

## FRIDAY, 14 JULY 2006

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### ESTIMATES COMMITTEE D—ENERGY AND ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER POLICY

#### Estimates Committee D Members

Mrs DA Reilly (Chair)  
Hon. KR Lingard  
Mr DW Livingstone  
Ms CT Male  
Mr GE Malone  
Mrs DR Pratt  
Mrs DC Scott

#### In Attendance

Hon. RJ Mickel, Minister for Energy and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy  
**Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy**  
Dr W Hoey, Director-General, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy  
Mr M Tolhurst, Assistant Director-General  
Mr T Dreise, Executive Director, Strategic Policy and Partnerships Directorate  
Mr W Briscoe, Executive Director, Operations and Programs Support  
Mr C Bray, Manager, Strategic Financial Management, Corporate and Executive Support Directorate  
Mr A Butler, Deputy Government Coordinator, Government Coordination Office (Acting)  
Mr B Walker, Director, Government Coordination Office, Palm Island  
**Department of Energy**  
Mr S Flavell, Director-General  
Mr A Millis, Deputy Director-General  
Mr P Bell, Director, Strategic Policy Coordination Division  
Dr A Kremor, Chief Executive Officer, Energex Limited  
Mr G Jardine, Chief Executive Officer, Powerlink Queensland

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Committee met at 9 am.

**CHAIR:** I declare this meeting of Estimates Committee D open. I am Dianna Reilly, member for Mudgeeraba and chair of the committee. Joining me on the committee are Kevin Lingard, member for Beaudesert and deputy chair; Mr Don Livingstone, member for Ipswich West; Ms Carolyn Male, member for Glass House; Mr Ted Malone, member for Mirani; Mrs Dorothy Pratt, member for Nanango; and Mrs Desley Scott, member for Woodridge.

The committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in Appropriation Bill 2006 for the portfolios assigned to it by the order of appointment made on 21 April 2006. The committee will examine the portfolio of the Minister for Energy and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy from 9 am until 1.25 pm. From 2.30 pm to 5.45 pm, the committee will then examine the portfolio of the Minister for Emergency Services. The committee will suspend proceedings for the following breaks: morning tea from 10.30 am to 10.45 am, a break from 12.15 pm to 12.25 pm, lunch from 1.25 pm to 2.30 pm, and afternoon tea from 4 pm to 4.15 pm.

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 206 any person admitted to the public hearing of the committee may be excluded by order of the committee. In relation to media coverage of the hearing, the committee has resolved that television and film coverage and photography will be allowed during the chair's introductory comments and the opening statements of each minister, as well as for short periods during each changeover of ministerial advisers. I also ask that all mobile phones and pagers be switched off.

I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time limit for questions is one minute and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a double chime will sound at the expiration of each of these time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will sound two minutes after an extension of time has been given. The standing orders require that at least half the time available for questions and answers be allocated to non-government members. Any time expended when the committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between government and non-government members. The committee has given leave for non-committee members to ask the minister questions. Mr Jeff Seeney, the member for Callide, will be participating in today's hearing on this basis.

On behalf of the committee, I welcome the minister, departmental officers and members of the public to the hearing and declare the proposed expenditure for the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and the Department of Energy open for examination. The time allocated is four hours. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

We will commence with the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy. Minister, would you like to make an opening statement or do you wish to proceed directly to questioning?

**Mr MICKEL:** I would like to make an opening statement of two minutes, given that I have two portfolios for which to make an opening statement of five minutes in total.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr MICKEL:** The committee would be aware of the national summit held recently on issues of violence, alcohol and substance abuse in certain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The Queensland government has adopted a whole-of-government approach to these and other Indigenous issues, with appropriate policies and programs being developed and implemented by relevant line agencies. This includes responding to the misuse of alcohol and other substances. It has been identified as one of the major causes of harm and violence in remote communities.

We are progressing demand reduction and harm minimisation strategies for these communities through the implementation of the Alcohol and Other Substances Demand Reduction Program, comprising \$12 million over four years. Demand reduction activities will be designed so that they provide a meaningful alternative to alcohol and substance abuse. Funding of \$3.76 million was allocated to the alcohol demand management reduction program in 2005-06, and the government aims to spend a further \$3 million on demand reduction projects in 2006-07. Today I am announcing the first round of communities receiving funding totalling over \$600,000. Community initiatives at Aurukun, Mapoon, Napranum and Lockhart River will receive support in this round.

A further package of initiatives for Palm Island was announced to coincide with the introduction of alcohol restrictions on 19 June 2006. A total of \$593,373 was approved in year one for Palm Island. With the introduction of alcohol restrictions into Palm Island last month, all 19 communities covered by the Cape York Justice Study now have some form of alcohol management plan in place. The budget also provides \$250,000 for communication activities to ensure that tourists and other visitors to the far north are aware of the details of these alcohol restrictions.

**CHAIR:** Your time has expired. I call the member for Beaudesert to commence non-government questions.

**Mr LINGARD:** Almost 12 months ago the Palm Island Select Committee tabled its report and the report had 65 recommendations. Has the government completed these recommendations?

**Mr MICKEL:** Madam Chair, could I ask that all questions refer to an MPS. It makes it easier for my departmental officers to get the necessary briefs to me, and I understand that that is in the standing orders.

**CHAIR:** Would the member for Beaudesert be able to refer to a page in the Ministerial Portfolio Statement?

**Mr LINGARD:** I do not think it is necessary in the case of Palm Island. You also referred to it in your introductory statement.

**Mr MICKEL:** Madam Chair, on a point of order, it is a courtesy to me as a witness appearing before the committee and to my departmental officers that we establish straight up that all questions refer to an MPS number.

**Mr LINGARD:** Minister, I refer to your opening comments in which you referred to the introduction of alcohol restrictions into Palm Island on 19 June 2006. I ask: why after 12 months of having the report haven't you actually completed an alcohol management plan?

**Mr MICKEL:** The premise of your question is inaccurate. I said in my opening statement that an alcohol management plan had been introduced on Palm Island. I said in my opening statement that now all 19 communities have alcohol management plans. I also said in my opening statement that we have announced demand reduction proposals for Palm Island for year one. I might also say this of the Palm Island Select Committee: the committee tabled its report on 25 August 2005 and the government tabled its response to this report on 10 November 2005. Seven of the 65 recommendations made by the select committee contained a direct reference to my department. They include the following.

Recommendation 6 refers to the minister for local government consulting with the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy in relation to the need to appoint a financial controller to the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council. I am advised that this matter is solely the responsibility of the minister for local government. However, it has not been deemed necessary to consider the appointment of a financial controller. As I am advised, the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council has been making progress in addressing its financial management.

Recommendation 12 refers to the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy transferring ownership of the Palm Island retail store from the government. I am advised that the government has agreed to divest its interest in the Palm Island retail store. A process has been instigated and initial consultations have taken place with the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council in relation to this matter.

Recommendation 29 refers to the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy assisting the Bwagman Aboriginal Land Trust to develop a master plan for the Aitkenvale reserve. The status of this is that the land trust, I am advised, is established under the Aboriginal Land Act. As such, the trust has sole control of the land and how it is utilised. DATSIP has supported the trust over a number of years to meet and conduct its business. This involved meeting travel and meeting expenses associated with the 22 trustees, many of whom are located on Palm Island. There is currently no funding available to undertake the development of a master plan for the reserve. However, my department will continue to support the trust in its management of the land.

Recommendation 53 refers to the Minister for Health and the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy assessing the need for cultural healing on Palm Island. The status of this, I am advised—

Time expired.

**Mr LINGARD:** Minister, I refer to your opening comments and standing order 177 and ask: are you going to adopt the attitude today that you will not answer a question unless an MPS is referred to because standing orders state 'a member may ask any question which is relevant to the examination of the Appropriation being considered'? Are you going to refuse to answer any question today unless it refers to a specific MPS?

**Mr MICKEL:** I will be guided by the standing orders on this but my understanding always was, Madam Chair—and I seek your advice on it—that in fairness to my officers a Ministerial Portfolio Statement page number or dot point should be referred to. That is how we have prepared our briefs. That is outlined here. I would have thought that it was fair enough when I am being asked questions about two complex portfolios over 3½ hours that the various officers who are briefing me be at least entitled to prepare the briefing notes for me based on the program statement. I seek your ruling on it.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. The member for Beaudesert would be aware that this committee is here to examine the budget statements for 2006-07 of these ministerial portfolios. I would ask that he refer his questions as closely as possible to the MPS but certainly to that proposed budget expenditure and remind the member for Beaudesert that under the standing orders the minister is entitled to answer the questions in any way he wishes to do so.

**Mr LINGARD:** I would ask you, Madam Chair, what happens when we refer to questions on notice that have been presented to the minister and answers to questions on notice that have been received? They have no MPS reference.

**CHAIR:** Member for Beaudesert, the committee members are able to refer to questions on notice and answers but, again, the minister is entitled to answer them in any way he wishes.

**Mr MICKEL:** Madam Chair, on a point of order, with respect to most of the questions on notice that I saw, on any fair ruling most of them would have been out of order because of the number of subset questions that were asked. But rather than dodge every question and be accused of such, we referred to the standing orders and how they had been breached and provided the answers. However, it is not unreasonable, Madam Chair, to expect today that a Ministerial Portfolio Statement to be referred to and a dot point, to be fair to my officers.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I ask the member for Beaudesert to try to attempt to do that.

**Mr LINGARD:** Minister, I refer to the appropriations and ask: what money has been set aside to finalise the 65 recommendations of the parliamentary committee?

**Mr MICKEL:** I am sorry. Can I seek clarification. Which committee are you referring to?

**Mr LINGARD:** The Palm Island Select Committee.

**Mr MICKEL:** Could I ask the member which page of the appropriations he is referring to?

**CHAIR:** Member for Beaudesert, the question is sounding repetitious. It does sound very much like the previous question which the minister did answer.

**Mr LINGARD:** I will move on. Minister, I refer to the finalisation of the Indigenous wages and savings reparations process mentioned in the MPS on page 2-7, dot point 4. In last year's hearings you advised that you would be finalising arrangements of a 2003 proposal for the appointment of an eminent persons group to establish a foundation to manage the fund's assets. What is the process for the administration of these funds?

**Mr MICKEL:** Certainly in the past 12 months we have concentrated on the reparations process as our foremost and principal concern. The indigenous wages and savings reparation process offers reparation to people born before 31 December 1956 whose wages or savings were controlled by the Queensland government under the protection act. The Queensland government was the first jurisdiction in Australia to make a reparations offer for past government control of wages and savings. Up to \$55.4 million was made available for reparation payments as part of this historic initiative. This offer was a gesture of reconciliation, not a replacement for money that people were owed.

We are now at a stage where the reparations payment process is concluding and the government is now considering what is done with the unspent component of funds allocated to reparations. The total amount, I am advised, would include approximately \$35.4 million of unspent moneys from the Indigenous wages and savings reparation process and approximately \$10 million from the Aborigines Welfare Fund of 2006-07. The department is cognisant of responding to a previous cabinet decision about the creation of a foundation with a board of eminent persons to govern disbursement of these unspent moneys from the indigenous wages and savings reparation process and Aborigines Welfare Fund.

However, as a matter of principle, we are keen to consult Indigenous communities in relation to these unspent funds. The department is currently working through details of such a consultation process. More details will be announced in the future once a decision has been made by cabinet. In view of this, what we have been doing is setting about finalising the payments and processing the claims. I was advised the other day that this work is almost done. In view of this, we have been focusing on those issues rather than the setting up of a board at this stage.

I might also point out that I am advised that the reparations offer is an acknowledgement of past injustices, not a replacement amount for any money which people may believe they are owed because, quite clearly, no amount of money can fully make up for the past injustices suffered by Indigenous people under those protection acts. As I said, we are the first jurisdiction in Australia to offer reparations for this past control, making a fair and reasonable offer of compensation and a written apology.

**Mr LINGARD:** Minister, in that answer, you referred to the \$35.4 million that is left over. What have you done with that money?

**Mr MICKEL:** What I said was that I am advised that it is an approximate figure. All of the process has not been finalised at this stage. I say to the committee advisedly that this is an estimate. We cannot give you an exact amount today because, as I said, the process is not completed. So it is an estimate; I stress that.

The Queensland government has previously indicated that any unspent funds would be transferred to an Aborigines Welfare Fund with a proportion to be used for Torres Strait Islander projects. I simply say this: in my answer I said that there would be further consultation with Aboriginal communities and that cabinet would make a decision on how any unspent funds would be approved. I am not today going to pre-empt the cabinet decision because the cabinet decision would be hitherto made without consultation with Aboriginal communities.

I might also point out that I think in an earlier question there was some confusion about an Aborigines Welfare Fund. That fund has been frozen, I am advised, since 1993 and as at 30 June 2006 the balance was approximately \$9.897 million. As the Aborigines Welfare Fund is protected by the Aboriginal Communities (Justice and Land Matters) Act 1984, the changes to this management would require legislative amendment. For 2006-07, the government is considering a consultation process in relation to the strategic and operational use of the unspent funds from the Indigenous wages and savings reparation process and the Aborigines Welfare Fund.

**Mr LINGARD:** Minister, we are well aware of the differences between the two funds, so I refer to 2-22 regarding the cash flow of funds administered on behalf of the whole of government. I refer to the inflow and outflow of funds. Notes 4 and 5 indicate that \$465,000 to be received and remitted to the government is interest from the Aborigines Welfare Fund. Can you confirm that this is the case, and what are you doing with that money?

**Mr MICKEL:** I will ask my director-general to answer that, if that is okay with the committee, Madam Chair.

**Dr Hoey:** That is correct. I am just confirming that the \$465,000 you are referring to on page 2-22 is the 2006-07 estimate. With the minister's concurrence, I would like to refer to my general manager of finance, Chris Bray.

**Mr Bray:** The \$465,000 is an estimate of the interest that will be earned on the Aborigines Welfare Fund for the 2006-07 financial year. That interest will go back in to top up the welfare fund balance. So basically the welfare fund is approximately \$10 million and it earns interest, and that interest is just added to the balance of the welfare fund.

**Mr LINGARD:** Minister, I go back to my first question, and let me refer to 2-5 if you want an actual reference, which is a general reference to coordination for Palm Island. I ask you once again: has the government completed the 65 recommendations as advised by the Palm Island Select Committee?

**Mr MICKEL:** I think when I last answered this question I was up to the recommendation in relation to the Minister for Health and the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, recommendation 53. I will just remind members that recommendation 53 referred, as I understand it, to the Minister for Health and the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy assessing the need for cultural healing on Palm Island. The status of this is that the government's response to this recommendation identified the Department of Communities as the most appropriate agency to address this recommendation. It is understood the Department of Communities is responding to this recommendation.

Recommendation 55 refers to the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and the minister for police addressing a diversion from custody option and establishing a Murri Watch program. The status of this is that investigation into a diversion from custody option has identified that the establishment of a full diversion from custody set-up, I am advised, cannot be justified. I understand that the police statistics for Palm Island indicate that there are few arrests for offences that could see a diversion option applied to the offender. It was determined that a cell visitors program, where detainees in the watch-house could be provided support from a community based organisation, would be a more effective option. Funding has been approved to the Palm Island Men's Group to operate this service. Under the divestment arrangements, this service will be administered by the Department of Communities from 1 July 2006.

Recommendation 61 refers to the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy finalising an alcohol management plan for Palm Island. As I said in my opening statement, the alcohol management plan for Palm Island has been implemented and became operational on Palm Island, as I understand it, on 19 June 2006.

The government is scheduled to report on its progress in implementing the recommendations on the Palm Island Select Committee in November 2006. Progress in relation to the implementation of these recommendations is being monitored by the Palm Island Chief Executive Officer Committee. This committee is chaired by the Director-General of the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy. An updated progress report in relation to the implementation of the select committee recommendations will be received by the Chief Executive Officer Committee at the next scheduled meeting, which I understand will be held on 23 August 2006.

**Mr LINGARD:** So clearly, Minister, after 12 months you cannot say that the recommendations have been implemented?

**CHAIR:** Can I just ask the committee member to direct the question in relation to something either in the ministerial portfolio statement or in relation to the budget. The question he is asking is repetitious and has already been answered by the minister. I ask him to ask another question.

**Mr LINGARD:** Minister, I refer to the Happy Valley development in Townsville referred to in MPS 2-15 in the capital acquisition statement.

**Mr MICKEL:** Can I just take a point of order on the premise of the previous question, which the Chair quite rightly pulled up on. DATSIP is one agency. The response to the Palm Island parliamentary committee report is a cross agency report. I made that point. That is why I read out the recommendations in relation to this department. I cannot remember the exact number, but I think I read out six and, as you can see, where we have had agency responsibility for it we have implemented those proposals.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr LINGARD:** Can I complete my question?

**CHAIR:** The time for non-government questions has finished. It is time for government questions. I call the member for Woodridge.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** Minister, page 2-6 of the ministerial portfolio statement refers to the Opal fuel trial. What progress has been made on the rollout of Opal fuel in Queensland?

**Mr MICKEL:** Thank you for a very intelligent question. In January 2005, the Australian government released Opal fuel for use on a trial basis in remote Indigenous communities registered under the Comgas Scheme. Potentially eligible communities in Queensland are Aurukun, Bamaga, Doomadgee, Injinoo, Kowanyama, Lockhart River, Mornington Island, New Mapoon, Palm Island, Pormpuraaw, Seisia and Umagico. In October 2005, the Queensland government agreed to include Opal fuel in the Queensland Fuel Subsidy Scheme on an administrative basis for a trial period of 15 months, with the introduction of retrospective legislation if the trial is successful. This means that the retail price of Opal will be as affordable as possible for consumers.

Aurukun commenced the sale of Opal fuel in November 2005. Anecdotal reports indicate that Opal is having a positive impact in Aurukun, with a reduction, as I am advised, in the number of people sniffing and a reduction in the number of break and enters. Mornington Island commenced the sale of Opal fuel in May 2006. Again, I am advised that anecdotal reports indicate that a significant decrease in both sniffing and juvenile offending has coincided with the commencement of Opal fuel sales. Doomadgee store began distribution of Opal fuel on 15 June 2006. The current price of Opal at the bowser in Doomadgee is \$1.70 per litre, which is approximately the same price that people were paying for unleaded fuel.

The roads into Kowanyama are currently four-wheel drive access only, and Opal is expected to be introduced to the community about mid July when the roads are clear. The Pormpuraaw Aboriginal Shire Council is keen to introduce Opal and is in the process of calling for quotes from three Opal fuel suppliers for preferred supply status for one year, I am advised.

I say this to the committee: the supply of Opal fuel alone is not a cure-all. It will not prevent the behaviour of some people seeking out intoxicating substances. This behaviour will continue in the absence of meaningful recreation, sport, education and employment opportunities. The Alcohol and Other Substances Demand Reduction Program aims to address the need for activities that provide an alternative to substance abuse and provide counselling and rehabilitation services to substance abusers. That is why the demand reduction program commenced in 2005-06 with a funding of almost—

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** Page 2-8 of the MPS states that the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy will develop and implement alcohol and other substances demand reduction programs in the 19 Meeting Challenges, Making Choices communities. Minister, would you detail the proposals which have been developed to date?

**Mr MICKEL:** Reducing the demand for alcohol is a key component of our long-term plan for reducing alcohol and substance misuse. Our efforts extend beyond health intervention such as detoxification, rehabilitation and treatment, and include strategies to address a range of other factors that contributed to the demand for alcohol such as the availability of opportunities in regard to education, employment, enterprise development, sport and recreation.

The government is focusing on and progressing demand reduction and harm minimisation strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through the implementation of the Alcohol and Other Substances Demand Reduction Program. This \$12 million program is complemented by almost \$2 million from the Australian government for the Queensland illicit drug diversion strategy.

In the first year of the program, in 2005-06, there has been engagement with a priority group of seven communities to develop specific initial proposals for demand reduction. I announced the package of initiatives for Palm Island to coincide with the introduction of alcohol restrictions on 19 June 2006. A total allocation of \$593,373 was approved in one year for Palm Island. Funded activities will be linked to issues of school attendance, suicide and self-harm, petrol sniffing and family violence, and include a yarnning circle to support and counsel parents, students and carers at the Bwngolman Community School, an arts and cultural development program, enhancements to family and community recreational activities, enhancements to rehabilitation services, workshops to reduce domestic violence and a diversion from custody measure.

I understand that DATSIP has held initial discussions with an MP regarding the diversion from custody measure. Further discussions are planned with relevant agencies to progress development of this service. I am announcing the details of initiatives approved for Aurukun, Mapoon, Napranum and Lockhart River. A total of \$623,000 is approved in one year for these four communities. In Aurukun there is \$217,000 for a support program for young parents. At Lockhart River there is \$221,000 to build a centre and 11 satellite campuses to host youth programs. At Mapoon there is \$185,000 to run counselling, group work, camps and community activities to reduce demand for alcohol and other substances in Mapoon and Napranum. This brings the total funds allocated to date to over \$1 million in the five communities.

DATSIP officers have recently completed initial engagement with a further three communities and have commenced engagement with the remaining group of 12 eligible communities to develop their initial package of initiatives.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** Minister, pages 2-6 and 2-8 of the MPS note monitoring the effectiveness of alcohol arrangements in Meeting Challenges, Making Choices communities. What positive feedback has been received on the effectiveness of the alcohol management plans?

**Mr MICKEL:** Some of the anecdotal evidence I have had in visiting the communities suggests that the communities are safer, quieter and less violent immediately after the introduction of the plans, although there are still comments about loss of individual rights, and committee members would have seen those from time to time, relating to drinking alcohol. There is still, I think, an overwhelming recognition of the need to support the rights of children and women to safety and a fair quality of life.

Where sufficient post-alcohol management plan data exists for the Meeting Challenges, Making Choices communities, hospital admissions for assault and other external injury to December 2005 reveal that—and I am advised on these figures—there have been significant reductions in hospital admissions for assault and other external injuries in most communities since the introduction of alcohol management plans. I am advised that there was a significant reduction in the quarterly average number of hospital admissions for assault and reduction to and admissions for other external injury when comparing pre and post alcohol management plan implementation.

Data supplied, I understand, by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General shows that as at 31 August 2005 offences relating to the possession of alcohol in restricted areas have occurred in 17 Indigenous communities with restrictions. Six of the 19 communities with alcohol restrictions have a zero carriage limit. These communities are Aurukun, Napranum, Lockhart River, Wujal Wujal—that excludes the Bloomfield River track—Kowanyama and Mornington Island. In the communities of Doomadgee, Woorabinda, Pormpuraaw, Yarrabah, Mapoon, Hope Vale, Palm Island, the northern peninsula area communities, carriage limits specific for each community apply. The Cherbourg community decided to address law and order issues through the declaration of dry places under the Aboriginal Communities (Justice and Land Matters) Act 1984.

In response to recent AMP reviews, the government has decided to increase the carriage limit of the restricted area regulation for Mapoon under the Liquor Act 1992. Information specifying carriage limits for each community is available from the Meeting Challenges, Making Choices web site as well as posters, brochures and information on other web sites. Residents and travellers are advised of carriage limits and fines which apply should the carriage limits be breached at the boundary of each community.

**Mr LIVINGSTONE:** Minister, page 2-6 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement refers to the Partnerships Queensland corporate engagement strategies. Are there any examples of Indigenous students beginning apprenticeships or traineeships as a result of this strategy?

**Mr MICKEL:** On 1 September 2005 I launched the Partnerships Queensland program before representatives of the private sector and highlighted the importance of corporate community partnerships. The Partnerships Queensland corporate engagement strategy was developed by DATSIP to support and facilitate long-lasting corporate community partnerships between the private sector, governments and Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The corporate engagement strategy aims to make it easier for the corporate sector to work with government to provide business and economic opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

In 2005-06, in collaboration with Accor Hotels, DATSIP brokered a partnership to provide information about school based traineeship opportunities to Indigenous students in years 10, 11 and 12 in localities near an Accor hotel or resort. In November 2005 and February 2006, DATSIP and Accor Hotels jointly delivered information sessions to school students and parents in Brisbane, Rockhampton, Townsville and Cairns. More than 120 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in years 10, 11 and 12 participated in the information sessions. Accor has signed training agreements with up to 20 students.

Accor Hotels has also requested assistance from DATSIP to implement a new Indigenous graduate program. The graduate program aims to increase the numbers of Indigenous people employed in management positions within the hospitality industry. DATSIP has passed this request on to the Department of Employment and Training.

In September 2005 I held a Partnerships Queensland round table with the Queensland energy companies to discuss Indigenous employment. Since that meeting DATSIP has been assisting the Department of Employment and Training and the federal Department of Employment and Workplace Relations to develop a memorandum of understanding with these Queensland energy companies to increase employment opportunities to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander job seekers, particularly those job seekers in rural and remote locations. Employment opportunities offered by the Queensland energy companies will include apprenticeships and traineeships. DATSIP advises that the memorandum of understanding will be finalised by the Department of Employment and Training shortly.

In 2006-07 the Partnerships Queensland corporate engagement strategy will continue to assist the corporate sector to work with government to provide business and economic opportunities including employment and training opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander job seekers.

**Mr LIVINGSTONE:** Minister, page 2-8 refers to a \$250,000 campaign to raise awareness of the alcohol management program. What has been done to address the concerns of the tourism industry, particularly in areas such as the Cook shire?

**Mr MICKEL:** In January 2005 DATSIP launched the Meeting Challenges, Making Choices communications strategy, which is a two-year communication campaign designed to support the alcohol management program in Indigenous communities. The Meeting Challenges, Making Choices communications strategy aims to ensure residents and travellers to far-north Queensland and remote communities are aware of alcohol restrictions in place in Indigenous communities. It also reflects the Queensland government's commitment to securing a better future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In 2005-06, \$400,000 was allocated to support the campaign and a further \$250,000 has been allocated for 2006-07. To ensure that tourists have access to reliable information, a range of communications strategies have been employed to ensure that this information is easily available in a variety of formats. Following representations from the Cook shire, for example, officers of the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy met with the Department of Main Roads and the Department of Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development in order to review road signage to ensure that visitors were aware that the Bloomfield track was exempt from alcohol management plan limits as it passes through the community of Wujal Wujal. DATSIP is also investigating the possibility of producing a single publication which would explain alcohol restrictions in all 19 MCMC communities. This would be used to support the existing Z-cards for each community which have been widely acclaimed by the tourism industry throughout far-northern Queensland and the gulf.

Preliminary evaluation of the communications strategy, I am advised, has found that people understand that the alcohol management program was about improving the lives of people living in remote communities, particularly women and children, and that they were willing to respect it. Rather than alcohol restrictions having a negative impact on tourism, I am advised the following. Usage of the Jardine vehicular ferry, which carries nearly all vehicles across the Jardine River to and from the northern peninsula area, has been increasing. I have been advised that there were 4,350 crossings in 2003, from January to December; 4,510 crossings in 2004, from January to December; and 4,436 crossings in 2005, but, importantly, I understand those figures were from January to July. The increased crossings relate primarily to visitors following the Laura dance festival. The Bamaga Enterprises manager reported to the alcohol restrictions review team that, although the 2005 tourist season was slow to start, visitor numbers increased dramatically in the mid-June holidays, especially after the Laura dance festival.

**Mr LIVINGSTONE:** Minister, page 2-10 states that DATSIP will continue to develop and coordinate policy outcomes under the Commonwealth-state bilateral agreement. What outcomes have been achieved through the shared responsibilities agreement?

**Mr MICKEL:** The Prime Minister and the Premier signed the bilateral agreement on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service delivery in December 2005. The agreement commits both governments to improving and streamlining service delivery so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are able to readily access appropriate services. DATSIP works closely with the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination to ensure there is a joint focus on service planning, delivery and investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. No level of government on its own can resolve the significant levels of disadvantage faced by Indigenous Queenslanders, nor on their own can communities and perhaps families. The bilateral agreement underpins the new approach, which recognises reciprocity and shared responsibility. It mandates against the solo approach both within and between government agencies. This is being actioned at the national and state levels as well as at the regional and local level.

Many shared responsibility agreements have been signed by the Indigenous Coordination Centres. However, the Queensland government has not been a party to all shared responsibility agreements. Some shared responsibility agreements require significant funds from both the Australian and state governments, which may also result in delays.

Some of the shared responsibility agreements which may require Queensland government funding for operational and recurrent costs are the Hope Vale sport and recreational facility and the Yarrabah aquatic centre. I am particularly concerned that this project will require a high level of recurrent funding and that the Commonwealth is likely to cost shift this either onto the Queensland government or, I fear, onto the Yarrabah community.

In terms of the Napranum PCYC facility, Napranum have committed to the ongoing maintenance of this facility. However, with the removal of CDEP this may need to be renegotiated. Pormpuraaw will need substantial support to operate a rehabilitation facility. It is envisaged that Aboriginal hostels, Education Queensland, Queensland Health, family and community services and all agencies will continue to be involved in all discussions to ensure that all aspects of the facility are considered. The Mossman Gorge shared responsibility agreement may require ongoing support as it relates to tourism and economic development.



Now I welcome this from the federal government because it is a change of heart. I welcome the fact that my federal counterpart has initiated a review of the shared responsibility agreements. Queensland looks forward to being consulted. If you want consultative federalism then we want to be consulted as part of that review process.

**CHAIR:** The time for government questions has expired. I call the member for Beaudesert.

**Mr LINGARD:** I refer to the Happy Valley development in Townsville, which is referred to in the MPS at 2-15 and the capital acquisition statement. I note that there is no funding allocated for 2006-07. Is the Happy Valley facility now completed and fully operational?

**Mr MICKEL:** The department has met the government's commitment to provide basic infrastructure on the site at Happy Valley to substantially improve the amenity for users, I am advised. The provision of services at Happy Valley falls within the government priority for improving health care and strengthening services to the community.

I am advised that in 2005-06 construction work was completed on the building from which service providers such as staff of the Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service, St Luke's Nursing Service, Queensland Health's Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Unit and Centrelink work. They can directly service the residents of Happy Valley. I am advised that the building has been heavily used by service providers since formal council approval was received in March 2006.

I understand that the total cost of the buildings at Happy Valley was \$511,000. The cost included three new shelters, new toilets and shower facilities, a sealed road to allow wet weather access, connection of the toilets and showers to town sewerage, electric lights on the road surfaces and upgrading of the three shelters that are already there. I am advised that the estimated annual cost of maintaining the facilities at Happy Valley, including cleaning, electricity and water costs, is about \$40,000.

The responsibility for Happy Valley is across all relevant agencies, not solely this department. I also understand that Happy Valley has been effective in satisfying the needs of those people who utilise the area.

**Mr LINGARD:** I again refer to the Happy Valley development referred to at MPS 2-15 in the capital acquisition statement. Is alcohol permitted to be consumed at the Happy Valley facility?

**Mr MICKEL:** I will ask Bruce Walker our Townsville departmental officer to come and address the committee.

**Mr Walker:** Alcohol is able to be consumed on Happy Valley. There is no alcohol sold at the premises but residents can bring their own alcohol to the location.

**Mr LINGARD:** Minister, I refer to question on notice No. 8. The answer to that question referred to the audit of the director-general's office in January. That audit recommended certain improvements in facility and asset management. What specific recommendations were made? Are we able to get a copy of that audit?

**Mr MICKEL:** If it is okay with the committee I will ask the director-general to answer that.

**Dr Hoey:** My officers are looking for the exact detail. All the recommendations from the audits that take place right throughout the agency—and we have had more than a dozen last year, including those of my office—are acted on. I do not have right before me immediately the status of those recommendations. But if we can get that before the end of this period will you allow me to come back to you with that update?

**Mr LINGARD:** Will you give us a copy of that audit?

**Dr Hoey:** Okay.

**Mr LINGARD:** I refer to the MPS at 2-4 showing the staffing output activity. This table shows the reduction in staff by 40 to 239 following the transfer of programs. It also shows that 59 staff are employed in departmental retail stores. Of the remaining 180 staff, how many are in the Senior Executive Service? How many were in the Senior Executive Service prior to the staff transfers? What has been the change in the SES?

**Mr MICKEL:** I will ask the director-general to answer that.

**Dr Hoey:** Again, I will get the details for you. My recollection would be that there has been no change in the SES, but I will confirm that. The only exception would be the forthcoming appointment of the Government Coordinator which has been determined by cabinet. That sits under the minister's portfolio. That person will report through me to the minister and the Premier. There would be an additional one, but I will confirm that before the end of this sitting.

**Mr LINGARD:** Minister, can we also get figures—and I refer here to the MPS at 2-4 and the staffing output activity—on how many officers are employed under a term contract under section 70 of the Public Service Act and whose remuneration is equivalent to the Senior Executive Service? Could those facts be provided?

**Dr Hoey:** We will include that information in the advice to you before the end of this session.

**Mr LINGARD:** I refer to the MPS at 2-6 and to the administered trial of non-sniffable Opal fuel including promoting the availability of Opal to eligible communities and commencing data collection for an evaluation. What was the result of the evaluation and will the evaluation be released?

**Mr MICKEL:** Let me go back to my remarks I made earlier to the committee and say this of Opal fuel. Opal fuel is not a single answer to the problem. I think it is far too early yet to give a detailed evaluation of the success of it. I think it is too early in the process. Some of these communities are quite small so you can get a small variation.

The other aspect about petrol sniffing is this. There are some anecdotal reports about people who mix Opal fuel with additives in order to create a sniffable substance. The intoxication effect, I understand, of these mixtures is questionable. However, what it demonstrates is that the supply of Opal fuel alone will not prevent the behaviour of some people seeking out intoxicating substances.

This behaviour will continue in the absence of meaningful recreation, sport, education and employment opportunities. That is why we have a demand reduction program to complement the Opal fuel trial through support for family and youth activities that divert young people from petrol sniffing and other substance abuse.

I say to the committee that I think that it is too early to draw definitive conclusions about the efficacy of the trial. Sniffing in the communities can be a cyclical activity with peaks and troughs. There is a need to monitor progress over time in order to determine the impacts of the introduction of Opal across communities.

I might also say that some of the evidence given to us from other states is that it is not a cure. Somebody said that it is simply a small step against sniffing and substance abuse. You have to be careful as to what communities you introduce it into because you can, for example, get an illicit trade in unleaded fuel going into communities. That was the advice from some of the other states. We are supportive of the program, but I would never ever say that Opal fuel is a cure-all for the difficulties associated with substance abuse in some of the communities.

**Mr LINGARD:** I refer to the refurbishing of Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre mentioned in the MPS at 2-7 for which \$1.5 million was allocated in 2005-06 and note that \$350,000 was expended. What was the reason for the underspend?

**Mr MICKEL:** Before I ask the director-general to answer that, could I just clarify one point in relation to a question asked earlier about Happy Valley. The question was in relation to alcohol sold there. Happy Valley is not subject to an alcohol management plan. I think that should be clarified. I will ask the director-general to answer the question on an apparent underspend.

**Dr Hoey:** The honourable member is correct. There was an underspend. The reason for that is the fact that we have had difficulty in obtaining qualified contractors. There has been extremely high demand in a number of our capital works areas. We did provide three-quarters of a million dollars in 2005-06 for the project. There has been a skills shortfall in the building industry and extreme weather conditions. Paradoxically, because of Cyclone Larry there was a huge demand and an even further withdrawal from western areas. As you know, Jimaylya is located in Mount Isa and it can be difficult to get contractors to go there without significant incentive. So that compounded the effect.

Nevertheless, we are progressing. People in the west are nothing if not inventive. We have managed to stage that in a way that has not compromised the ability of that centre to deliver services to particularly the people from the river. We will continue that. That is part of our divestment program. That will be a seamless process. We are working closely with the Department of Communities to make sure that the capital works program is completed and to standard.

**Mr LINGARD:** Minister, can I ask for clarification of your statement about Happy Valley. We have all been concerned about Happy Valley for many years. What is the situation at Happy Valley? Are people allowed to drink alcohol at Happy Valley?

**Mr MICKEL:** It is not covered by an alcohol management plan. My understanding is that Happy Valley comes under the control of the Townsville City Council. Alcohol restrictions are not US-style prohibition where there is no alcohol. They simply reduce the amount of alcohol. So even in communities where there is an alcohol management plan, it is rare that there is prohibition. I cannot think of an instance where there is prohibition; it is about reducing the amount.

The service for the people in Happy Valley is provided by Queensland Health's Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Unit. It is safe environment where treatment is available. A similar question was asked by the member for Gregory last year, is my understanding. Our department's response this year is the same as last year's.

**Mr Walker:** Just to clarify, there are no alcohol restrictions applying to Happy Valley, so residents can purchase and bring back to the community alcohol for consumption.

**Mr LINGARD:** Minister, the MPS at 2-7 dot point 3 talks about a child safety policy framework. I notice that when you attended the opening of the national Indigenous centre for enterprise development near Murgon you commented that, while many people were talking about the problems of child abuse, negligence and violence in Indigenous communities, you had yet to hear of the solution. Now that you have been minister for a fair length of time, what is your attitude to the problems of child abuse, negligence and violence in these Aboriginal communities?

**Mr MICKEL:** We are obviously strongly committed to improving the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. That is why the government introduced the alcohol management plans and that is why we are sticking by the alcohol management plans. Anybody who would tolerate child abuse or place at risk child safety is behaving in an abhorrent manner. That is why we have been firm on alcohol management plans. That is why I found disturbing the statements of the Leader of the Opposition when he went up to one of the communities that he wanted a relaxation of alcohol management plans. All sides of politics and I think the Independents having supported alcohol management plans, he wanders up to an Aboriginal community knowing that there is a report—and that report, as I understood, interviewed children as well—and the first tough bit of language you get is that he wants to walk away from it. These things are a hard sell. They are a hard sell in communities because people are doing pretty well—or some of them—out of sly grogging.

Let us go to what the kids said in the report of the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian. I will read to the committee the responses to 'What do you think are the biggest problems in your community?' The responses were uniform, albeit far from negative. Alcohol use, smoking and violence were most commonly cited as the biggest problem in the children's communities, and these are the responses from the kids: people getting drunk and smoking drugs, particularly when little children are around; kids smoking and drinking; lots of people drinking; too many stealing and fighting; parents are a bad example for kids when they grow up; drugs and alcohol; sniffing petrol; kids and adults smoking; fighting and violence; drinking; fighting, especially when adults are drinking; it is not safe for kids to be around there because trouble starts and the kids might get hurt; people drinking too much; some of the people selling drugs; fighting; some of the young boys in the community buy drugs; half of the kids in the community are starting to sniff petrol; alcohol; smoking; smoking gunja; fighting; got no respect. That is why we acted to bring in the alcohol management plans. That is why we were relieved when we had the support of all sides of politics. That is why I was disturbed when the Leader of the Opposition wanted to walk away from them.

**Mr LINGARD:** Minister, I notice—

**Mr MICKEL:** We have an answer, Madam Chair, to one of the questions asked by the member previously.

**Dr Hoey:** This is in relation to the SES before and after. There are five SES and three section 70s—that is, the contract section 70. That five includes myself, which is a CEO salary, and four others. That is the same before and after. With regard to the section 70s, two are SES equivalents. One is not an SES equivalent; one is a senior officer. The only change there is, as I alluded to before, the appointment of the government coordinator which will take place in August which is a section 70 SES equivalent. With regard to that number you referred to in the changes of FTEs, that is anticipating that the divestment of the retail stores will be completed by the end of this financial year. So at the moment they are still with us and we are working through a process there.

**Mr LINGARD:** Minister, the minister for housing, Mr Schwarten, has commented that the Queensland government is facing a bill of more than \$500 million to fix all of the community houses and provide enough new ones to solve the overcrowding problems. I appreciate the comment that that is what the minister for housing has said because that is his responsibility, but I notice that you have cut your capital works program on page 3 from \$7.5 million and note that only \$4.6 million was expended. Why have you cut your capital works program when the minister is talking about housing itself needing \$500 million?

**Mr MICKEL:** Your premise is wrong. We do not build houses in Aboriginal communities.

**Mr LINGARD:** I said that.

**Mr MICKEL:** We do not build houses in Aboriginal communities. You are quite right when you refer to the minister for housing as being the minister responsible for that. But in relation to the particular question you ask, let me provide that information for you. For 2006-07 the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy budgeted \$3.544 million for capital expenditure. The funding for 2006-07 is allocated to the following projects. Some \$0.4 million is to be spent continuing the upgrade of Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre at Mount Isa, including fire safety regulation requirements to assist programs identified in the regional blueprint for Indigenous homelessness. Some \$0.75 million was provided in 2005-06 for this project. But as you have been told, as a result of the high demand for qualified contractors in the building industry and extreme weather conditions, including Cyclone Larry, the project was unable to be completed. We hope to have it completed in 2006-07 subject to the availability of contractors. Some \$0.633 million is for the replacement and enhancement of plant and equipment,

including information technology. I am also advised that \$2.261 million is for the replacement of fuel facilities at Lockhart River, Kowanyama and Doomadgee and refurbishment work on departmental retail stores at Palm Island and Lockhart River.

In terms of departmental housing, \$0.25 million is to be spent replacing a departmental house at Lockhart River. Houses predominantly used by retail stores staff is an essential element in attracting staff to these remote locations. Due to harsh climatic conditions, the houses require continuous and expensive maintenance. Some \$0.75 million is being spent upgrading and replacing departmental houses at Bamaga, Doomadgee, Kowanyama, Woorabinda and Pormpuraaw. The Lockhart River house replacement has been delayed due to that wet season event and ongoing negotiation following a request from the Lockhart River council that wishes to acquire the existing structure under a proposed land swap deal.

**CHAIR:** As the time has expired for the answer, does the questioner want to give an extension of time? Do you want another two minutes, Minister, to continue with that answer?

**Mr LINGARD:** That is fine.

**Mr MICKEL:** Some \$1.5 million was provided under the Smart State Building Fund for the refurbishment and upgrade of the Aitkenvale hostel in Townsville. The project was put on hold during 2005-06 pending discussions with the Department of Housing in relation to the whole-of-government response to homelessness in Townsville and the divestment of non-core functions to other government agencies. So across a range of initiatives, it is mainly departmental housing. I welcome the interest of the member for Beaudesert in housing in Aboriginal communities in view of, I think, some fairly unfortunate comments he made on 11 November 1999 with respect to housing at Mapoon. I will quote it for you.

**Mr LINGARD:** I do not need a quote.

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

**Ms MALE:** Minister, page 2-9 states that DATSIP will continue work to remove liquor licences and responsibility for licensed canteens from local councils. Could you advise the committee what is being done in this regard?

**Mr MICKEL:** Yes. Thank you for the question. The issue of canteens on Aboriginal communities is one of the saddest stories you will read in the departmental history. Let me give you a couple of examples of it. As I understand it, the 1971 annual report of the department reported that councillors were concerned by the proportion of Aborigines' income being channelled into the purchase of alcoholic beverages with consequential problems. Acting on that, what happened in 1972 was that changes to allow the introduction of beer canteens were introduced by an amendment to the legislation which came into effect in December 1972. Even though there were concerns the year before, the canteens came in. You can see what happened in the late 1970s. It is important, because the funding available to the then department for community development was apparently declining by the late 1970s when the federal government reduced funding provided to the state government for that purpose. So what happened was that canteens were introduced progressively to give councils the money.

Here is an interesting report from 1973, and then I will come to the present. By 1973 a canteen was operating at Pormpuraaw. By July 1973 the visiting justice apparently recommended that the canteen be closed. This was rejected by the department. There were almost continuous reports of disorder and violence at this community from this point forward. By July 1973, in the face of that report, canteens were operating at Woorabinda, Palm Island, Yarrabah, Lockhart River, Pormpuraaw, Kowanyama, Bamaga, Mornington Island and Weipa. In other words, in the face of disturbing reports, all we had was weakness and the introduction of canteens right across-the-board. That is the challenge that is left to us.

Alcohol management plans are one thing, but we also now have canteens—beer canteens—that are run by the local communities in line with Justice Fitzgerald's observation that the control of general liquor licensing by local governments conflicts with the council's role of ensuring the welfare of their communities. What is happening now is negotiations are occurring with each individual council currently holding or controlling a general liquor licence and the community concerned to transfer or relinquish the liquor licence.

**Ms MALE:** I was going to ask you a question about the historic reparation offer, but I feel that you answered that quite fully in a previous answer. I will move on to my next question, which is in relation to page 2-8. Its refers to the continued monitoring of alcohol management programs in the Meeting Challenges, Making Choices communities. How does the Queensland government's approach to alcohol management differ from the approach taken by the National and Liberal parties?

**Mr MICKEL:** I welcomed the support of all sides of politics on the alcohol management plans. As I said earlier, I was disappointed at what I considered the lily-livered approach of the Leader of the Opposition when he actually confronted one of these communities and said—my recollection was that he said—that the plans were 'paternalistic' I think was the word he used. I raised this, you will recall, in

August 2005. I also direct members to the fact that at the budget hearings in 2004-05 the member for Gregory reaffirmed that he, the member for Callide and the member Charters Towers supported alcohol management plans against obviously the policy of the Leader of the Opposition.

But I want to welcome, too, the fact that Tony Abbott, the federal health minister, said when he went up there that alcohol management plans are working and should be an example to all Indigenous communities with alcohol abuse problems. As I said, the Leader of the Opposition wandered around the place in August 2005 and was quoted on the ABC's far-northern program saying that the alcohol management plans were paternalistic and in the *Cairns Post* he said that they were silly, unworkable laws. So not only did the opposition vote for the plans; the opposition supported them in the House and welcomed them in the estimates committee last year.

In relation to the Leader of the Opposition's comments on the ABC that they were silly, unworkable laws, I am advised that the effect from alcohol restrictions continues to be positive in most of the communities, and I outlined earlier the effectiveness of that. I want to also bring to the committee's attention an article. These are not my words; these are the words of a young lady who visited Palm Island. These comments were in the *Koori Mail* of 7 June 2006. She said—

If Ms Kyle and Mr Sam—

of Palm Island—

think that they are doing their communities any favours, they have to be kidding themselves.

Alcohol management plans were first recommended on Indigenous communities in the Fitzgerald Cape York Justice Study. Information taken from this study, along with a study conducted specifically on Palm Island, was then used to create the Alcohol Management Plans.

She continues—

The plan acknowledges that it is not the only answer and that it will not be permanent, but that it is a step in the right direction.

She concluded—

Wake up and lead your people Ms Kyle and Mr Sam. The grog has got to go!!

They are not my words but the words of a young Aboriginal woman with the courage, having visited Palm Island, to speak out. She should be applauded by the committee.

**Ms MALE:** I now refer to page 2-7 of the MPS regarding the child safety policy framework. Would you detail DATSIP's role with the framework and detail other measures your department is taking to address child abuse in Indigenous communities?

**Mr MICKEL:** I will start off by congratulating two officers from my department who are with us today. I thank Freya and Tammy for the outstanding role that they have played and for the work that they have done in child safety and the promotion of it in Aboriginal communities. Last year their work was recognised, quite rightly, and they received an award for it. I place on record my appreciation for it. I simply say to them: never lose courage; we will always support you in what you are doing.

The Queensland government is strongly committed to improving the safety and wellbeing of children. To achieve this, our decisions and actions are always in the best interests of the children, but there must be a guiding principle for government action. While significant reforms have been introduced by my colleague the Minister for Child Safety, we recognise that achieving our goals is a long-term commitment.

New investments in the child safety system, alcohol management and prevention and early intervention services require strong collaboration and coordination between all government agencies and the non-government sector. Further, the government recognises that in large part the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children also rest on better housing and improved education and employment outcomes.

The Department of Child Safety is the lead agency responsible for statutory child protection services in Queensland. The Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, through the across-government Child Safety Directors Network, continues to work closely with the relevant service delivery agencies, including the departments of child safety, communities, health, education and police, to improve child safety outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

Improving prevention and early intervention services is particularly important because Indigenous children are overrepresented within the child protection system and are more likely to be on a child protection order than non-Indigenous children. I am advised that as at 30 June 2005 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0 to 17 years were between 4.3 and 4.8 times more likely to be the subject of a child protection order than non-Indigenous children. However, they were only 1.4 to 1.6 times more likely to be subject to a substantiated notification for abuse than non-Indigenous children. During 2004-05, approximately 7.2 per cent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care were subject to substantiated abuse. As I said, DATSIP has a child safety project manager and director and is an agency being monitored by the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian.

**CHAIR:** Minister, page 2-9 of the MPS refers to the divestment of retail stores. What conditions are being placed on the sale of those stores?

**Mr MICKEL:** You will recall that earlier I told the committee that the all-party parliamentary committee recommended the divestment of the retail store on Palm Island. That got me thinking that perhaps we should have a look at that right across-the-board. We sought and gained government approval for that.

There are six retail stores managed by DATSIP. It is not true that DATSIP manages them in every community. It does not. The six that are managed are in the communities of Doomadgee, Kowanyama, Lockhart River, Palm Island, Pomppuraaw and Woorabinda. The stores are managed with the aim of ensuring that the residents of those communities have access to healthy foods at the best possible price. The government has run those stores either since their establishment or following the transition from church missions to government controlled communities over 30 years ago.

The government has a desire to divest ownership of the stores and has embarked on a divestment strategy, recognising the importance of the stores to their respective communities. We hope that the strategy will deliver ownership of the store assets to the respective local governments while ensuring that the retail service is operated by a capable operator under a lease arrangement.

The target date for transfer is 1 July 2007. The lease agreement will be drafted in consultation with the respective local governments and will aim to ensure that retail store services run by new operators will be at least comparable to the existing service level provided by DATSIP. Lease conditions will cover pricing policies on healthy foods, price control, employment and training opportunities for local people and percentage rental in which rental adjustments will be based on revenue increases. The leases will be offered to the open market and DATSIP has engaged a business broker to facilitate this process. The Queensland Audit Office is monitoring the divestment process. I understand that a probity auditor will be engaged to ensure that the market process meets QAO guidelines for the sale of public assets.

The government does not accept that local governments are the most appropriate operators of retail businesses, but they have an important role to play as landlords for many assets in the community. We hope that this model of divestment will deliver benefits to both the communities and the operators and, above all, will meet with the aspirations that were certainly expressed to me and, I understand, to the committee when it visited Palm Island by residents of places like Palm Island.

**CHAIR:** I was going to ask you to talk further about the MCMC communities and the AMPs. However, I feel you have covered that in some of your previous answers. Instead, I refer you to page 2-8 of the MPS regarding the Partnerships Queensland Corporate Engagement Strategy. You may have referred briefly to it earlier, but I ask: aside from Accor Hotels, what other corporate partnerships have been established?

**Mr MICKEL:** I wanted to finish my previous answer by also congratulating the Bendigo Bank. Late last year I was in Aurukun, where the Bendigo Bank has formed a partnership with the community and actually established the first bank there in several decades. If you want to go about normalising communities, one of the most normal things you can provide is a bank. If you think about country towns and their despair when a bank closes, in a place like Aurukun you can imagine the despair when a bank has not operated. I understand that they have some wonderful schemes for helping children save and that are also directed at school attendance. They have been wonderful.

I also want to commend the work done by Ergon, in my other portfolio, in partnership with the North Queensland Cowboys in a program that they ran last year to promote sport, recreation and better lifestyles. They got together to make a DVD highlighting Indigenous heroes which I asked to be sent around to every school. I will get to the substance of your question, but I wanted to place on record my appreciation for those organisations as well as for other people who have approached me.

The Partnerships Queensland Corporate Engagement Strategy was developed by DATSIP to support and facilitate long-lasting corporate community partnerships between the private sector, governments and Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It aims to make it easier for the corporate sector to work with government to provide business and economic opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The member for Beaudesert referred to an opening out in the Burnett district. We assisted the Silver Lining Foundation, which is a not-for-profit organisation that provides programs for young people at risk in the Cherbourg area. The foundation has been working with the Cherbourg Aboriginal community to establish infrastructure to develop and run programs for Indigenous youth aged between 15 to 18 years. DATSIP will continue to work with companies like Sinclair Knight Merz, a leading professional services consulting firm, to provide additional business and economic opportunities for a number of communities.

I also want to commend the groups that came to our launch last year. This includes the non-government school sector, which wants to get involved in assisting Aboriginal communities with scholarships to help in school attendance. I have been encouraged by all of that. I might mention the mining companies as well. I will not single them out today, but they have been to see me to discuss the job opportunities that they want in their communities, particularly in the gulf area.

**CHAIR:** I certainly hope that that program expands and continues. On page 2-6 of the MPS there is mention of the Partnerships Queensland budget strategy. Can you explain what Baas Yard at Pormpuraaw will be used for?

**Mr MICKEL:** The when I visited Pormpuraaw, Alan Butler was with me. People from across-the-board mentioned to me how important the Baas Yard project was. During 2005-06, the Premier and I endorsed the allocation of \$200,000 to assist in the upgrading of infrastructure at what was a decommissioned correctional facility at Baas Yard, Pormpuraaw. Alan, my recollection is that everybody was pretty supportive of that project.

**Mr Butler:** It had whole of community support.

**Mr MICKEL:** Thank you for that. The upgrading will enable the establishment of the Pormpuraaw Community Justice Rehabilitation Centre. The funding will be provided under the Partnerships Queensland budget strategy, which provides \$5 million over two years to support initiatives aimed at enhancing the quality of life for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The development of the Pormpuraaw Community Justice Rehabilitation Centre is a joint initiative between the Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama communities and will be managed by an Aboriginal corporation and the Pormpuraaw Aboriginal Shire Council.

The corporation operates a community healing service under arrangements with the Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council, thereby providing the links to allow utilisation by both communities. The program is to be run from the centre and will utilise clan and family support structures as an integral element to achieving its outcomes. The facility will be used as an alternative sentencing option, a healing centre outpost, a vocational training and education centre and a rehabilitation centre. It will provide opportunities for on-the-ground training in the cattle industry and broader land management issues.

The initiative was raised at the negotiation table in October 2004, and I want to thank Alan for being part of that process. As was indicated, the Pormpuraaw community supports and has driven this initiative. I received a briefing on the Baas Yard proposal when I visited Pormpuraaw in November last year. I am impressed by the level of cross-community support for the project.

Funding under the budget strategy is for the renovation of Baas Yard. However, the ongoing use of the facility will be supported by the Pormpur Paath Aboriginal Corporation, Queensland Health and Nooki Weedni Corporation, the owners of the cattle property.

**CHAIR:** That brings to a conclusion the time for government members' questions. I propose that we have one more question from non-government members. I call on the member for Beaudesert.

**Mr MICKEL:** Before we take the question of the member for Beaudesert, we now have the information that the honourable member requested. I will hand over to the director-general.

**Dr Hoey:** I wish to table the internal audit report from the office of the director-general and assistant director-general of DATSIP, dated 20 January 2006. I am advised by my office manager that 100 per cent of the recommendations have been put in place. Can I table that?

**Mr LINGARD:** Thank you. I also refer to non-government question on notice No. 8, relating to the audit of the central Queensland regional office and the recommendations in relation to grants management. What deficiencies were noted regarding grants management in that audit?

**Mr MICKEL:** I will ask my director-general to answer that question.

**Dr Hoey:** I do not have that detail with me, although I can get it for you quite promptly. I reassure you and the committee members that our audit program is very thorough and we take it very seriously. We make sure that 100 per cent of those recommendations are implemented. All of our internal audit material is viewed by the Queensland Audit Office. I chair a departmental audit committee that has members of the Queensland Audit Office there, so no stone is left unturned. I can provide that specific detail at the end of this presentation for tabling if that is appropriate.

**CHAIR:** The time allocated to the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy has now expired. The committee will now have a short break and resume the hearing at 10.45 am, when we will examine the Department of Energy.

**Mr MICKEL:** I want to thank my departmental officers who have prepared the briefs for today so that we can give the committee full answers. I thank them for their professionalism, their diligence and their patience over the last week or so as they prepared for this. I want to thank various regional officers who are here today.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

Proceedings suspended from 10.29 am to 10.51 am.

**CHAIR:** We will now turn to the Department of Energy. Minister, I understand you wish to make a brief statement.

**Mr MICKEL:** Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. The next year in the energy sector will be one of the most significant in a policy sense with regulatory and structural changes and opportunities for growth driving record investment in infrastructure by the Queensland government owned corporations. This year the GOCs will invest \$2.85 billion in capital works—one-quarter more than last year and 67 per cent more than in 2004-05. That is a record investment two years in a row to keep up with the phenomenal growth in electricity demand driven by our population boom and nation-leading economy.

Energex will spend \$941.9 million in 2006-07 compared to \$658.8 million last year—a \$283 million, or 43 per cent, increase. Ergon Energy has a preliminary budget of \$768.1 million—up 95.1 million, or 14 per cent from \$673 million in 2005-06. Powerlink will invest almost \$400 million, which is 55 per cent more than last year.

There is also significant GOC investment on the generation side led by the \$359.8 million investment by CS Energy. In continuing construction of the \$1.2 billion Kogan Creek Power Station and mine, this is part of CS Energy's total capital works spend of \$442.5 million. This project will be the linchpin for meeting the state's projected energy needs in the coming year. It will also play a significant part in capturing a greater share of the national electricity market.

Gas-fired generation is moving ahead in leaps and bounds. Our 13 per cent gas scheme has been the catalyst for millions of dollars worth of private investment in the gas sector. Already over 600 megawatts of gas-fired generation has come on line since May 2000. The 450 megawatt Braemar Power Station near Dalby is commissioning and is due to be in full operation before the end of this year. Braemar is part of the gas-fired boom on the Darling Downs. Our policies are opening the door for not a trickle but a flood of private sector investment in generation assets. That is a win for all Queenslanders as energy infrastructure development continues to drive jobs growth and regional development.

There are significant changes happening in the retail arena, too. Full retail competition in both electricity and gas will commence on 1 July next year, bringing potential new energy players and promoting competition in the retail market. As we have seen in the telecommunications industry, this is likely to inject greater choice, better services, more options and more competitive pricing into the retail energy market. The sale of the retail business of Energex, the contestable part of the Ergon Energy retail business, and the Allgas network will also open the market to new players and healthier competition while fully retaining public ownership of the electricity network. The capital investment policies, legislative and regulatory changes that will be put in place over the next 12 months will be consistent with the national market approach.

**CHAIR:** I will begin with the non-government members. I call the member for Callide. Welcome. Thank you for joining us.

**Mr SEENEY:** Thank you for the opportunity. I refer to page 1-2 of the MPS where your departmental outputs are listed. One of the key departmental outputs in the second paragraph is listed as providing policy advice on a range of issues including energy supply infrastructure. Can you tell the committee what advice your department has been asked for in relation to the electricity supply infrastructure that is affected by the Traveston Dam proposal?

**Mr MICKEL:** I will ask my director-general to answer that.

**Mr Flavell:** I am on a committee that is looking at a range of issues, both in my role as Director-General of Employment and Training and Director-General of Energy. We are looking at a number of issues. We are sitting down working through both the infrastructure and the employment and workforce implications. That committee met last week. So we are going through that now.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, surely your department has been asked for advice regarding the cost of relocating the electricity infrastructure that is going to be incurred. Surely your department or the CEOs of Energex and Powerlink have been asked for some sort of an estimation of the cost of electricity infrastructure that is going to have to be relocated for that project as part of your department's planning before they announce that project?

**Mr MICKEL:** Any infrastructure requirements for that will have come through either Energex or Powerlink or any impacts on infrastructure will come through either Energex or Powerlink. To help with the committee, I will ask Andrew if he has any details on anything the member has asked for.

**Dr Kremor:** We have done some preliminary assessments of the impact on our network. There is obviously an amount of work to be done and we are working through that. At this stage, we have not prepared any detailed costings of that exercise.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, through you, could I ask the CEO of Energex when that information was first requested and by whom?



**Dr Kremor:** We do not have the date of the request to give you today.

**Mr SEENEY:** You did not get a request? It is something that you have done of your own initiative?

**Mr Flavell:** He does not have the date of the request.

**Mr SEENEY:** I am sorry.

**Dr Kremor:** We have had discussions at officer level with the department of natural resources. I do not have the dates that we had those discussions at this stage, but I can give those to the minister later.

**Mr SEENEY:** Would Energex have a preliminary estimate as to the value of their electricity infrastructure that is going to have to be relocated?

**Dr Kremor:** No, we have not prepared any detailed costings on those. Obviously, in that context there are a number of options that you need to consider in what is the most cost-effective way of delivering power into the region and what the impacts are on the system. So that work is progressing.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, once again through you, can you provide some advice to the committee as to the extent of the Energex infrastructure that needs to be relocated?

**Mr MICKEL:** I think the answer to that has been given. They are working through a range of options on what will be required. When that work is completed I am sure they will make that available to the various departments.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, through you again, could I ask the CEO of Powerlink whether similar work is happening in regard to Powerlink infrastructure.

**Mr MICKEL:** Your question is based on a premise that it does affect Powerlink infrastructure. I will ask Gordon Jardine.

**Mr Jardine:** It is a similar position to Energex. We have had officer level contact with the department of natural resources. At this stage, what we have been able to identify is a very small number of towers right on the fringe of the maximum ponded area. That is all we have identified. We will have to do some more work to identify if anything has to be done to them and, if so, what. But they are right at the very edge of the ponded area. It may be that nothing needs to be done; it may be that minor works need to be done. We have not done that detailed technical analysis yet.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, once again, could I ask the same question that I put in regard to Energex infrastructure: when was a request received and who from in regard to an analysis by Powerlink as to what infrastructure would be—

**Ms Jardine:** I do not have those dates with me. All I am aware of is that it is officer level contact between the department and ourselves.

**Mr SEENEY:** So is it correct for me then to assume that there has been no formal approach made to your department in regard to the electricity structure. It has been at officer level. There has been no formal approach made by either the department of natural resources, the Premier's department or the department of state development—whoever it is that is driving this project. There has been no formal approach made by your department. The discussion has been at officer level and instigated, apparently, by the officers themselves.

**Mr MICKEL:** My director-general has explained that he is on a committee. Perhaps the director-general can explain his involvement with that.

**Mr Flavell:** I am on the committee. Our department is not responsible for the provision of the infrastructure. In normal circumstances where there are business transactions or any sort of commercial arrangements being undertaken, it would be the commercial body or, in this case, the department of natural resources or the water division within the department dealing at an officer level in the normal course of events with Powerlink and Energex. That is how they would operate across any number of infrastructure projects in the state.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, the point I am driving at is that this project has been announced by the government. There have been costings announced by the government. I am trying to determine whether your department has had any input into the establishment of those costings of the relocation of electricity infrastructure and what that contact has been. Was advice provided by your department about the cost of relocating that infrastructure, be it Energex infrastructure or Powerlink infrastructure?

**Mr Flavell:** With something like this, the assessment of costs would have been taken by the department of natural resources in conjunction with Powerlink or probably in this case Energex. So that is where the arrangements occur. We do not get involved in the detailed costings and commercial negotiations between Energex and the department of natural resources or between Energex and Comalco or anyone.

**Mr SEENEY:** That is the question I am asking. Has Energex provided that costing? Has Powerlink provided that costing? Who did they provide it to and when?

**CHAIR:** Member for Callide, the minister and his staff have already answered that question.

**Mr MICKEL:** I thought that both CEOs answered the question.

**Mr SEENEY:** With respect, I do not think they did. They said they were having informal officer-to-officer conversations.

**Mr MICKEL:** That is untrue. They said they have been working through. That is a normal process. That might be difficult for the member for Callide to understand, but that is what happened.

**Mr SEENEY:** You clarify it for me. You clarify what the process was.

**Mr MICKEL:** I will ask the CEO of Energex and the CEO of Powerlink to come back and repeat their answers.

**Dr Kremor:** Would you mind repeating the question?

**Mr SEENEY:** My question is: what has the process been in regard to Energex and Powerlink, the two GOCs involved, providing costings or advice to whatever other government department about the cost of relocating the electricity infrastructure that will be affected by that project, given that the government has announced that it is going to proceed with that project and it has announced how much it anticipates it will cost? A significant proportion of that cost will be relocating infrastructure. A significant part of that infrastructure will be electricity infrastructure. When was Energex approached, who approached Energex for a costing and what advice was given by Energex?

**Dr Kremor:** As I said previously, I will provide the dates on which we have had contact at an officer level. I do not have those with me now. We have done some preliminary work. We have not provided any costing information, to my knowledge, at this point in time.

**Mr SEENEY:** Thank you. I knew that was the situation. It took a long time to get to the answer.

**Mr MICKEL:** Madam Chair, on a point of order, he calls a witness up and then berates the witness.

**Mr SEENEY:** I am not berating the witness.

**Mr MICKEL:** The point is that this is not unusual. The government has made the announcement just in the last couple of weeks. Why in heaven's name in the last couple of weeks would you be able to produce detailed costings when they have been approached at officer level? He also displays his complete ignorance about the process involving my department. My department would not be approached on this. It would be through the GOCs. Instead of that he chose to grill my director-general on it. The GOCs get approached by companies. That is what they are set up to do.

**CHAIR:** Can I remind all committee members and the minister to refrain from making personal reflections on members.

**Mr MICKEL:** I have to protect the officers under my care, Madam Chair. I make no apology for that at all.

**CHAIR:** Can I also ask the member for Callide to refrain from making speeches rather than asking questions.

**Mr SEENEY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I was almost going to take offence at the suggestion that I was berating or grilling anybody.

**CHAIR:** I am sure you would not.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, the GHD report on which your government—

**Mr MICKEL:** What is the page in the MPS?

**Mr SEENEY:** It is still in regard to the advice that you have or have not provided. The GHD report in regard to this project on page 637, where it examines the estimated cost of electrical distribution relocation, suggests that an amount of \$5 million would be enough to relocate the electricity infrastructure from the Traveston Dam. Have you provided any advice to GHD or has Energex or Powerlink provided any advice to GHD to justify that figure and when was that advice provided?

**Mr Flavell:** The GHD report you are talking about relates to the Traveston Dam, not the GHD report into full retail contestability; is that right?

**Mr SEENEY:** That is right.

**Mr Flavell:** Professional consultants have been commissioned by the department of natural resources. The analysis that they have undertaken, I assume, has been based on their engineering expertise. To the extent that they have had discussions with other parties, I am not aware of that. It would not be normal for them to contact the Department of Energy for something like that.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, would you imagine that in compiling such a report they would make contact directly with the GOCs involved?

**Mr MICKEL:** GHD is a consultancy firm. I am not sure about GHD, but I would imagine they have their own consulting engineers who in compiling a report to government would draw on that expertise. It really does depend on the consultancy firm hired.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, have you yourself sought any advice from the GOCs as to the amount of electricity infrastructure that would need to be relocated?

**Mr MICKEL:** Not at this stage, I have not, because the process has been run by DNRMW. In my monthly meetings going forward, now that we have two established dam sites, of course I will sit down with the CEO of Energex and the chairman of the board and work out what those costings and infrastructure arrangements are as they do the work and provide that to DNRMW. But at this stage I have not because, frankly, I have been away. I was away when the announcement was made and I have not had my July meeting with Energex on those matters and I have not had it with Powerlink.

**Mr SEENEY:** So when this matter was considered by cabinet, Minister, did you provide any advice to cabinet about the effect on the electricity infrastructure that you are responsible for?

**Mr MICKEL:** There were a number of options. The options were looked at by DNRMW for the capture of water. It depended on the site that was settled on and that site was water related. I know that that is difficult for National Party members, because they have advocated dams for so long and now when we have come up with the solution they are opposed to it. The further away you are from government the worse you become in a policy sense, and that is what you are seeing today. The other thing is that usually GHD would go straight to the department that has commissioned the work. GHD has been engaged presumably by DNRMW. Also, what I discuss with cabinet, you would understand, stays confidential.

**Mr SEENEY:** Absolutely. I did not ask you for the advice that you provided to cabinet. I asked you whether you did actually provide any advice. I would presume that to provide that advice you would have sought advice from Energex and Powerlink as to the effect on their infrastructure.

**Mr MICKEL:** I just said that dams are a product of DNRMW and, now that the sites have been settled, the infrastructure requirements, if any, of Energex and Powerlink will be examined, and I think you heard that today from the CEOs.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, you are confirming, then, that you are prepared to participate in that decision without any regard to the impact on the electricity infrastructure for which you are responsible?

**CHAIR:** Member for Callide, this line of questioning is becoming repetitious. You might like to consider moving on to the next line of questioning.

**Mr MICKEL:** I will answer the question in this way. The government recently determined what the sites would be. The Premier has had consultations on those sites. There are infrastructure implications arising from that and we will patiently, steadily, professionally, competently and diligently work through that over the coming months and years that it takes to deliver that project. It is no different from any other major infrastructure program. Once it is announced then of course the infrastructure component in and around that will swing into operation. I have enough faith in the professionalism of the CEO of Energex and the CEO of Powerlink to know that they will look at these issues in a professional and competent way. That is why they are in their positions.

**Mr SEENEY:** Were you aware that \$5 million had been allocated in that report to re-establish the electricity infrastructure and do you believe that that is a sufficient allocation?

**CHAIR:** Member for Callide, where in the MPS are you referring to the expenditure of this department?

**Mr SEENEY:** I am referring to the second paragraph under 'Departmental Outputs', which includes providing policy advice on a whole range of issues, one of which is energy supply infrastructure. I agree with the MPS that that is a major responsibility of the department to provide that advice. I am trying to establish whether advice was provided and what advice the minister provided.

**CHAIR:** I think you have just repeated your question.

**Mr MICKEL:** Because he does not understand it, he has to repeat it. The point is that that was an estimation provided by the consultants to the department requesting the report—namely, I presume in this case, DNRMW. They would do a normal assessment. Now that the site has been determined, over the next little while Energex and Powerlink will assess what the infrastructure requirements are. I am not going to speculate on what that amount would be as you are inviting me to do. GHD has done that. How the consultants have arrived at that depends on the expertise within their company. It is not my department that has commissioned that report.

I might stress to the committee that this is no different to any other way of handling things. This would have been no different to when the coalition was last in government, and it would have been no different to when it was building the dams that it built in the Lockyer Valley all those years ago. I might say that, while the \$5 million is a significant amount of money, the capital works program I outlined to the committee is \$2.86 billion this year.

**Mr SEENEY:** Could I ask—

**CHAIR:** There are five seconds left so we will come back to you in 20 minutes. The time for non-government questions has expired. I call on the member for Ipswich West.

**Mr LIVINGSTONE:** Minister, page 1-7 outlines the Department of Energy's role in monitoring the gas sector. I ask: what work is being undertaken to increase the gas pipeline capacity into south-east Queensland?

**Mr MICKEL:** Thank you for the question. This is a very important issue for those associated with the gas industry in the state. The Department of Energy has an important role in monitoring the gas sector and works with gas market participants—including operators of transmission pipelines, distribution networks, retailers and customers—to assess the impacts of future gas demand and contestability, the need for further infrastructure and investment, and the government's role in providing the regulatory framework to grow a strong and reliable gas market.

A significant change underway at present is the introduction of full retail contestability. It is important that new market entrants can access transportation capacity to take advantage of the opening up of contestability in Queensland. Limited spare capacity is a relatively common problem on most transmission pipelines, as expanding capacity is an expensive exercise and therefore only occurs after gas transportation agreements relative to the new capacity are finalised. New retailers that only have potential small volume gas supply contracts may have difficulty funding a capacity expansion.

The Roma to Brisbane pipeline is the only means of delivering gas to the Brisbane region and has already been duplicated along most of the length of the pipeline to Ellen Grove in the outer suburbs of Brisbane. This has significantly increased the capacity of this section of the pipeline. Queensland has a growing economy and rapidly increasing population. Increasing the capacity of the remaining Ellen Grove to Gibson Island section of the pipeline would alleviate potential capacity constraints on the delivery of gas to areas of Brisbane and the Gold Coast. This would allow new businesses the opportunity to access gas supply as well as ensuring our growing population has a choice when selecting a fuel supply for their homes.

The Department of Energy is working with the Coordinator-General to conduct preliminary investigations into the potential benefits of facilitating a capacity expansion of the Brisbane section of the Roma to Brisbane pipeline. These investigations are being conducted in concert with other infrastructure planning investigations for water, transport and electricity corridors to ensure that any benefits from co-locating infrastructure can be captured.

Industry has told us that Queensland residential customers and housing developers need a better understanding of the benefits of using gas, and we have listened. To encourage a greater uptake of gas at the residential level, on 1 June 2006 I announced the Queensland residential gas market strategy. The strategy is designed to expand Queensland's residential gas market. More specifically, the aim is to raise awareness of gas as an alternative energy source for Queensland households, facilitate increased connection of gas to new and existing homes and develop and implement programs that will promote the safe and efficient use of gas in Queensland homes.

**Mr LIVINGSTONE:** Page 1-5 states that the Department of Energy encourages new investment to ensure the continued delivery of reliable energy to Queenslanders, and I ask: what steps are being taken to improve Ergon Energy's customer initiated capital works program?

**Mr MICKEL:** Ergon Energy has approved a number of initiatives to improve its customer initiated capital works program, including improving streaming and prioritisation of works to manage priority projects. A priority projects pilot is currently underway in the southern region aimed at developing and implementing a strategy to reduce customer connection times. The pilot will address criteria that ensures projects are evaluated for factors such as community importance, hardship, customer health issues and escalation potential. The full implementation of priority projects will be in place in the southern region by 30 September 2006, with deployment across Ergon Energy by 30 October 2006.

The Ergon Energy works plan has been approved for 2006-07 and it is representative of the strategies to increase direct personnel in CICW's delivery. This financial year there has been a net increase of 160 full-time field related employees. A change in defect inspection cycles from three to four years has enabled \$20 million to be transferred to CICW, owing to the anticipated reduction of 120,000 man-hours to be redistributed to CICW activities, quality of supply and other high priority, customer facing, supply and reliability works in the next financial year.

As a result, the budget for CICW will be approximately \$214 million, an increase of 26 per cent on the estimate used to establish Ergon Energy's resource requirements for 2005-06. Discussions have been held with Energex in respect of the offer of short-term resources. Energex has provided Ergon Energy with a list of its service providers, which are private companies accredited to undertake design and construction works that Ergon Energy can utilise. An access arrangement has also been established to allow the utilisation of available Energex field crews for the Toowoomba and Wide Bay regions.

Ergon Energy has undertaken a review of its contestable CICW subdivision model. Three main elements have been identified in regards to the implementation of the contestable CICW subdivision process. These include: undertaking an initial pilot of the revised Ergon Energy contestability model, with key developers on selected projects commencing on 9 August this year; broadening the pilot to a wider range of projects and developers primarily based in Ergon Energy's southern and central regions; and full implementation of the new Ergon Energy contestability model to all developers by 31 December 2006 and final implementation by 31 March 2007. Ergon Energy will engage external specialist resources to identify improvement opportunities in the end-to-end CICW process. This project is scheduled to commence on 31 July 2006. Ergon Energy has scheduled a CICW workshop for 18 July 2006. The outcome of this workshop will be to place Ergon Energy in a position to set targets for its average cycle times by the end of the 2006-07 financial year.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** Minister, page 1-6 outlines continued participation in the development of national policy agendas in relation to emissions trading. Could I ask: what is the impact of the Commonwealth's decision to make Enertrade subject to mandatory renewable energy targets?

**Mr MICKEL:** This decision by the Commonwealth, which has progressed amendments to the Renewable Energy (Electricity) Act, will impose a penalty on Queensland of potentially up to \$190 million, particularly on Enertrade. As Enertrade is a Queensland government owned corporation, the federal government's amendments shift what is properly a private sector liability on to the state public purse and therefore the people of Queensland. I repeat to the committee: no other state is impacted in this way. This is John Howard-Peter Costello style federalism where they have smashed Queensland, potentially by \$190 million.

This inequity came through changes made by the Queensland government to support and allow implementation of the federal government's national competition policy in the electricity industry. A fundamental component of the national electricity market is that all electricity for major grid generators would be bid into the national pool. Queensland participation in the national electricity market was initially complicated by pre-existing agreements to supply electricity from the Gladstone Power Station to the Boyne Island smelter. This electricity was and is supplied directly so that it never actually enters the contestable market. To ensure security of the NEM, all large generation has to appear in the pool and the NEM rules require only one purchaser and seller for pool electricity. To meet these requirements, Enertrade undertook to carry out two notional transactions that would balance the contracted smelter electricity load within the NEM. It would bid the entire 1,613 megawatt output of the Gladstone Power Station into the NEM and immediately purchase from the pool the 810 megawatts covered by the offmarket arrangements between the power station and the smelter.

The federal government's amendments make it clear that a NEM REC liability attaches to Enertrade's purchase of the smelter energy out of the pool. Enertrade does not actually deal with the electricity required by the smelter, so it cannot pass on the costs as it has no contract for supply to the smelter. Since the commencement of the Commonwealth government's Renewable Energy (Electricity) Act in 2001, the Queensland government has been working with Enertrade and the federal government to confirm that the renewable energy certificate liability for electricity consumed by the Boyne Island smelter rests with the smelter or with the owners of the Gladstone Power Station, the actual smelter suppliers, and not with Enertrade.

The federal government has ignored these years of work in a stroke of arrogance and the detailed submission by my department prepared for the Senate inquiry into the amending legislation. I have written to the responsible Commonwealth minister, Senator Campbell, advising of the Queensland government's strong opposition to the amendments. I advised Senator Campbell that Queensland is willing to support Enertrade in any and all efforts to remove this unfair burden from the people of Queensland.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** Minister, page 1-1 states that the Department of Energy has a role in developing Queensland's energy markets and the national energy markets. What work has been undertaken in regard to the augmentation of the Queensland-New South Wales interconnector?

**Mr MICKEL:** Committee members will recall that the interconnector was the one thing opposed by the National and Liberal parties last time they were in government, at enormous cost to Queensland, but I am pleased to say that under us Queensland now has the most modern and efficient generation sector in the national electricity market, with the capacity to generate approximately 11,000 megawatts—well in excess of the state's electricity needs even at times of peak demand. This excess generation capacity allows Queensland to be a net exporter of electricity to the southern states while still holding sufficient reserve capacity for unseen contingencies.

Even though Queensland is experiencing record electricity load growth at 31 per cent over the last five years—and it is forecast to grow by 3.9 per cent per annum over the next 10 years—Queensland continues to meet the electricity demand of this state as well as providing almost 10 per cent of New South Wales peak demand. Electricity is exported from Queensland to the southern states by two interconnectors between Queensland and New South Wales—that is, the Queensland-New South Wales interconnector, or QNI, and the Terranora interconnector, previously known as Directlink.

QNI is the main interconnector and allows Queensland to export up to 1,078 megawatts of electricity into New South Wales and import up to 750 megawatts from New South Wales. Throughout 2005-06 Queensland exported power to New South Wales via the QNI approximately 95 per cent of the time, averaging a flow of 650 megawatts southward. This equates to providing power to over 700,000 average New South Wales customers over this period.

With respect to transmission development in the national electricity market, in order to ensure the existence of a secure and reliable national transmission network, Queensland through the MCE has taken a leading role in a series of national transmission reforms. These reforms either have been successfully implemented—such as the release of the inaugural annual national transmission statement in 2005 detailing the requirements for transmission planning—or are currently in the process of being implemented, such as the suite of MCE initiated rule changes on transmission currently before the Australian Energy Market Commission.

To further increase interconnector efficiencies, security and export capacity, Queensland transmission company Powerlink and its New South Wales counterpart TransGrid are currently scoping and costing QNI upgrade options to determine which meet the requirements of the Australian Energy Regulators' regulatory cost benefits test for transmission network augmentation. Powerlink and TransGrid expect to commence the initial consultation phase of the regulatory test for QNI augmentation later in 2006. My department is also working closely with other jurisdictions.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** Minister, I would now like to refer to the energy sector response to Cyclone Larry, as mentioned on page 1-6. Is it true that Powerlink has been unable to access and inspect some sections of the transmission line between Kareeya and Innisfail because of its location in dense vegetation?

**Mr MICKEL:** Yes, this is another program where we want to upgrade power to north Queensland and have been frustrated for years by the federal government. It is an infrastructure program which is vitally needed but which has been opposed by the Queensland National Party. Prior to Cyclone Larry, Innisfail and surrounding townships were supplied with a bulk electricity via a coastal transmission line between Edmonton and Innisfail and an inland transmission line between Kareeya and Innisfail. Both of these lines sustained heavy damage from Cyclone Larry. I show the committee these photos to demonstrate the devastation to the towers so that you have an idea of the type of infrastructure we are talking about.

The accessible coastal location of the Edmonton to Innisfail line meant that repairs could be carried out quickly, and bulk supply was restored to Innisfail four days following the cyclone. The assessment and repair of the cyclone damage to the much less accessible inland transmission line were far more difficult due to the continual poor weather in the area following the cyclone. A full assessment of the damage has only recently been completed. Due to its age and condition, this line is scheduled for replacement by late 2007 by the new Tully to Innisfail transmission line. Powerlink considers that it is not economically viable to reinstate this line to its precyclone state and there is insufficient time to undertake such extensive repairs before the 2006-07 cyclone period.

Following the cyclone, Powerlink reconfigured the Innisfail to Edmonton line to improve its reliability by creating two separate circuits to Innisfail, each of which is capable of meeting expected demand. Whilst the performance to date of this reconfigured line has been reasonably good, with only two short interruptions, a contingency plan is required for the 2006-07 storm season in case the coastal line sustains serious damage. Powerlink will undertake temporary repair work which will allow the Kareeya to Innisfail line to be put back into service as a backup should a major event such as another cyclone cause serious damage to the line.

The temporary repairs to be carried out on this Kareeya to Innisfail line include the erection of a short section of a transmission line on wooden poles in the vicinity of fallen towers. This section of line will be strung as a single circuit using three of the existing six conductors and without installing an overhead earth wire. The wooden pole will have a significantly lower rating than the original line but will have sufficient capacity to supply Innisfail in the event of an emergency. It will not have the capacity to operate as part of the original Kareeya to Innisfail to Cairns transmission network. Powerlink expects this wooden pole section to be completed by October.

**CHAIR:** Minister, I refer to the development of significant policy initiatives, as mentioned on page 1-6 of the MPS. How does the Beattie government's approach to power purchase agreements differ from that of the previous government?

**Mr MICKEL:** For a start, ours is responsible; theirs was fiscally irresponsible and saddled this state with a series of uneconomic power purchase agreements. Enertrade is counterparty to five power purchase agreements, or PPAs, which date from before Queensland joined the national electricity market. These agreements were made to ensure Queensland would have sufficient generation capacity to meet demand in Queensland. Why? Because you will remember that the Borbidge government cancelled Eastlink. That resulted in three of these PPAs which we are saddled with being entered into as a direct result of the Borbidge government's policy failure.

In addition to the increased cost of energy generated in Queensland as a direct result of this decision, the interconnector itself increased in costs because of delay by, I am told, \$85 million at a direct cost to both Queensland and New South Wales consumers and taxpayers. The PPAs were written in the context of the previous monopoly electricity industry structure before the commencement of a competitive wholesale market. They did not anticipate the evolution of the market, the extent of the additional generation capacity in Queensland or the resulting impact on wholesale prices.

The PPA conditions were not expected to be profitable and are not profitable in the current market environment. As at 30 June 2005, Enertrade's balance sheet allowance for onerous contracts was \$267.6 million. So, when National Party members go on about their great economic management, always remind them of the uneconomic PPAs that they saddled this state with and you are still paying for. You might remind your constituents of that.

For 2004-05, Enertrade's revenue from the wholesale electricity market and related energy products and services was \$393.5 million. Over the same period I am advised that power purchase and related costs were \$485.9 million. To offset current and expected cash losses, the government made an equity injection of \$250 million into Enertrade in 2005-06. To minimise its costs, Enertrade acquired Barcaldine power station in June 2003 and cancelled its PPA.

Enertrade also facilitated conversion of the 159-megawatt liquid fuel Townsville power station to a 220-megawatt gas-fired baseload power station which commenced operation in February 2005. Renegotiation of the Townsville PPA on conversion of the plant improved Enertrade's commercial position, as there is now greater utilisation of the assets covered by the agreement.

**CHAIR:** The time for government questions has expired. I call the member for Nanango.

**Mrs PRATT:** Minister, in your answer to non-government question on notice No. 10, which in part refers to another question that was asked in the House, you have inferred that water from Wivenhoe Dam is being utilised or has been used by Tarong Power Station since the directive was issued by you and the Deputy Premier for them not to use anything other than the Boondooma water supply. Minister, do you stand by that statement? As it is common knowledge from workers and others that water other than the Boondooma supply has been used since that directive was given by Tarong Power Station, where is that water coming from? Is it being supplied by Tarong North?

**Mr MICKEL:** Can I just have the top part of your question again?

**Mrs PRATT:** In your answer to non-government question on notice No. 10, which refers to other questions which I asked of you in the House, it is stated that no water from Wivenhoe Dam is being or has been used by Tarong Power Station since the directive was issued by you and the Deputy Premier and that they were to only use the Boondooma water supply. Do you stand by that statement? As it is common knowledge by the workers and others in the area—

**Mr MICKEL:** I am sorry, I think you are completely misquoting me. I do not know that I have said that.

**Mrs PRATT:** I have them here, Minister—the whole lot.

**Mr MICKEL:** Would you mind if I had a look at the answer, because I am sure I did not say that. Which question are you referring to—the one you asked of this committee or—

**Mrs PRATT:** Of this committee, I asked here in non-government questions in which you referred to question No. 1036.

**Mr MICKEL:** Can I just check to see what I said? My recollection is that I did not say that, but I just want to double-check.

**Mrs PRATT:** It infers that no water is being used—

**Mr MICKEL:** No, no, you said I said it.

**Mrs PRATT:** No, I did not. I have it written here 'inferred' and you can check *Hansard*.

**Mr MICKEL:** It reads—

Firstly, I would like to point out ...

...

I am advised that power station water supply and consumption varies in proportion to the amount ...

In regard to annual water usage, I refer you to my answer ...

Tarong North ... are commercial entities ... I am advised given commercial-in-confidence considerations, the costs associated with water supply cannot be publicly disclosed ...

That is in answer to a question with regard to Tarong Power Station and Tarong North water usage.

**Mrs PRATT:** Question number?

**Mr MICKEL:** Where did I infer anything? You attributed comments to me—

**Mrs PRATT:** In a question without notice that no directive has been changed, that Tarong Power Station cannot—

**Mr MICKEL:** This is the question you asked me in the House?

**Mrs PRATT:** Which has been referred to, yes, in your questions which I have asked you today.

**Mr MICKEL:** Yes, but you then put words in my mouth that are not correct, I am sorry. You then said that I inferred something. I had not inferred anything. Your question in the House—and I am going off memory here—asked if I had issued another redirection. That is what you asked me in the House.

**Mrs PRATT:** Yes.

**Mr MICKEL:** And I said—

**Mrs PRATT:** And the direction was that they do not use water from Wivenhoe.

**Mr MICKEL:** I am sorry about this, but your question in the House asked whether I had issued another direction. If you look at it—I am going off memory; I would like to see the question.

**Mrs PRATT:** Minister, I will accept that. I will ask another question with regard to that.

**Mr MICKEL:** I think if you are going to put words in my mouth at least please be accurate about it.

**Mrs PRATT:** I was accurate.

**Mr MICKEL:** Well, you were not accurate.

**Mrs PRATT:** With regard to the use of Wivenhoe water since the directive was given by you and the Deputy Premier, has Tarong Power Station been using any Wivenhoe water?

**Mr MICKEL:** I will answer it in this way. There was a direction issued under section 124 of the Government Owned Corporations Act 1993. It required that from 1 March Tarong Energy Corporation Ltd cease sourcing water from the Wivenhoe Dam for the purpose of providing water for use in the Tarong Power Station. The direction specifically stated that it did not apply, as I understand it, to water sourced from Wivenhoe Dam by Tarong Energy for the purpose of providing water for use in the Tarong North Power Station.

I am advised that Tarong Energy has complied with the spirit and achieved the intended effect of the direction. However, it advised my department in mid-June that it had become aware of technical issues which may be perceived to relate to the water direction. Because of raw water quality problems including the level of dissolved salts in Boondooma Dam and blue-green algae in the Cooling Water Dam, Tarong Energy sources around 800 megalitres per annum from the Wivenhoe Dam for the joint demineralisation facility. This supplies demineralised water for both Tarong and Tarong North power station boilers and small amounts of potable drinking water for general consumption including at the Meandu Mine. Whilst this is only approximately two per cent of the total water requirements of the two power stations, Tarong Energy sought to comply with the spirit of the original direction. It more than compensated for the proportion of water it drew for its Tarong station power auxiliary needs by drawing the same amount of water from Boondooma Dam instead of from Wivenhoe Dam and applied this for use in the Tarong North Power Station cooling tower.

The Deputy Premier and I have written to the chair of Tarong Energy under the requirements of section 124 of the Government Owned Corporations Act 1993 advising that we propose to issue a superseding direction. Tarong Energy has advised that it has no concerns with the draft direction and shareholding ministers will now formally issue the direction. This direction will enable Tarong Energy to source water from Wivenhoe for use in the joint demineralisation plant and for potable water. However, to compensate, Tarong Energy will need to draw an amount of water at least equal to the proportion it would use at Tarong Power Station and Meandu Mine from Boondooma Dam. This equivalent amount of Boondooma Dam water is to be directed to Tarong North Power Station, decreasing its supply requirement from Wivenhoe Dam.

The net effect will be that the volume of water drawn from Wivenhoe Dam will not be greater than the amount of water required to operate Tarong North Power Station. To demonstrate the actions that Tarong Energy has taken as of 1 March 2006, Tarong Energy has sourced water solely from Boondooma Dam for use in Tarong Power Station's cooling towers. This has resulted in a saving of approximately 35 megalitres of water per day not being drawn from Wivenhoe Dam. Approximately 28,000 megalitres per year of cooling tower water for Tarong Power Station will come direct via a pipeline from Boondooma Dam.

**Mrs PRATT:** Thank you, Minister. That was a really full explanation. I appreciate that, because I would have liked to have that answer a long time ago.

**Mr MICKEL:** Could I just say this—

**Mrs PRATT:** Well, the directive has changed, Minister.

**Mr MICKEL:** The directive changed yesterday. I became aware of the extent of this issue in a full briefing session on Tuesday and noted that it had not complied. I am not about to mislead anybody on anything. You had asked me a series of questions in relation to it, and that is why we issued a redirection on it. I do not take it lightly, either.



**Mrs PRATT:** Minister, was that directive changed because—

**Mr SEENEY:** Because of the question you asked on notice.

**Mrs PRATT:** Yes. Minister, were you aware of an instruction—perhaps that is the best word—issued from both power stations to their staff not to discuss the use of the water being used with the general public and me in particular?

**Mr MICKEL:** No.

**CHAIR:** Can I ask the member to refer to the MPS.

**Mrs PRATT:** It relates to that question on notice.

**Mr MICKEL:** Can I give a full answer to the redirection. I notice the member for Callide interjected on your question. I will provide a full answer to you because you are entitled to a full answer. I will provide that to you if you like. Your concern is: why has there been a water direction reissued?

The original direction was focused on getting very large, immediate water savings for south-east Queensland. The 28,000 megalitres per annum that Tarong Power Station uses in its cooling towers was identified as a stand out priority. Tarong Energy also sources around 800 megalitres per annum from the Wivenhoe Dam for the joint demineralisation facility. I am advised that it is around two per cent of the total water used by the power stations. Because of the focus on the main game the two per cent was not identified, I am told, until after the direction was issued. Demineralised water is required for both Tarong and Tarong North Power Station boilers. Potable drinking water is also required for general consumption, presumably by your constituents and the people who work at the mine.

Raw water quality problems, including the level of dissolved salts in Boondooma Dam and blue-green algae in cooling water dam, prevent their substitution for Wivenhoe water for the demineralisation plant and potable water. Inappropriate quality make up water added to the boiler water system may lead, I am advised, to inefficient power plant operation and premature power plant failure.

I am told Tarong Energy examined alternative options to Wivenhoe water for the demineralisation plant. It has advised that alternative water strategies, such as using Boondooma Dam water only or mixing Boondooma Dam and Wivenhoe Dam water, would require major engineering solutions to address technical and quality issues. Tarong Energy has indicated that while Boondooma Dam water could be connected to the demineralised facility this would halve the throughput of the demineralisation process due to the level of dissolved salts.

The overall result is that using only Boondooma Dam water would not allow sufficient demineralised water to run all five generating units. Providing a dual supply of water from both Wivenhoe Dam and Boondooma Dam into the demineralisation facility would require major engineering solutions because of the differential in pressure between the two water sources. Feeding the demineralisation facility directly from the cooling water dam, which contains water from Wivenhoe and small amounts from Boondooma Dam, is another supply option. However, the ongoing problems with blue-green algae in the cooling water dam would require some engineering solutions to make potable water available from the demineralisation facility for on site use.

**Mrs PRATT:** So what the general public could deduce from the whole thing is that a directive was issued in the first place that they were not to use any Wivenhoe water and that since that day and since I asked the question in the House that directive has been changed—that was yesterday, I think you just said. So at this point in time Tarong Power Station can access Wivenhoe water as little or as much as they deem fit? That is what you just said.

**Mr MICKEL:** I did not say that at all.

**Mrs PRATT:** You just read that off that sheet, Minister.

**Mr MICKEL:** What did I read off the sheet. I read that they will take water for a demineralisation facility. I used the term two per cent. Two per cent does not mean as much as they wish, it is two per cent. Let me finish the explanation for the benefit of the honourable member.

**Mrs PRATT:** It is rubbish.

**CHAIR:** Can you please refrain from personal reflections and using unparliamentary language.

**Mr MICKEL:** I will ask my departmental advisers to come forward. I resent the fact that I have given you a full and detailed explanation and you, for the second time today, have put words into my mouth that I have never said.

**Mr Bell:** The amount of water that Tarong will be able to draw from Wivenhoe Dam will be less than two per cent of the total needs of the power station and Meandu mine. Tarong will be required to also compensate at least that amount of water for use in the Tarong North Power Station from the Boondooma Dam and cooling water dams. Any water it draws from Wivenhoe Dam up to two per cent it must compensate with an equivalent amount of water. The net effect is that there is less water being taken from the Wivenhoe Dam.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, can I refer you to this map which is Energex's own map of its extensive network in the Mary Valley which shows the major transmission lines that run down the valley and on to the communities further up the valley. Also can I refer you to the Skyring-Diamond switching station and the Kandanga Road substation, both of which are in the inundation area, and the two Powerlink lines which run across the inundation area. Will you undertake to provide this committee with an estimate of the cost of relocating that infrastructure? I appreciate that you will need to take that on notice. I take it from your previous answers that that work has not been done. I am asking you to provide this committee with the best estimation of relocating that infrastructure given that there will be different options.

**Mr MICKEL:** Let me find out reasonably how long that will take because there is no way in the world I can supply that for you by 2 o'clock this afternoon.

**CHAIR:** Can I remind the committee that the minister is entitled to answer any way he deems proper. If at some point you feel that a question has already been answered we can move on to the next one.

**Mr MICKEL:** I have nothing to hide with this. It is a process that needs to be worked through so I am happy to do it.

**Mr Kremor:** We are working on that now and it is going to take a number of weeks for us to put together the initial options and estimations associated with that. Then obviously there is some more detailed planning and design work that goes on beyond that to finalise that.

**Mr MICKEL:** I will ask Gordon Jardine to supply an answer.

**Mr Jardine:** As I mentioned before, our lines are at the very fringe of the maximum ponded area, but we will be going through the same analysis to identify what if anything needs to be done in relation to those lines. That analysis is underway. It will be in a couple of weeks time frame.

**Mr SEENEY:** Do I take it from your answer that you do not feel you are able to provide that information to the committee?

**Mr MICKEL:** I do not intend for the committee to sit for a couple of weeks. I thought it was all over by 2 o'clock.

**Mr SEENEY:** That is fine, but you are confirming for me that that information has not been prepared or provided to anybody else—any other government department, the DNR, the Premier's department, the department of state development? So that information has not been prepared and provided to anybody else?

**Mr MICKEL:** I did not say that.

**Mr SEENEY:** If it has been prepared and provided to other people can it be provided to this committee.

**Mr MICKEL:** I will ask the CEO of Energex to come back and see whether they have supplied it to any other department. I thought they said in their earlier answers that they had been working through it, they did not have costings and it had been done at officer level. That was my understanding of the answer.

**Mr Jardine:** We have only recently started to do that work and we have not provided any information to any other department in that regard.

**CHAIR:** The time for non-government questions has expired. I have a question. Page 1-7 of the MPS states that the Department of Energy encourages innovative technologies and energy efficiency. Would you please explain the success that has been achieved through a gas-fired air-conditioning trial on the Gold Coast?

**Mr MICKEL:** Thank you very much. As a Gold Coast member you would be interested in this. Gas air conditioning is an exciting new technology that just arrived in Queensland. Whilst the technology is new to Queensland it has been operating successfully in Japan and other parts of the world for several years. The first gas heat pump air conditioner was installed in a Queensland restaurant in May of this year. I should say, the restaurant owner is thrilled with the product.

Only commercial models are currently available but these are triggering a lot of interest in businesses which have access to gas or currently use gas in their day-to-day operations such as for water heating for commercial laundries. Domestic household gas air-conditioning models are likely to be available later this year. Sometimes, especially with large commercial operations, there can be a significant cost to increase the capacity of the electricity network and supply the electricity needed to run a commercial sized air-conditioning system. The Gold Coast restaurant is a good example.

The installation of the gas air-conditioning system for the Gold Coast restaurant was approximately half the cost of installing a comparable electric system and the necessary electricity network upgrade. Operating or running costs for electric and gas air conditioning are currently comparable. I am advised that a new generation of gas air-conditioning models has been developed which are more energy efficient than current models. We expect to see these new models in Queensland shortly.

The gas heat pump air conditioner uses gas as its primary fuel but uses a small amount of electricity for fans and control system—less than 10 per cent of the electricity a conventional air-conditioning unit uses. Gas air conditioning has lower greenhouse emissions compared to electric air conditioning. At the commercial level there are additional innovations that could be applied to gas air conditioners to increase their efficiency and reduce their environmental impacts.

My department is discussing with industry opportunities to combine heat recovery with gas air conditioners. The heat from the gas engine could be recovered and used in other applications such as preheating boiler water and space heating. Gas air conditioning provides significant environmental benefits. I know some people will suggest the best environmental outcome is no air conditioning, but that is not a reality. People want to be cool and stay cool. I know my colleague the Minister for the Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women is working hard on improving building designs to increase comfort and livability. Queensland has enormous gas reserves and a growing and developing gas distribution network making gas a viable alternative energy source for homes and industry.

**Ms MALE:** I refer you to page 1-5 of the MPS regarding the introduction of guaranteed service levels. Would you please advise the committee how the implementation of guaranteed service levels has improved customers service?

**Mr MICKEL:** The guaranteed service level scheme and associated rebates is not a compensation scheme. The scheme is about requiring the electricity distributors Energex and Ergon Energy to recognise their customer service obligations and give financial rebates to customers when they fail to meet those obligations. The guaranteed service level scheme entitles customers to rebates on their electricity bills if they do not receive a satisfactory level of customer service. These service levels apply to all non-contestable customers of Energex and Ergon Energy.

Both Ergon Energy and Energex have advised that the service level complaints have helped identify problems in their internal processes and communications, and these are now being addressed. For example, as a result of problems identified through claims for GSL rebates, Ergon Energy subsequently corrected incorrect data in its internal systems that was resulting in some customers not being notified of planned outages. Similarly, Energex has been able to identify where improved processes and reduction of human error will result in better outcomes for customers and is carrying out staff training to address the customer service issues which contribute to GSL claims.

**Ms MALE:** Page 1-1 of the MPS refers to your department's role in providing for the state's current and future energy needs. Would you outline how this year's record capital works budget in the electricity sector will help fulfil that role?

**Mr MICKEL:** The seven energy government owned corporations are planning a record total capital expenditure of \$2.9 billion in 2006-07. The record capital expenditure for the second consecutive year by both Energex and Ergon Energy will lead Queensland's commitment to providing a secure, reliable, cost-competitive and sustainable energy supply for all Queenslanders. Energex and Ergon Energy are both heavily investing in their electricity distribution networks to ensure the system capacity will match the high growth in demand being driven by Queensland's booming economy and the increasing use of domestic air conditioners.

The total budgeted capital expenditure for 2006-07 represents a 26 per cent increase compared with the 2005-06 capital budget of \$2.3 billion and a 71 per cent increase compared to the 2004-05 capital program of \$1.7 billion. The total reported budgeted capital expenditure for 2006-07 of \$2.9 billion compares with budgeted capital expenditure in the Queensland government across the entire energy sector of \$590 million in the Borbidge government years from 1996-97 to 1997-98.

Energex's total capital expenditure program for 2006-07 is \$941.9 million, highlighted by continuing work on the city grid project to reinforce supply to the Brisbane CBD and the south-west Brisbane project to upgrade the electricity network in the important economic corridor to Ipswich. The program includes \$642 million in its regulated electricity network capital expenditure program comprising \$401.2 million in its subtransmission system and \$240.9 million on its distribution network.

Ergon Energy has preliminary budgeted capital expenditure of \$768.1 million for 2006-07. This includes a significant number of major projects focused on improving the quality of supply to domestic and commercial customers. The program includes \$302.6 million for corporation initiated works, \$214.3 million for customer requested works, and \$25.4 million for isolated systems in remote and regional Queensland.

CS Energy has earmarked \$359.8 million in 2006-07 for continuing construction of the \$1.2 billion Kogan Creek Power Station, due to commence operation in 2007. The Kogan Creek work is part of an overall capital expenditure of \$442.5 million by CS Energy in 2006-07, which includes a \$59.6 million program for overhauls at Callide, Swanbank and Mica Creek.

Powerlink will invest \$398.5 million in its capital expenditure program for 2006-07 for transmission projects scheduled in regions across the state.

**Ms MALE:** Thank you. Page 1-1 of the MPS discusses identifying strategic options for developing and monitoring end-use energy efficiency. Could you outline to the committee the work being undertaken with local councils in south-east Queensland in this regard?

**Mr MICKEL:** My department is working closely with local councils in south-east Queensland to examine technologies available for more energy efficient public lighting and opportunities for their adoption. Brisbane City Council, Gold Coast City Council and Maroochy Shire Council have all been involved in this project together with government owned corporation Energex. I wish to congratulate the Lord Mayor of Brisbane and the mayor of Maroochy shire for their interest in this area. The councils will continue to be engaged by the Department of Energy over coming months to develop the framework for an energy efficient streetlighting trial in the south-east corner. New housing developments represent a significant opportunity to trial energy efficient streetlighting technologies in an initiative which will set the groundwork for increased uptake of energy efficient public lighting throughout the state.

Increased use by local governments of improved public lighting products has the potential to provide financial savings and greenhouse gas reductions to Queensland communities. The potential opportunity for energy savings by local governments is huge, with over 40,000 minor streetlights in residential areas in Brisbane alone. To help define the benefits in more detail, my department has commissioned an independent expert to provide advice on the capital costs of energy efficient lighting installations, their serviceability, expected life under south-east Queensland conditions and energy cost savings available from their use.

**Mr LIVINGSTONE:** Minister, page 1-6 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement refers to the development and implementation of significant Queensland energy policy initiatives. Minister, would you advise what Ergon Energy is doing to improve reliability of power supply to key community infrastructures in north areas, particularly in the cyclone-prone area?

**Mr MICKEL:** Ergon Energy's Cyclone Area Reliability Enhancement—or CARE—program targets improved reliability for key community infrastructure in the narrow tropical coastal strip from Mackay to Cooktown, which is most exposed to cyclones. The \$120 million, 20-year infrastructure program targeting spending of \$6 million annually is 100 per cent funded by Ergon Energy.

Developed in 2001, CARE's initial priority has been to improve power supply reliability to essential services such as hospitals, disaster control centres, aged-care facilities, sewerage, water, airports, ports, major food outlets and other counterdisaster agencies. More than \$29 million has been expended to date, mostly for capital intensive undergrounding work. The program has also included considerable works installing low-voltage spreaders to minimise conductor clashing caused by high winds, tree contact and airborne debris. The CARE program is not cyclone-proofing but aims to provide an important enhancement to the ability of the network to withstand cyclonic forces.

Following severe Cyclone Larry, Ergon Energy commissioned a review of the CARE program. The review confirmed the initiatives of the existing CARE program to be correct and properly targeted for lower category tropical cyclone conditions. The success of the CARE program was demonstrated in the aftermath of Cyclone Larry, with the review finding the CARE funded assets remaining secure. As a result, power supplies to key community infrastructure were able to be restored as soon as the upstream transmission network came back online.

However, while analysis to date indicates that the CARE program assets performed admirably in the conditions, the intensity of Cyclone Larry was such that significant damage was incurred on transmission and subtransmission system assets, most of which were the responsibility of Powerlink. The upstream situation rendered the undamaged CARE feeders ineffective and exposed the weakness in the current CARE program in that it relies on the speedy recovery of the transmission and subtransmission systems to be effective. Ergon Energy is therefore planning to investigate within the CARE program options for establishing additional isolation points on the CARE feeders and the potential to inject temporary power from mobile generators into strategic locations on the CARE feeders to cover the contingency of loss of supply from upstream supply points.

Ergon Energy is also expecting to shift the focus of the CARE program from essential services to securing underground cable connections to already existing underground supply areas such as central business districts and residential estates in order to minimise the number of customers affected by outages caused by cyclone damage to the overhead distribution lines.

**Mr LIVINGSTONE:** Minister, page 1-7 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement discusses the ongoing regulation and administration of the 13 per cent gas scheme, and I ask: what impact is the scheme having on gas-on-gas competition and investment in Queensland?

**Mr MICKEL:** This 13 per cent gas scheme was introduced from 1 January 2005 and has currently completed its first compliance period. It has encouraged major investment in developing new gas sources and energy infrastructure. It is of course opposed by the Queensland National Party. Ironically, most of the jobs and most of the investment are in National Party electorates.

To date, operational gas-fired power stations developed with the support of the scheme are located at Swanbank E in Ipswich, Townsville, Moranbah and central Queensland—a total of 640 megawatts of gas-fired generation capacity. In addition, a 450-megawatt gas-fired power station at

Braemar north-east of Dalby has commenced commissioning and is scheduled to commence commercial operation in late 2006. The 13 per cent gas scheme has also encouraged consideration of a number of new gas-fired generation projects planned, I am advised, to come online in the period 2008 to 2013, including a 1,000-megawatt power station to the coal seam gas fields at Spring Gully, a 200-megawatt power station proposed at Chinchilla, a 370-megawatt power station at Townsville, over 600 megawatts of intermediate and peaking gas-fired power stations in various central Queensland locations, and a number of smaller projects of less than 100 megawatts designed to supply electricity to large users or provide electricity network peaking support. This totals over 3,000 megawatts of new, efficient and environmentally friendly gas-fired generation capacity which is built and operational or currently under construction or consideration.

These new power stations bring skilled, full-time jobs to regional communities. For instance, the Braemar Power Station has employed around 120 people during construction, with at least six people required to staff the plant once operational. In addition, around 20 new jobs have been created in gas field developments undertaken to supply gas to Braemar. The 13 per cent gas scheme and its requirements for gas-fired generation have breathed life into the coal seam gas, called CSG, industry. It is conservatively estimated that around 665 full-time jobs have been created in the industry to date, with other employment opportunities which directly benefit local businesses coming from the provision of accommodation, food, fuel and mechanical and fabrication services.

With exploration continuing, production is set to increase rapidly in coming years, and employment growth is set to continue. To date, an estimated \$1 billion worth has been spent developing coal seam gas production capability, and it is estimated that an ongoing investment of over \$160 million a year will be required by gas producers and developers to meet existing commitments. The 13 per cent gas scheme has also provided incentives for further exploration and development of conventional natural gas resources.

**Mr LIVINGSTONE:** Minister, page 1-1 refers to the options for renewable and sustainable energy. Would the minister outline some of the achievements of the Queensland Sustainable Energy Infrastructure Fund?

**Mr MICKEL:** This is a great program which has received acclaim from a number of people in the business sector. The project spans a broad range of applications. Let me briefly describe them. Four years ago QSEIF provided \$85,000 to assist Water Engineering and Research Solutions, which is a company developing and manufacturing a reservoir mixer requiring one-tenth of the energy of conventional equipment. More than 50 units have now been sold throughout Australia, bringing \$5 million to the Queensland economy. So \$80,000 to the company has resulted in \$5 million into the Queensland economy. By replacing inefficient conventional technology, the WEARS reservoir mixers reduce electricity consumption by more than 10,000 megawatt hours per year, thereby reducing greenhouse emissions. Development of the energy efficient reservoir mixer won WEARS a national science and technology award in 2003.

A \$90,000 QSEIF project to develop drying technology for sugar mills has led to an entirely unforeseen application. The technology has now been updated to create a new product and market for the sugar industry. Queensland company BioCane is building a factory at Nambour to dry sugarcane for export as cattle feed to be marketed in Asia as cow candy. Drying sugarcane provides the required shelf life for the product to be exported by ship. Once the plant is fully operational, BioCane will produce, I am told, 300,000 tonnes per year of cow candy and the Queensland sugar industry will access a \$30 million annual export market.

QSEIF funding of \$120,000 enabled two researchers at the University of Queensland to develop antireflective, antifogging coatings that allow about 10 per cent more power to be produced by solar photovoltaic power modules. If adopted for all solar modules currently being manufactured, the enhanced power output would have a direct market value of \$1 billion a year. The University of Queensland has created a spin-off company, Xerocoat, to commercialise the technology, and initial capital raising has enabled Xerocoat to employ five staff.

QSEIF provided \$215,000 to Redflow Energy Pty Ltd to develop a zinc bromine battery that can store six times the energy of lead acid batteries of the same weight. The battery will overcome existing limitations on service life, maintenance, weight and cost for remote area power systems. It provided \$172,000 to Fibre Composites Design and Development at the University of Southern Queensland to develop fibre composite materials that can be used in place of hardwood timber in road and railway bridges. The fibre composite beams incorporate one-sixth the energy required to produce comparable steel or concrete beams.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. We will stop there for a few minutes. We will have a break and resume at 12.25.

Proceedings suspended from 12.15 pm to 12.27 pm.

**CHAIR:** We will recommence. I call the member for Callide.

**Mr MICKEL:** Can I just say that during the previous determination for the committee, a request was made for an audit report on the central Queensland regional office of DATSIP. I am now in a position to table that for the benefit of the committee members.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, again I refer you to your key departmental output of providing advice in regard to the state's energy supply infrastructure. I ask whether or not your department has provided any advice in the government's decision-making process regarding the southern regional pipeline.

**Mr MICKEL:** Could you clarify what you mean by that?

**Mr SEENEY:** The southern regional pipeline is a decision that is being progressed by your government. It is commonly referred to as the water grid. It will transfer water between the major dams in south-east Queensland. Has any advice been sought from your department in regard to the electricity requirements to—

**Mr MICKEL:** I honestly have to ask which one you mean. There are a number of water pipelines that I am aware of.

**Mr SEENEY:** The southern regional pipeline is the water grid. It is the one that connects the major dams. Obviously, there will be a huge electricity requirement if that water grid is to operate in the way that the government is suggesting that it will. I am asking you whether you have provided any advice to the government in regard to meeting the electricity requirements that will be needed to pump water from the Hinze Dam to Brisbane, for example.

**Mr MICKEL:** I would imagine that on those issues the Department of Natural Resources is dealing specifically with the energy companies. What you are failing to understand is that these are DNR initiated projects. I imagine that DNR would consult with the energy companies in relation to this.

It is like your insinuation before that GHD has made a report to DNR. You are trying to imply that there is no money assigned by GHD for electricity infrastructure, yet in your own question you acknowledge that \$5 million was assigned by DNR—presumably their electrical engineers—for electricity infrastructure. You are trying to imply to the committee that because Energex and Powerlink have only recently been involved, GHD has not factored in the cost of electricity infrastructure into that scheme. That is completely wrong. This is no different from any other infrastructure program, whether it be a mine, a port or anything else.

**Mr SEENEY:** The southern regional pipeline is supposed to be operational by the end of 2007, mid 2008 at the latest. What advice has your department supplied in regard to the electricity infrastructure that will be needed to make it operational or have any of the GOCs been asked for their advice as to the electricity infrastructure that will be required?

**CHAIR:** That question has already been asked.

**Mr MICKEL:** I do not know how many other ways I can answer it. For the benefit and the education of the honourable member, the department would not provide advice on that. As the responsible agency, DNR would seek out work with the relevant GOCs in relation to this. This is exactly how companies operate when they are bringing on major infrastructure projects.

**Mr SEENEY:** Could we get advice from the CEO of the relevant GOC, which I presume would be Energex, as to what infrastructure will need to be provided and what consultations they have had with the government in regard to providing that infrastructure?

**Mr MICKEL:** Madam chair, this series of questions would be far better addressed to the DNR minister. That is the appropriate way to deal with the water issue. We have been very patient with the honourable member because he fails to understand how government operates. I understand that. However, the provision of the water pipelines is a matter for DNR. Presumably the companies that it engages to build these things will then talk with the relevant GOCs to ensure that the electricity infrastructure is delivered.

I have already outlined to the committee the extensive capital works projects that are being undertaken this year by Energex, Ergon and Powerlink. These are not the dozy old days of the Borbidge government when they had \$590 million right across the system. We have several billion dollars to address infrastructure in the electricity industry.

**CHAIR:** Member for Callide, the line of questioning is repetitive. I remind you that you are a guest of the committee. Could you please identify a more specific question in relation to the proposed expenditure of this portfolio for 2006-07.

**Mr SEENEY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Obviously, my question is not about the pipelines. My question is about the electricity supply to south-east Queensland which has been struggling to meet the demand that is already placed upon it. I am concerned that the department for which the minister is responsible is not adequately providing advice as to the ability of the system to meet the extra need for the major projects that the government has proposed.

**CHAIR:** Is there a question there? Do not make a speech.

**Mr SEENEY:** I ask the minister to advise the committee as to what advice has been sought in regard to meeting the electricity needs of the water grid, as it is commonly referred to, that is, the southern regional pipeline, which is a key part of the government's strategy to address the water crisis in south-east Queensland.

**Mr MICKEL:** I notice that he could not address it in a MPS. I will take the question anyway and I will tell you why I am going to take it. The premise of the question is that the electricity system is struggling. You heard that. I will tell the committee what he told the *Australian Financial Review* on 12 February 2005. He said, 'The doomsday situation has not eventuated.' Then over that summer he said that the Energex people had lied. That came from a bloke who told the media that he was a tactical liar. He blaggards everybody about that—

**Mr SEENEY:** Madam Chair, I do not think the minister advances his cause by attacking me. The question is about the electricity supply; it is not about me.

**CHAIR:** I am chairing this meeting and I ask everyone to refrain from using unparliamentary language.

**Mr MICKEL:** You said that the electricity system was struggling. I will deal with the electricity system as it was on Friday, 14 July. The total available capacity of Queensland's generation today is 9,468 megawatts. The reserve generation, excluding all those interconnectors, is 43 per cent. I get bagged in the *Australian Financial Review* for that amount of reserve capacity, yet the honourable member tries to mislead the committee by saying that the system is struggling.

Let us look at the capacity today. We have a total registered capacity of 10,634. Today on the QNI the maximum flow south is 1,077 megawatts. This is the struggling system! Terranora is 234 megawatts. Today the amount that Queensland needs from the struggling system that the member just tried to tell the committee we have is zero. I managed to get these figures for Energex's daily network to ensure that I had the latest available outage report. These are yesterday's figures. The report from Energex on outage reports: nil, right across the board yesterday. So I thought, 'Hang on, that might be just a one off. There must have been a problem across a network this large'. I said, 'Give us Wednesday's figures.' Energex's daily network outage report for 13 July 2006: no events. This is the system that the member tries to tell you is a struggling system. This is the system that General Cosgrove praised after Cyclone Larry when pretty well the entire network was destroyed in far-north Queensland. Unlike the National Party, I put on record my thanks for Ergon, Energex and Powerlink for the outstanding work that they did after Cyclone Larry and for the work that they are doing for Queensland consumers and taxpayers.

**Mr SEENEY:** I refer you to the capital statement on page 74, which lists Ergon's capital expenditure for the year. There is a budgeted figure of \$15 million for the 2006-07 budget, which is part of a \$28 million commitment to SunWater as a major customer for the Burdekin-Moranbah pipeline. Some \$28 million worth of expenditure was required by Ergon to provide the electricity infrastructure to that pipeline. I cannot see any mention made in any of the future developments or from the answers that you have given that any similar commitment has been contemplated for the water grid pipeline, the southern regional pipeline. Can you confirm that there has been no negotiations of a similar nature to make a similar commitment to the southern regional pipeline?

**Mr MICKEL:** The electricity requirements for these projects will be handled in the normal capital works project. As I advised the committee, we have several hundred million dollars worth for Energex and several hundred million dollars worth for Ergon. Requests like this get handled in the normal capital works project. The money is there for future plans. If I can say this again, Madam Chair, surely to goodness these are matters more directly for the Minister for Natural Resources.

**Mr SEENEY:** This is about an electricity supply issue.

**Mr MICKEL:** I have just answered the question and said for electricity supply we have a record capital works expenditure. There are network plans. Discussions go on all the time between various departments and the need for electricity requirements.

**Mr SEENEY:** So there have been no contracts entered into in regard to the southern regional pipeline? You have obviously entered into a supply contract for the central Queensland pipeline because you have expended \$28 million, of which \$15 million is to be expended in this year's budget. I would imagine that if the water grid in south-east Queensland is going to work, there will need to be a similar contract with one of the electricity suppliers. There does not seem to be any indication that those negotiations have even begun.

**CHAIR:** Member for Callide, you have asked your question. Please refrain from making a speech.

**Mr Flavell:** To explain the process, the department of natural resources, as the minister has indicated with GHD, has undertaken a report. They have engineers involved. In GHD's case, they are electrical engineers. In terms of the other water infrastructure, those engineers are making assumptions about the cost of the infrastructure, including electricity supply infrastructure, and other related requirements. When the project is at the stage where they need to deal in any significant detail with Energex, I presume that is when they would do it.

**Mr SEENEY:** And that has not happened yet, obviously. Thank you. We will move on.

**Mr MICKEL:** Point of order. It is usual today that we give an answer, but because it is not the answer that he understands, he then blaggards the people who are the witnesses before him.

**Mr SEENEY:** No.

**Mr MICKEL:** This is a bloke who wrote to me wanting to know of Energex Retail Pty Ltd and the work they do in network limitations and forecasting network limitations. This is a company that sells electricity; it does not distribute it. This bloke wrote to me on 11 March 2005. As the energy spokesman, he has little or no understanding of the different roles that the different energy GOCs supply. Why would you write to me about network limitations from Energex Retail Pty Ltd? All they do is buy and sell electricity. That is why he does not understand when—

**Mr SEENEY:** I appreciate that when you are in trouble, you lash out. Spoilt kids do it as well.

**Mr MICKEL:** No, when you are in trouble, blaggard a public servant.

**Mr SEENEY:** When you are in trouble, lash out. Go for the personal insults.

**Mr MICKEL:** No, all I am doing is quoting your letter back. You are the one who is insulted because of your own limitations.

**Mr SEENEY:** The personal insults demonstrates that you are—

**Mr MICKEL:** If the network had the limitation of understanding that you have, we would be in serious trouble.

**Mr SEENEY:** Can I move on to my next question about another issue altogether?

**CHAIR:** Please.

**Mr SEENEY:** Have you provided any advice to other government departments in regard to the western corridor pipeline, which is supposed to, as I understand it, provide treated sewage effluent to CS Energy at Swanbank and Tarong?

**CHAIR:** Minister, if you find the question a repetition of previous questions with a slight—

**Mr SEENEY:** This is a different pipeline.

**CHAIR:** Member for Callide, it is a different side of the same ball.

**Mr SEENEY:** It is a different point.

**Mr MICKEL:** He wants to talk about DNR desperately. Are you talking about the electricity distribution?

**Mr SEENEY:** No. I will clarify it for you. I am talking about the issue of the power stations—the GOCs—Tarong and CS Energy using recycled sewage effluent that is going to be transported by the western corridor pipeline. The pipeline itself is irrelevant; it is the issue of the electricity GOCs that I am asking you about.

**Mr MICKEL:** Yes, but what are you asking about? Are you asking about the width?

**Mr SEENEY:** I am asking you whether you have provided any advice or the GOCs themselves have provided any advice as to the viability of them using that water from the western corridor pipeline.

**Mr MICKEL:** So this is a question about the quality of the water, is it?

**Mr SEENEY:** I am asking about whether you have provided any advice. There are a number of issues which I will pursue in the line of questioning, one of which is water quality, another of which is economics, and another one will be timeliness. There are a whole series that I probably should not give you too much forewarning about. There is a whole series of issues that revolve around the western corridor pipeline and the use of that water by Tarong and CS Energy which are very relevant to your department and the advice that you supposedly give the government in these decision-making processes.

**CHAIR:** Order! Member for Callide, the committee is here to examine the budget for the Department of Energy for 2006-07. If you are unable to address any of those issues that you have referred to to that appropriation, I suggest you try to do that.

**Mr SEENEY:** Yes.

**Mr MICKEL:** My understanding is, on the water quality issues, because they deal with CS Energy and Tarong, I think the GOCs have been involved in discussions, as has my deputy director-general, in the quality of water issues to do with that whole issue.

**Mr SEENEY:** Can I ask you specifically: had either of the GOCs entered into any contracts to take water from that pipeline?

**Mr MICKEL:** Not at this stage.

**Mr SEENEY:** Have negotiations begun in regard to taking water from that pipeline?



**Mr MICKEL:** I know that discussions have been underway. The issue also is mainly about waste water for those industrial estates, too, up around the Swanbank area. I am not aware at this stage of a contract having been signed with CS Energy or Tarong.

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

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** Page 1-7 of the MPS refers to reviewing energy regulatory requirements to support the changing needs of the community. Can you advise what has been done to ensure south-east Queenslanders purchasing properties can check their proximity to Energex owned sites which may be earmarked for future network infrastructure?

**Mr MICKEL:** This is a very important issue. It is one that affects electorates in the outer metropolitan areas where you will find that people wake up one day and realise that the vacant block of land across the road or something is for an Energex substation. I have been particularly concerned about this issue, because I think sometimes people have been captured by a vacant block of land that suddenly becomes other than what they thought it would be. The problem can be avoided by the purchaser or a solicitor carrying out appropriate title searches through the Land Titles Office. In some situations the future use of property owned by a public utility provider may be unclear.

Given the ongoing population growth rate in Queensland, and particularly in the south-east region, this issue will continue to present problems for purchasers of residential property. The problem often occurs when Energex Ltd and electricity distributors servicing south-east Queensland own a vacant block of land in a residential area with the intention of building electricity works on the land at some future time.

I am pleased to advise honourable members that this problem of vacant land owned by Energex being a concern in residential areas has now been satisfactorily addressed. Energex now provides a free information service on its web site for use by potential purchasers, solicitors, real estate agents and the general public. The service lists by locality, street name, lot and plan number all the blocks of vacant land owned by Energex. The service also lists the intended use for the land such as a future substation or a distribution line corridor. Additionally, the service provides an office hours telephone number should the inquirer require further information about either the land or its proposed future use. More importantly, the web site is updated each time Energex purchases a new block of land for some future use.

I want to thank Energex for being involved in this project. I think it will make a material difference to people who are buying blocks of land, particularly in outlying areas. I also want to thank the member for Ferny Grove, Geoff Wilson, for taking an avid interest in this issue.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** Page 1-5 of the MPS refers to the continued monitoring of key performance indicators identified by the Somerville report into electricity distribution and service delivery. One of those key indicators was the level of skills in the Energex and Ergon Energy workforce. What steps have been taken to respond to the Somerville report's recommendations on workforce skills?

**Mr MICKEL:** Energex and Ergon are taking positive steps to ensure that they have the skilled workforce that is needed to meet the fast-growing demand for energy. Energex has recruited 489 additional field staff, that is, tradespersons, trades assistants and apprentices, since July 2004 to June 2006. Successful recruitment campaigns overseas have seen 123 international candidates accepting offers of employment with Energex by 1 June 2006. Energex is assisting in technical skills transmission and family and social integration.

Since August 2004 Energex has had five intakes of apprentices numbering 199 in total. Energex has also launched an accelerated paraprofessional cadetship with 14 trainees completing an advanced diploma in electrical engineering. A further paraprofessional cadetship program is planned for commencement in 2006-07. Seventeen graduate electrical engineers and two gas engineers have been recruited by Energex since July 2004.

The capacity of Energex's technical training facility, Easytrain, has been extended with expanded classroom and training facilities to accommodate a significantly increased number of recruits. Since June 2002 Ergon Energy has increased the size of its apprenticeship program from 100 to 279. A further intake of at least 70 apprentices is planned for January 2007. Contractors are encouraged to develop apprentices as part of recent negotiations for extending contracts.

Ergon Energy has placed significant emphasis on trainee programs with 50 staff across six technical fields and traineeship programs. By the end of June 2006, 51 group training administration support trainees had commenced under the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle scheme. A total of 28 new traineeships have been recommended for approval for the 2007 trainee intake. This includes 18 new externally recruited trainees under the existing technical training program and a further 10 internally sponsored traineeships in a new dual apprenticeship trainee program. Trainees will be guaranteed a permanent position on successful completion of their traineeship.

Over the year to date, Ergon Energy has employed 247 technical people whilst losing 87. In 2004-05, that figure was 190 with a loss of 65. Ergon Energy has initiated a program of electrical engineering scholarships with eight currently in place. Nineteen engineering vocation students were employed in 2005-06 with 30 to be engaged in 2006-07. Ergon Energy currently has 12 new engineering graduates. An employment target of 20 engineering graduates is planned for 2007.

To meet increased capital and maintenance programs, Ergon Energy now operates a field and technical workforce of 2,408 as at end of April 2006. Ergon Energy is working to attract additional technical staff in the current competitive skills market.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Further on page 1-6 of the MPS there is reference to the monitoring of Energex's and Ergon Energy's Summer Preparedness Plans, also as recommended by the Somerville report and specified in the Electricity Industry Code. Can you inform the committee what work has been undertaken to ensure that GOCs are preparing for the summer storm season to minimise outages and manage the impact of extreme weather events?

**Mr MICKEL:** The summer preparedness plans outline actions to be completed prior to the summer storm and peak load period to ensure continuity of supply to customers, responsiveness to outages and communications with customers. Significant improvements have been experienced in the performance of the distribution networks following the focused capital works and operational initiatives of both Energex and Ergon Energy in accordance with their 2004-05 summer preparedness plans.

Key achievements for both Energex and Ergon Energy included: increases in trade staff and apprentices, the installation of more than 850 megawatts of additional network capacity and improvement in the reliability of supply to customers, improvements in vegetation management and significant improvements in call centre performance. Following the success of summer preparedness plans for 2004-05, Energex and Ergon Energy were requested by the government to produce summer preparedness plans, detailing the work to be carried out to prepare their networks for the 2005-06 summer. These 2005-06 summer preparedness plans have been published on their web sites.

Highlights of Energex's 2005-06 summer preparedness plan include: capital expenditure of \$160 million between July and December 2005 to mainly increase the capacity of the network to enable the network to cope with the estimated increase of 7.5 per cent in the maximum summer demand; operation and maintenance expenditure of \$50 million between July and December 2005, \$25 million of which will be on vegetation management with most of the remainder spent on improving the performance of the 11 kilovolt and 33 kilovolt overhead feeders; \$3.4 million to improve information systems used during emergencies; and further improvement of capacity and quality of the customer contact service and provision of information to the public by means other than the telephone—that is, radio.

Highlights of Ergon Energy's 2005-06 summer preparedness plan include: capital expenditure mainly to increase the capacity of the network and replace ageing infrastructure of more than \$600 million during 2005-06; operation and maintenance expenditure of more than \$250 million during 2005-06 and \$80 million expenditure on vegetation management during 2005-06; installation of more than 825 quality of supply monitoring units throughout the network; and enhanced disaster management and contingency plans, including the simulation of events with escalating severity and which require the management of field crew fatigue and the deployment of back-up personnel. The 2005-06 summer preparedness plans were successfully implemented, audited and reported on in accordance with the Electricity Industry Code. Energex and Ergon Energy have been asked to produce new summer preparedness plans for the 2006-07 summer. These plans are due to be finalised and submitted to the regulator by 31 August 2006.

**CHAIR:** Page 1-7 discusses the Department of Energy's role in managing community service obligations to deliver the government's uniform tariff policy. Will this policy be upheld once full retail contestability takes effect on 1 July 2007?

**Mr MICKEL:** The cost of providing electricity in some of the Ergon areas is extraordinarily high. As a result, the uniform tariff comes at a very significant community service obligation. I am advised that it is nearly \$400 million for 2005-06 financial year. The uniform tariff will stay. It continues to provide a safety net price for electricity consumers after the introduction of full retail competition, ensuring that retail prices are reasonable and fair in the context of an entire national provision of energy services. It is expected that some customers in areas of lower cost of supply will secure lower prices under full retail competition than rural and remote Ergon Energy customers. We will put in place a framework to allow small customers within contestable areas to revert to the uniform tariff if they are unhappy with the services that the new retailer offers to them. These customers will be expected to complete existing contracts but will be able to return to the uniform tariff after those contracts expire. That effectively sets a price ceiling.

Can I give the committee some figures that have been provided to me by region of the subsidy per customer. This applies to commercial and industrial customers. For example, in the eastern part of south-western Queensland the average subsidy per customer at the moment is \$23,175. In Wide Bay, in

the eastern part, that subsidy is \$6,482. If you go to the western part of north Queensland, the subsidy per customer is \$7,462 per customer. If you go to the western part of far-north Queensland, the subsidy is about \$7,900 a customer. So you can see that the \$400 million is spent providing a uniform tariff to people regardless of where they live in Queensland. That is the cost protection that we will abide by.

If you look at the South Australian example where under the Liberals they simply privatised the system, prices skyrocketed. That is because they never had a safety net. Our uniform tariff is the safety net protection for consumers. But, over and above that, what we are going to do is say to customers, 'After your contract expires if you are not happy then you will have reversion rights to go back to the uniform tariff.' That is a significant breakthrough and I think an important one for Queensland consumers.

**Ms MALE:** Page 1-1 states that the Department of Energy works with the owners of electricity and gas transmission networks across Queensland while meeting current and future energy needs. How does the performance of Powerlink, the owner of the electricity transmission network, compare with its peers?

**Mr MICKEL:** I am pleased to report that, if you look at the work done by Powerlink and particularly Ergon and Energex workers after Cyclone Larry, you will see the enduring image of the Chinook helicopter bringing the tower to restore electricity transmission to far-north Queensland. If you need a symbol of Powerlink and power workers in general, that is the symbol.

Over and above that, Powerlink has been recognised as a world leader in the operation and maintenance of transmission services through an international benchmarking study. In late 2005, Powerlink participated in the international transmission operation and maintenance study as a means of benchmarking its performance and practices against other electricity transmission entity around the world. Twenty-five transmission companies, I am advised, participated in the 2005 study, and the performance of each transmission utility was measured across cost and service levels for the 2004-05 year.

Powerlink was assessed to be a top-performing entity in the overall study as well as in both major categories of the study—that is, transmission lines and substations. In particular, the result showed that Powerlink was delivering above average network reliability at below average costs. This international benchmarking was undertaken by a leading utilities consulting firm which applied a detailed data validation process. Powerlink's leading position in the benchmarking study reflects its focus on making innovative improvements to its asset management strategy and work practices. Powerlink has deployed modern digital technologies to enable sophisticated condition monitoring of its equipment and to enable rapid diagnosis of any problems and, where necessary, timely remote reconfiguration. I want to congratulate Powerlink and its employees on this significant achievement.

**Ms MALE:** Page 1-6 states that in 2005-06 the Department of Energy completed eight community infrastructure designations for Powerlink Queensland. What community infrastructure is proposed in Powerlink's annual planning report?

**Mr MICKEL:** Powerlink has a program of community offsets in recognition of the fact that some communities bear disproportionately the infrastructure burden that benefits the wider community, so they have an infrastructure plan but there are also infrastructure designations. Powerlink is required to publish an annual planning report to provide at least the following information about its high-voltage transmission network in Queensland: demand forecasts, committed new large generation of loads, grid capability estimates under various scenarios, identified grid limitations in the committed network and non-network developments to overcome these, and potential grid limitations and the options to overcome these. Despite recent unprecedented increases in demand, Powerlink has been able to successfully identify where network limitations may occur and has implemented network and non-network solutions to overcome these limitations. Currently 13 major projects and many smaller projects are in various stages of being implemented to overcome already identified grid limitations.

Powerlink follows defined and transparent processes to identify and develop projects to address these limitations. The process carried out for major projects during the regulatory phase includes the following main steps: notification of potential limitations, seek information on non-network solutions, develop network solutions, determine the feasible solutions, seek approval from the Australian Energy Regulator for regulated network solutions. If necessary, Powerlink may seek to have the land for a project designated for community infrastructure under the Integrated Planning Act 1997 after the completion of the regulatory phase. The designation exempts the project from any further planning assessments and notes the infrastructure on the relevant local government's planning scheme.

Because not all projects require community infrastructure designation and the need for designation is usually determined towards the end of the planning phase for a project, the annual planning report does not specifically identify which projects require designation. However, the Department of Energy expects to process community infrastructure designation requests for about 20 Powerlink projects during 2006-07.

**Mr LIVINGSTONE:** Page 12-2 refers to \$1 million being committed to the Solar Cities trial. What benefit will the trial deliver to Queenslanders?

**Mr MICKEL:** The Solar Cities program represents an excellent opportunity to nourish and grow the sustainable energy industry as part of the larger renewable energy solution to reducing the impact of climate change. This program will develop and trial strategies to overcome constraints to solar generation and demand side management that can be replicated more broadly throughout the state and the rest of Australia once proven to be successful.

On 5 December 2005 the Australian government announced the short-listing of 11 Solar Cities proposals nationally including Ergon Energy's Townsville based proposal. Of the 11 proposals short-listed, at least four will be selected to host a Solar Cities trial. Based around Magnetic Island, the Townsville Solar City Project will demonstrate the effectiveness of solar power, smart meters, energy efficiency and other demand side measures in an urban grid connected context. There will be approximately 600 solar panels installed on residential homes on Magnetic Island and state government buildings including the Magnetic Island State School, police station, ambulance station, ferry terminal, medical centre and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service office. The project will also involve the installation of energy efficient products, photovoltaic solar panels in homes, two new housing estates and a refurbishment of an existing CBD commercial building. Data collected from this trial will support the development of practical strategies that reflect the Smart State approach to ensuring the reliability, competitiveness and sustainability of the state's energy sector.

There is no doubt that the opportunity to promote Townsville as a solar city will provide a variety of benefits to the region including tourism and employment benefits, as well as placing Townsville in the international limelight as a world-leading sustainable city. Should the Townsville solar city bid be successful in attracting Australian government funding, the project will generate 11 gigawatt hours of renewable energy over its life to 2013 and reduce demand peak by 2,550 kilowatts. In doing so, Townsville solar city will reduce growth in greenhouse gas emissions during this period by over 50,000 tonnes. That is why the Queensland government strongly supports a solar city trial and has allocated \$5 million from the state budget to support the delivery of a successful Townsville solar city proposal over the next five years.

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

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, I refer you to page 1-6 of the MPS where you say under 'Future Developments' that you are going to continue to develop and implement a range of policy positions for the Queensland government to support Queensland's continued delivery of, amongst other things, cost competitive energy supplies. Minister, have you had any advice from either CS Energy or Tarong regarding the impact of using recycled water on their cost competitiveness?

**Mr MICKEL:** I think I said in my previous answer that, whilst discussions are underway, there have been no contracts signed at this stage. I would point out that the power stations in south-east Queensland use about eight per cent of the south-east Queensland water requirements. Certainly CS Energy and Tarong Energy have been participating in discussions with the Western Corridor Recycled Water Scheme project in the development of their business case, with particular focus, I am advised, on the technical feasibility of the use of recycled water in these power stations. I am advised that the GOCs have provided useful input to the project development in relation to the nature of the water requirements of the power stations. I am further advised that the project is continuing with its development of a business case for consideration by government. I am advised that part of that consideration will be in relation to the commercial arrangements to apply to the major south-east Queensland water initiative. It is therefore premature at this stage to be discussing contract arrangements. I would also just remind the committee that the generators do operate in a competitive environment market when it comes to pricing in the contracts they enter into.

**Mr SEENEY:** Will those GOCs need to break existing contracts to enter into contracts to take water from that source?

**Mr MICKEL:** I cannot elaborate any more than what I have just given you. The discussions are ongoing, business cases are being determined. You are asking me to speculate on whether they will take it up or not. I cannot do that.

**Mr SEENEY:** In that dot point that I quoted, you say that you are advising the government on a range of policy positions, and you are a part of the cabinet. Have you been provided with any advice which you have subsequently and hopefully passed on to the cabinet in regard to that policy position to supply those GOCs with recycled water?

**Mr MICKEL:** Could you tell me which MPS you are referring to?

**Mr SEENEY:** I am referring to the one I quoted to you a moment ago. It is page 1-6, the second dot point under the heading 'Future Developments'. It says that your department is going to develop and implement a range of policy positions for the Queensland government to support Queensland's continued delivery of these energy supplies. It is a policy position that the Queensland government has

adopted to use recycled water in these two power stations. I am asking you about the advice you have received from those GOCs and the advice you have given to the government in regard to that policy position.

**Mr MICKEL:** Obviously, we have had advice on these things. We are providing advice to government but, as I said to you, the GOCs involved will work up their business case and that business case has yet to be finalised, as I understand it, as I told you in my previous answer.

**Mr SEENEY:** So you are not prepared to share that advice with this committee as to the feasibility of that policy position or the impacts of that policy position on the electricity generators that are involved?

**CHAIR:** The minister can answer the question in any way he deems appropriate. I think the question has been answered several times.

**Mr MICKEL:** The commercial arrangements have not been finalised. I do not know how many other ways I can say that.

**Mr SEENEY:** Maybe next year when it has been finalised we might be able to get the details from you, Minister.

**Mr MICKEL:** I look forward to you being in your position and me being in mine next year.

**Mr SEENEY:** That is a fair point.

**Mr MICKEL:** And the way you are going, I reckon that might be a fair likelihood.

**Mr SEENEY:** In the small amount of time that is left, can we move on to a completely different issue in regard to the capital expenditure that is projected in the capital statement. As I said before, there are large amounts there that are unidentified. Can you indicate whether the government has allocated any of that capital expenditure for undergrounding powerlines, especially those in north Queensland which were so devastated by the cyclone conditions?

**Mr MICKEL:** I think I answered this question before in relation to CARE, but I am happy to share it with the committee again. I think Don asked this question, so I will read it back to Don. I might also point out to the committee that the Leader of the Opposition, in one of his moments of complete financial irresponsibility, gave an indication in his budget reply speech last year that the opposition would look at undergrounding the entire network. Some of you might remember that. I pointed out then that the advice given to me of the costs of undergrounding all of Queensland's existing overhead powerlines, including high-voltage transmission lines, was estimated in 2004 by my department at—wait for it—more than \$56 billion. So that might be something as events take place in February next year that members might like to remind their constituents in their electorates about—that is, the clear policy difference between us and them when it comes to electricity prices. That would have a massive implication for electricity prices.

In terms of the specifics in relation to cyclones, Ergon Energy does have a Cyclone Area Reliability Enhancement Program. It targets improved reliability for key community infrastructure in the narrow tropical coastline strip from Mackay to Cooktown, which is most exposed to cyclones. What we have is a financially responsible \$120 million, 20-year infrastructure program, spending about \$6 million annually, 100 per cent funded by Ergon Energy. It was developed in 2001 and CARE's initial priority has been to improve power supply reliability to essential services such as hospitals, disaster control centres, aged-care facilities, sewerage, water, airports, ports, major food outlets and other counterdisaster agencies.

More than \$29 million has been expended to date, mostly for capital intensive undergrounding work. The program has also included considerable works installing low-voltage spreaders to minimise conductor clashing caused by high winds, tree contact and airborne debris. Madam Chair, I am quite happy to take extra time if you would like to talk about Cyclone Larry.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, you misrepresented the opposition leader's statements. In regard to undergrounding electricity lines, our intention was never to underground the major transmission lines, and you know that very well. Can you tell the committee—

**CHAIR:** Member for Callide, there is no time for speeches here, and your time has expired.

**Mr SEENEY:** I just wanted to get that on the record.

**CHAIR:** I am sure you did.

**Mr MICKEL:** I do not blame you for walking away from the Leader of the Opposition. I would have too. This is probably a leadership spill here. You got it here first.

**CHAIR:** That is how rumours start, Minister. The time for non-government questions has expired. We have time for some government questions.

**Mr LIVINGSTONE:** Page 1-2 also refers to energy services and the capacity to analyse the implications of energy production and its use on economic, social and environmental fronts. What progress has been achieved through the energy efficient forums held by the Department of Energy?

**Mr MICKEL:** Energy efficiency is widely regarded as the most cost-effective way to deliver savings on our energy bill and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, feedback from industry has revealed that a lack of relevant case studies and information on appropriate systems and technology is a barrier to implementing energy efficiency projects. That is why my department has hosted two EnergyWise forums over the past 12 months to improve the energy efficiency performance of Queensland businesses. These EnergyWise forums allow industry experts to demonstrate to businesses through case studies, practical technical advice and commercial product demonstrations how they can reduce their ongoing energy costs.

The first two forums successfully targeted shopping centres and major retailers in Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast, and the third targeted hotels and resorts on the Gold Coast. Over 100 centre and store managers, hotel owners, engineers and maintenance managers left the forums enthused to ramp-up their energy efficiency projects. The highlight of the forums is the case studies which demonstrate actual savings, such as Brisbane's Myer Centre air conditioning retrofit which delivered energy savings of over \$81,000 a year. That is a 50 per cent reduction.

The case studies that are prepared by my department provide the participants at the forum with a benchmark for energy efficiency practices specific to their industry—something they previously did not have. The case studies and technical presentations delivered at the forums have been made available as a free resource for Queensland businesses via the department's web site.

The recent EnergyWise forum held for the hotel and resort sector on the Gold Coast also received considerable media coverage, which only serves to spread the energy efficiency message further. The Surfers Paradise Marriott Resort case study will also be sent to industry newsletters and magazines, which means the Marriott energy efficiency story could potentially reach hundreds of industry participants.

In addition to promoting energy management strategies within the retail and hotel sectors, these forums also serve to highlight the leading-edge energy efficiency products and services available in Queensland. Almost 90 per cent of the respondents who were surveyed after the forum last October said that despite having attended the full-day forum they could benefit from further information or education on energy efficiency measures. This indicates there is a real need for my department to continue to support energy efficiency educational forums for the commercial and industrial sectors in Queensland.

My department is planning to hold two more EnergyWise forums over the next 12 months. The energy sectors we are planning to target are pubs, clubs and licensed venues, and the local government sector.

**Ms MALE:** I refer to page 1-7 of the MPS regarding the encouragement of sustainable energy development. How successful have green power programs been and what steps are being taken to improve subscription levels?

**Mr MICKEL:** Over 65,000 Queenslanders purchased green power accredited renewable energy last year. This equated to over 122,000 megawatt hours of renewable electricity, resulting in a saving of almost 100,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. In the first quarter of this year, the number of Queensland electricity consumers purchasing green power grew to 68,000. This is over 40 per cent more customers than Australia's most populous state, New South Wales.

After five years leading the charge with more green power customers than any other state, Queensland's dominance was only recently challenged following a million-dollar marketing campaign in Victoria. While Victoria now has more subscribers in terms of numbers, Queensland still maintains its position as the largest overall consumer of green power, with more green power sold per customer than in either Victoria or New South Wales.

Queensland government owned energy retailers have consistently achieved an impressive uptake of renewable energy products by their customers. Both retailers actively market their green power accredited products to consumers through brochures, mail-outs, articles in regular newsletters and via their web sites.

The National Green Power Accreditation Program, which accredits renewable electricity generators across Australia, is funded by six states and territories. Queensland's contribution in 2005-06 was \$63,104. This funding goes towards the administration of the program and the development of marketing materials such as the green power web site. This web site provides consumers with information on renewable energy and how they can sign up to receive green power accredited renewable energy from their electricity retailer. The state government is also doing its bit by purchasing \$1.4 million of renewable energy each year through the Government Energy Management Strategy.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** Page 1-5 of the MPS refers to your department regulating and monitoring the state's energy industry. Minister, given that safety is a top priority in the industry, would you advise what government owned corporations such as Energex are doing to ensure that Queenslanders are aware of the dangers associated with the supply of electricity and what measures are being taken to promote safety around powerlines?

**Mr MICKEL:** All Queensland electricity transmission and distribution entities are active in promoting public awareness of the dangers associated with the supply of electricity. For example, many committee members will know of the regular public safety messages broadcast and printed by Energex in the lead-up to and during the 2005-06 summer. These messages address key safety issues such as storm preparedness and powerline safety.

Recent independent research commissioned by Energex showed that 97.3 per cent of south-east Queenslanders took note of the safety programs. This is a 30 per cent increase compared to similar promotions in 2000, with a high retention rate of almost 100 per cent. This is a very positive outcome for the Energex safety campaign, particularly considering the accepted retention rate for retail advertising is 25 to 40 per cent. Customer safety is the No. 1 priority for Energex, and the high retention rate of these messages demonstrates that residents also take storm preparedness and electricity safety seriously.

Ergon Energy also engages in regular and seasonal public safety campaigns with both the general public and industry across the state. This includes storm and cyclone related safety measures as well as targeted advertising such as the 'look up and live' campaign. In addition, Ergon Energy conducts safety campaigns with various agricultural and other industry groups to advise on the use of crop dusters and heavy machinery near electricity installations.

All Queensland electricity transmission and distribution entities maintain public safety pages on their web site, providing a range of information on issues such as powerline friendly trees and electric and magnetic fields. Powerlink Queensland's web site safety page focuses on safety issues related to high-voltage transmission lines. The committee can be assured that the government and the electricity entities are fully aware of the need to promote public safety in regard to all aspects of the supply of electricity.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. The time allocated for the consideration of the expenditure estimates for the portfolio of the Minister for Energy and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy has now expired. I thank the minister, advisers and all the staff for their attendance today. The committee will adjourn for lunch and resume at 2.30 pm to examine the portfolio of the Minister for Emergency Services.

**Mr MICKEL:** Before the committee adjourns, could I thank my departmental officers, the officers from the GOCs and my personal staff for the countless hours they have spent in preparing for this estimates committee process today. I want them to know that I appreciate their efforts.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. We note that.

Proceedings suspended from 1.25 pm to 2.28 pm.

## ESTIMATES COMMITTEE D—EMERGENCY SERVICES

### In Attendance

Hon. P Purcell, Minister for Emergency Services

**Department of Emergency Services**

Ms F McKersie ESM, Director-General

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

Mr J Higgins ASM, Commissioner, Queensland Ambulance Service

Mr F Pagano AFSM, Executive Director, Emergency Management Queensland

Ms M Smith, Executive Director, Business Support Services

Ms B Williams, Executive Director, Strategic Policy and Executive Services (Acting)

Mr G Taylor, Chief Financial Officer

Mr R Melton, Manager, Volunteer Marine Rescue

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**CHAIR:** The Estimates Committee D hearing is now resumed, and the portfolio of the Minister for Emergency Services will be examined for the budget expenditure of 2006-07. I welcome the minister and his advisers. I am Dianne Reilly, the member for Mudgeeraba. The time limit for questions is one minute, and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A 15-second warning will be given prior to the expiration of these time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner.

In accordance with the standing orders, at least half the time available for questions and answers will be allocated to non-government members. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask agency officers and advisers to identify themselves if the minister refers a question to them to answer. I also ask that all mobile phones and pagers be switched off. I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Emergency Services open for examination. The time allocated is three hours. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr PURCELL:** Thank you, Madam Chair, I would.

**CHAIR:** Please go ahead. It must not exceed five minutes.

**Mr PURCELL:** Today's emergency services are operating in a rapidly changing world and rapidly changing environment. Global warming, Queensland's growing and ageing population, and the threat of terrorism and flu outbreaks are placing greater demands on staff and volunteers. In this environment it is important that our personnel are better trained and better resourced than ever. Once again the Beattie Labor government has shown its commitment by providing a record emergency services budget to meet these challenges.

In 2006-07 the state budget provided \$744.1 million to ensure that the Department of Emergency Services continues to focus on reducing risk in the impact of emergencies and disasters throughout Queensland. This is a rise of more than \$76 million—an increase far above inflation. \$357.6 million will be spent to boost our world-class Queensland Ambulance Service. For capital works, funding will be provided for five new ambulance stations, with a further 18 stations to be either replaced or redeveloped. \$4.7 million is provided for replacement ambulance vehicles.

Further funding is provided for continued rollout of programs to reduce paperwork and improve response times. The budget provides an extra 70 paramedics to address growth in demand, to maintain emergency response times and to improve services in rural, isolated and remote communities. In addition, this budget provides 144 extra ambulance officers over two years, starting with 102 officers in 2006-07. This will ensure that we have a responsive workforce and working conditions that look after our staff. \$2.9 million has already been provided for an extra 35 communication officers. This year's budget for the Queensland fire, ambulance and rescue service is \$324.1 million—an increase of \$23 million on last financial year. The capital works funding is provided for one new station, eight redeveloped or refurbished stations and five replacement or relocated stations. \$24 million is provided for extra replacement appliances, vehicles and trailers and for the upgrade of communications and information technology equipment.

The Beattie government has also increased the annual spending for firefighting in the rural urban interface zones, or iZones as they are known, to \$3.7 million. This will provide 10 iZone officers, permanent aerial operations capacity, accelerated incident command and control training, and better



communications. The Beattie government has also announced an increase of 23 full-time equivalent staff in rural fire operations. This will provide even better training, coordination and management for the Rural Fire Service.

For our new Emergency Management Queensland division, this budget provides \$64.3 million for its enhanced role within Queensland and the community. The Beattie government will spend \$7.3 million this year, which is \$48.3 million over four years for the replacement of three Bell 412 helicopters. \$2.2 million is allocated to begin the upgrade of the aeromedical and air rescue helicopter service in the Torres Strait, and an extra \$5.1 million will go towards increasing grants to the community helicopter providers to help boost helicopter safety. This is more than double the amount provided last year.

I am also pleased to state that the department's commitment to safety in Indigenous communities is being continued and boosted. As part of the new three-year Indigenous community safety enhancement package, the department will spend \$2.25 million on measures that contribute to improved and sustained safety outcomes in Indigenous communities, particularly in north Queensland, which was struck by cyclones Larry and Monica earlier this year.

With joint projects, the department will complete the redevelopment of the joint fire and ambulance facilities at Roma Street in Brisbane. Over \$6 million—this is the second year of a \$20 million spend over three years—is allocated for a major expansion of the Queensland Combined Emergency Services Academy, and \$4.4 million is allocated for the computer-aided dispatch system to improve support for the QAS and QFRS emergency response services. We will also start a joint facility at Palm Island.

This and a range of other exciting programs will further enhance safety in our state. They will ensure that our staff and volunteers have the resources they need to provide world-class emergency services to all Queenslanders every minute of the day. The 2006-07 budget continues to build the government's vision for safer and more supported communities through the provision of world-class emergency services.

**CHAIR:** I call the member for Mirani.

**Mr MALONE:** Welcome, Minister, staff and officers. Let us hope we have a bit of fun this afternoon.

I refer to page 35 of the MPS—Fire and Rescue Service, operational preparedness, safe and secure communities—and to page 12—enhanced service delivery, in which it is claimed that the construction of the Carindale ambulance station will be commenced or completed. The Beattie government made a commitment in August 2005—I think that was during the Chatsworth by-election—that this ambulance station would be completed by December 2006. I note that not a blade of grass has been turned on that site at this stage. My question is whether that station will be completed in the allotted time.

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. The question is fairly close to my heart, being just out of my patch. There have been some problems in regard to the site with land title issues—native title issues. I think there were a number of people, including people on your side of the House as well as ours, who thought there would be none because it is an old road reserve and that would extinguish native title. My information from the department is that it does not do that. We have looked at ways to speed that up. We are looking at leasing part of that land from the council, and we are negotiating with the council on a lease, because it would take too long to buy and get our spend done and get the station built. So we are looking at doing that as quickly as we possibly can. I understand our officers are negotiating with the council on that matter. We would have the design for that station on hand or on foot at the moment, including the delivery method and how we are going to deliver the station.

We are also doing some extra drilling on the site even though we do not own the site at this stage, because we have struck some rock there and we are looking to find the best areas we can get some foundations in, where we are going to put the building and how we are going to site it. We are going to site the building not into Creek Road or Old Cleveland Road because they are too busy. We will site it on the northern side. We are hoping to get as quick a result as we possibly can. I am as keen to get that station built and up and running as any other person, I can assure you, but we have to own the block of land or have it in our control. Staff have already been recruited and they commence operations from a temporary facility in Tingalpa from 31 July. So as soon as the station is built we will be able to hit the ground running and we will have a very good service there.

**Mr MALONE:** By Christmas?

**Mr PURCELL:** I do not know about by Christmas. We will be looking to get it done by May next year, if everything goes right. It will depend on how quickly we can acquire the land.

**Mr MALONE:** The same reference, Minister, in the MPS talks of a replacement auxiliary fire station at Forest Hill. I note that there is a slab of concrete and a tin shed there currently. Is this in line with some other stations that have been built that are basically relocatable dongas with a Titan tin shed? Is this the standard that the department is now accepting as replacement fire stations and ambulance stations?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. You are one up on me because I have not visited that station yet but I will be very interested to see how it does come up. That probably goes to one of the things that we are looking to do within the department. Obviously you have heard what we are looking to do. We are looking to deliver our building program a little bit differently than we have traditionally. We are looking to see if we can deliver it at a better price because of the amount of build we need to do for our personnel. We have a lot of old stations throughout Queensland. I have extensively travelled throughout the state and I have to say some of the stations that some of our people work out of hark back 30 or 40 years and they show that. They are very old buildings. We are looking to get more bang for our buck and get more stations built.

Just recently I did a bus trip with my staff and clients around relocatable home yards. I know that our staff have looked at a number of builders, probably in excess of 15, where I have said that the quality is not to suffer. The conditions that are going to be in those buildings are to be the same as the new buildings we are building in situ now on site.

As you would probably know, everything comes to site on the back of a truck. Whether it comes on the back of a mixer and you pour it in situ or you bring it on the back of a truck already built, it comes the same way. Our sheds where we put our trucks already come prefabricated on the back of a truck and always have, and we accept that. We throw the steel up over a slab, and they are our sheds for our vehicles, whether they be ambulance vehicles or fire vehicles. Accommodation can be done in the same way, and I want to see if we can do that with the quality being the same and much better than we have now, for the simple reason that we have a lot of build to do and I only have so many dollars to do the build. The CPI index for building is running at about one per cent a month at the moment. Anyone in the building game would know how difficult it is to put an amount of money aside and then build that building. There is a shortage of tradesmen. We are looking at ways to be more innovative and deliver what we need to deliver for the department and for our staff to make sure they are as comfortable as possible. I can assure the member that I will be going out and having a look at the Forest Hill station. It had better not be a tin shed.

**Mr MALONE:** My comment, Minister, is that there are plenty of bucks but not much bang. I implore you to be careful in terms of the reconstruction of those sites. We do not want to go back to a situation where the staff are compromised by buildings that are not up to scratch. I will leave it at that.

**Mr PURCELL:** Could I just comment on that, Madam Chair. I do agree with the member. The clients—and I am talking about the commissioners for QAS and fire—certainly made a couple of things quite well known to me when I came to this portfolio. There are two things we are not going to compromise on—there are probably three or four, but two things that we are referring to here—one of which is the conditions that people work in. Therefore, we must get the accommodation that they work out of correct and right. We have been spending some time on that. That may be why we have a bit of an underspend at the moment, because of the changeover in what we are looking at at the moment. I can assure you that the staff have been working very hard on that. The second thing is the equipment we supply to people to put in the accommodation. That is our trucks and our personal protection equipment. That is going to be second to none, and we are working on that just as hard. I can assure the member that we are not going to compromise on any of those. There are other things, but they are probably the two things in that question that you raise that we are not going to compromise on.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, I refer to the same reference and I draw your attention to and remind you of your commitment during the Gaven by-election to build a new fire station at Nerang. Can you inform the committee as to the progress and purchase of land suitable for the site of the station? What plans for construction have you attended forthwith?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question and the opportunity to correct the member. At no stage did I promise a fire station at Nerang. I think I made that quite plain in the House when I may have inadvertently said 'fire station' when I meant 'ambulance station' and I got a question. I came back into the House and corrected that and said I was not talking about a fire station; I was talking about an ambulance station, because that is what I was talking about. An ambulance station had been committed for Nerang. We had already bought a block of land at Nerang—that was before my time—to build an ambulance station. That is what I was talking about. I know the member is having a bit of fun with me because he knows that I did that, and at no stage did I say I was going to put a fire station there.

My advice from my commissioner is that the fire services in the Nerang district are currently very well covered. To give you more detail on that, I will ask my Fire Commissioner to comment. The understanding I have, and it is an operational matter, is that we have three or four fire stations in that area that adequately cover Nerang at this point in time, but we continue to monitor that like we do all areas to make sure they have the required coverage for the people in Nerang.

**Mr MALONE:** It was nearly another fire station; that is all.

**Mr PURCELL:** I would love to be able to build fire stations where everybody wants a fire station. Fire stations and ambulance stations are like police stations: everybody wants one and we want more of them. The problem is that I have to be able to afford them and their upkeep and employ the people. The

QAS call-out rate in Nerang is in excess of 350,000 per year. The QFRS call-out rate averages around 300 a year. They are the differences in the fire and ambulance services call-out rates in that area. Lee, do you want to add anything on the fire situation?

**Commissioner Johnson:** The issue of service delivery at Nerang has been on our minds for some time. Many years ago a block of land was made available to the south coast fire brigade board. Unfortunately, that site is totally unsuitable. The regional officers advise me that the activity and call-out rates in that area do not warrant a station at this time. We will continue to monitor the growth rates and the call-out rates. It is covered by Southport, Robina and Helensvale stations quite adequately at this time.

**Mr MALONE:** At page 47 of the MPS, in the capital acquisition statement there is a \$15 million shortfall in capital expenditure over the last 12 months. Can you give me some indication of why that has happened? Is it because your department has not been able to build the infrastructure that is necessary to ensure that emergency services can continue to be a front-line force in Queensland?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for that question. I will get an update on that. I do not think the underspend is quite that high at the moment. We have been working on that. It is something we wanted to work on. In a previous answer I did say that we are changing the way we do business with regard to building. That has caused a bit of a hiccup in the delivery.

I can assure members of the committee that the underspend will certainly be spent next year, along with what we have allocated for this year. We will deliver more stations than ever before and upgrade more stations than ever before. The department is very keen to make sure that that happens.

We have brought expenditure forward from next year into this year for truck and land purchases so that we do not have that underspend. I have not got a final figure on what that underspend may be. I can assure you that we are making sure that we do not have an underspend again. We have brought the purchase of all the trucks for the Ambulance Service into this year. The figure for that is \$6 million. That means that we can put more vehicles on the road. We will continue to spend money in a timely manner.

We have made land purchases. That is something that is fairly close to my heart. I do not want to go out buying land—and the member commented about the Carindale site; as I have been told recently it should be the Carina site—and then have delays in construction. The department is looking three, five and 10 years out for land purchases. We have made some land purchases. The South East Queensland Regional Plan, which the Beattie Labor government has put in place, gives the department an opportunity to risk-map those areas to determine where we need facilities for fire, ambulance, SES or rural fire so that we can purchase land and put ourselves in a better position to build when required so that we do not have any hold-ups and we do spend the money when we have the money to spend. I can assure the member that I will spend every dollar I have got to make sure that these conditions are delivered for our staff as quickly as we possibly can.

**Mr MALONE:** I happened to notice an ad in the *Courier-Mail* in relation to firefighters which pointed out, quite correctly of course, that under the coalition government they were the highest paid firefighters in Australia. They claim they are now the second lowest paid. What means are you pursuing to ensure that our firefighters are compensated for the work they do here in Queensland?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. I do not know where they sit with regard to other states—that is, whether they are the highest or lowest paid. I know that we are at the end of our three-year EBA. We are now into a new EBA period. Other states may be at the start of their agreements and paying higher rates now. We will certainly catch them up when our EBA money starts to flow. As I understand it, negotiations are continuing with the union. We are looking to get an outcome as quickly as we possibly can. We would like to get an outcome by the end of this month if we possibly can so that we can start the new wage rates from 1 July this year.

As I understand it, that will give them seven per cent on 1 July. That is a four per cent increase in line with the government's policy with regard to the wage outcomes for public servants. There is a three per cent increase in shift allowance. The union went to the commission on this. I think we were paying 12 and they were entitled to 15. That will become part of the pay arrangements. Then there will be another eight per cent increase over the next three years.

There are other parts of that EBA. As the member may realise, I do not have a hands-on negotiating role. I can assure you that the Premier warned me when I took this job on that I was not a union official anymore and that I would be the employer of a large number of people and I cannot get too involved in negotiating rates of pay. I would like to see the best outcome for the firefighters in this state. They do a marvellous job. They are well trained. They are continuing to do more tasks than they have ever done before.

That will not diminish. Sadly, half the jobs that they do now are road accident rescue jobs. Our QAS staff and firies attend 10,000 accidents. Sadly, that number is growing. They are very good at what they do. They also do vertical rescues. There is no end to what our firies can do. They will continue to do a marvellous job for us. I would like to make sure that they get as much remuneration as they possibly can out of the budget, but I do not get involved in that on a personal basis.

**Mr MALONE:** I agree with you that they should be recompensed for the work they do. It is marvellous. Minister, I refer to the MPS at page 4. It details an allocation of \$0.49 million in ongoing support for the CPR for Life program. There are quite a lot of programs like that. A lot of these programs seem to be detracting from the main work of the emergency services. A lot of the funding seems to be drawn off. I raise this issue particularly with regard to community groups. LACs and so on raise funds for emergency defibrillators and all those sorts of things. They run chook raffles et cetera. They can also apply to the Gambling Community Benefit Fund. Why is it necessary for local communities to support the emergency services in such a way when you do have a growth tax fund for the fire service and community ambulance cover?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. It gives me the opportunity to talk about LACs—I have been a member for some 15 years—and the amount of work they do in the community. The old QATB was funded by chook raffles and money from within the community.

**Mr MALONE:** Nothing has changed much.

**Mr PURCELL:** I think it has. I think you will find that they used to throw you in the back of an ambulance and hope to get you to hospital alive. I can remember being in the back of one when I was out in the bush and got injured playing football. There was not too much in the back of the ambulance, except me rolling around on a stretcher on my own. These days with the amount of equipment we have in the vehicles—

**Mr MALONE:** I was making the point about raising money.

**CHAIR:** Minister, we could come back to the question from the member for Mirani. The time for non-government questions has expired.

**Mr PURCELL:** Raising funds for the LACs is something that the community wants to become involved in. As the member may or may not realise, we thought LACs would die when we went from a district based ambulance service to a state based service. The town that I was in would not have been able to buy a wheel for the ambulance with the money we raised. These days they have very good ambulances, very well trained officers and very good outcomes for their districts.

When we first went to a state service there were 80-odd LACs. The number has doubled. People do want LACs. They see it as important to raise funds for the ambulance in their own communities. It is not just about raising funds, I can assure you. It is about getting feedback from the community back to the ambulance officers and vice versa. When I stand out and sell tickets at the shopping centre with our local LAC, the information that I get as the local member and the Ambulance Service gets is invaluable.

You mentioned the \$0.49 million for the CPR program that operates in Queensland. I was very critical as an LAC member and a member of parliament that the Ambulance Service did not roll that out quickly enough. It is something that saves lives. I would never forgive myself if I was at a function or at home and something happened to a member of my family, someone I know or a stranger and I could not assist them. We need as many people as possible to do CPR. Every dollar we spend there is money well spent because it saves people's lives. Survival rates in Queensland have increased by over 50 per cent.

**Mr MALONE:** Is it the role of the ambulance to do that?

**Mr PURCELL:** The member would know that the prehospital care that you get in an ambulance now is second to none anywhere in this country.

**Mr MALONE:** I am not disagreeing.

**Mr LIVINGSTONE:** The Queensland Ambulance Service budget for 2006-07 is \$355.7 million. How much of an increase is that on the 2005-06 budget? What will this deliver for Queensland?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. The record funding provided in this year's ambulance budget is another example of the Beattie government's ongoing commitment to provide a world-class ambulance service for all Queenslanders. The Beattie government has consistently delivered record staffing numbers and resources as a result of record budgets to the QAS year after year. This year's budget is no different. It more than doubles the last Borbidge-Sheldon coalition government budget.

The \$355.7 million invested in the Queensland Ambulance Service in 2006-07 is a \$42 million increase on the 2005-06 budget—an absolutely marvellous outcome. This QAS budget is loaded with initiatives to further improve our ambulance response times, better support our staff and provide essential infrastructure to Queensland communities, particularly in rural, isolated and remote areas.

In this budget the government will provide a record 207 additional operational positions which include: 70 additional paramedics as part of the government's commitment to provide 240 paramedics over three years; 102 ambulance officers which is the first of the 144 over two years to improve the working conditions and assist with the 38-hour-a-week working week implementation under the EBA; and 35 communications officers to meet the increasing demand for 000 call taking. This budget also provides \$40.3 million for capital allocations which will deliver five new ambulance stations and a further 18 stations replaced or redeveloped.

Some \$4.7 million has been allocated to commission 119 new ambulances; \$2 million for the continued implementation of the Strategic Information Management Initiative, which is aimed at reducing paperwork and further improving the service's availability and response times; and \$2.7 million for continued improvement of operational and communications equipment. Governments are judged by what they invest in their essential services. The Beattie government's record for providing record funding and resources for the Ambulance Service speaks for itself.

Despite the fact that the QAS is caring for more people than it ever has before, it has a 98 per cent public approval rating. That can only come with record funding for resources and a great staff, and I have to reiterate that we have great staff in Queensland. I have advocated and will continue to advocate for the necessary funding to ensure our staff are properly resourced and funded so that all Queenslanders can feel sure that they will get the best prehospital care from the QAS. I am amazed on a weekly basis by how hard our staff work. They continue to give and give and give. We are very fortunate in Queensland to have the great staff that the QAS has.

**Mr LIVINGSTONE:** Minister, page 31 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement refers to the installation of smoke alarms in the home. Will you please advise the committee of the benefits of having operational smoke alarms installed in our homes?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. Tragically, people continue to die in house fires because either they do not have smoke alarms or batteries in their alarms are flat or have been removed. Queensland Fire and Rescue Service research shows that each year about 50 people escape fires in their homes after being warned by a smoke alarm. Unofficial figures have revealed that 21 people have died from fires in Queensland during the last 18 months. In keeping with the Beattie government's ongoing commitment to creating a safer Queensland, we have new legislation that will make smoke alarms compulsory in all domestic residences. This is a very significant step towards raising the bar for fire safety in this state.

Protection against fire increases with the quality, number and type of smoke alarms installed. There are two types of smoke alarms—ionisation, the most commonly used in Queensland homes, and photoelectric, known as optical. The latest research by the Australasian Fire Authorities Council, of which the QFRS is a member, has found that optical smoke alarms increase the likelihood of all types of fire being detected in the home. This in turn increases the likelihood that occupants will have enough time to escape. Research indicates that, although both ionisation and optical smoke alarms provide people with time to escape, it concludes that optical alarms should be promoted as the technology of choice.

For this reason, the QFRS recommends that optical smoke alarms be installed, especially if installing only one alarm in your home. If people already have ionisation smoke alarms installed in their homes, the fire service recommends that they supplement these by installing optical smoke alarms, especially between sleeping areas and exits from the home and places like hallways. Of course, when your alarms need replacing, the QFRS recommends that all new alarms should be the optical type. It is a fact that operational smoke alarms have saved and will continue to save the lives of Queenslanders. I would encourage people to take advantage of the new technologies to make sure that their homes are protected from fire by the most up-to-date equipment. The Beattie government will continue to support the QFRS in making Queensland a national leader in fire safety.

Smoke alarms do save lives. The legislation will be hopefully through by the end of this year or early next year, but you really do not have to wait for that legislation. I would urge people to do something about those smoke alarms now. We do not want to make law-breakers out of lawful people by taking the legislation too far, so we will be doing some education programs as we get closer to the legislation coming into force to make sure that people know what is going on and have time to put smoke alarms in their homes. But do it now!

**Ms MALE:** Minister, page 4 of your MPS refers to the Beattie government's investment in new helicopters. How will the new Emergency Management Queensland helicopters assist in the provision of emergency services in Queensland?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. There is a record \$744 million in the Emergency Services budget for 2006-07. The Beattie government is investing \$48.3 million to buy three new state-of-the-art Agusta AW139 helicopters. They will replace the EMQ fleet of aeromedical and air rescue helicopters located at Brisbane, Townsville and Cairns. The Beattie government has awarded a contract to Agusta SPA based in Italy for the supply of three new state-of-the-art twin engine, instrument flight rules capable AW139 helicopters. I can assure you that our pilots are absolutely delighted with the machines. The helicopter will be configured for aeromedical and air rescue operations and will be required to operate both day and night in most weather conditions over land and over water.

Compared with the Bell 412 helicopters, the AW139 helicopter is faster, has greater range, has more fuel availability, is available to carry more weight, can improve transit times for a patient's retrieval from an incident scene to hospital, has more economical fuel consumption and, most importantly, the AW139 has improved safety, which is the bottom line of our buy. The Beattie government has also

delivered an additional \$7.3 million to establish new safety standards. This additional funding extends across all emergency helicopter network services, including the community helicopter providers, the service in the Torres Strait and the EMQ helicopter rescue.

The 2006-07 budget has also increased the grants to community helicopter providers by \$5 million. This represents an additional \$1 million for each community helicopter provider base for the term of the new service agreement between the providers and the state government. This additional funding will support the delivery from each base of an instrument flight rules service with a twin engine instrument flight rules capable aircraft and command instrument rated pilots. The replacement of the EMQ Bell 412 helicopter fleet from the state government will ensure the provision of a significantly enhanced aeromedical and air rescue capability in this state.

I know that the helicopter providers in Queensland, though we are still negotiating our contracts with them, are delighted with the extra money that we have made available. Sadly, there have been some accidents here in Queensland—not with state helicopters—and we need to make sure that safety is of paramount importance for the people that we carry, for pilots and for staff. The Premier, along with the Treasurer, has been very good in making sure that we have enough money to ensure that that happens.

**Ms MALE:** They sound like an excellent investment indeed, and I certainly hope that I never have to fly on one of them. Minister, page 15 of the MPS mentions community education provided by the Queensland Ambulance Service. Could you inform the committee what community and business education the QAS provides and how it benefits Queenslanders?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. Community and business education is an important part of the Beattie government's commitment to community safety. The Queensland Ambulance Service offers a suite of community and business education packages with a focus on reducing the level of preventable injuries. These include a complete range of nationally accredited commercial first aid, CPR and injury prevention training courses. With the development of key strategies, these programs increase community awareness and lift an individual's capacity to respond to sudden illness and injury. These programs are delivered across all regions of the state through seven regional community service unit offices.

The programs offered by the Queensland Ambulance Service are second to none and focus on community safety. They include the baby capsule hire service, the Indigenous child restraint project, CPR for Life, the One Step Ahead short course, preventing heat related illness, PrimeSafe, Project DOV, advanced resuscitation techniques, basic first aid, senior first aid and CPR. The target audience for these courses are specific community groups such as industry, schoolchildren, rural and remote communities and the elderly. This year the Beattie government will invest a further \$0.49 million in ongoing support for the CPR program, CPR for Life.

QAS community education and training development and planning ensure that the courses address the changing needs of the clients and have flexible training methods. This allows greater access to first-aid training and ensures that the QAS develops its business in line with community needs and expectations. To remain up to date, the QAS has this year reviewed and relaunched its community education products and services in consultation with the community. The review of the products and services include the Australian Resuscitation Council and, in conjunction with the International Liaison Committee on Resuscitation, new CPR guidelines and other clinical advances in first aid were released in February this year.

The Beattie government accepts that its commitment to community safety does not just lay with excellent prehospital care by our Ambulance Service; it also includes community awareness and training to ensure that a patient is given the best possible chance of recovery. We have invested and will continue to invest in our programs and will deliver world-class community education to assist our world-class Ambulance Service and to give the community a chance to look after people in their own communities.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I note page 5 of the MPS and the enhancements to bushfire response capability in the iZone, something very dear to my heart. I ask: how will the provision of \$3.7 million for 10 iZone officers across the state be of benefit to Queensland's bushfire preparedness?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question and note her interest in the iZone because of where her electorate is and how important it is. The fire season varies across Queensland and it follows that the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service is continually prepared for bushfires, especially in what we call the iZone. The iZone is the urban-rural interface, where residential development encroaches on bushland, and represents unique firefighting challenges, and this has been a development in recent years by the fire services. Parts of The Gap, Samford, the Gold Coast—where the chairman's electorate is—and the north coast's hinterland are examples of the iZone. To aid in preparedness activities, iZone areas are mapped in major regional areas and regional wildfire plans are developed.

In this budget the Beattie government continues to boost its investment in enhancing the iZone bushfire response capability with \$3.7 million to provide 10 iZone officers across the state. Priorities in 2006 for the 10 new iZone officers are to develop iZone operational training to all permanent, part-time

and volunteer firefighters; further develop command training to all officers working in the iZone area; consolidate and test incident control infrastructure; build on the capabilities of our air operations, which is very important; focus on communications, both technical and interpersonal; and investigate and develop an annual wildfire command skills assessment system.

In Queensland we experience a wide range of challenging bushfire conditions for our firefighters. The recent Council of Australian Governments national bushfire inquiry made key recommendations addressing some of the needs. The recommendations were better coordination of fire management agencies and resources, improved community awareness, and increased research into bushfire behaviour and management. These issues have been recognised by the Beattie Labor government with additional funding, such as this additional iZone initiative, which has been provided to the QFRS to undertake a range of initiatives to mitigate against the impact of bushfires.

In furthering the service's commitment to contemporary firefighting techniques, this year we will see an increased role for aircraft in wildfire response after the successful deployment during the 2005 fire season, particularly in iZone areas. In the lead-up to the fire season, an iZone operations conference was held on 2 and 3 May this year where firefighters from both urban and rural operations were brought together to share ideas and workshop further solutions to the iZone challenges.

We used to have a bushfire season which was recognised by people—that is, after winter. We have started early this year. We have had a number of bushfires. About a month to six weeks ago there were 36 wildfires one weekend with the winds. With the drought and the dry conditions, we can have bushfires at any time.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Yes, my electorate is very aware of the potential risks and does appreciate the fantastic work of the rural fire brigades in conjunction with the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. Minister, page 23 of the MPS refers to the department's effective response to cyclones Larry and Monica. Could you please explain the work undertaken by the Department of Emergency Services in the provision of emergency response to the areas affected by these tropical cyclones?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the chairman for the question. Category 5 Tropical Cyclone Larry crossed the coast at Innisfail on Monday, 25 March this year. The Beattie government acted prior to this by activating the state disaster management system. On Sunday, 19 March a disaster situation was declared for the disaster districts of Cairns, Innisfail, Mareeba, Townsville, Mount Isa and Mackay. This declaration was extended twice until Sunday, 9 April 2006. Over 1,000 people were made temporarily homeless. Between 5,000 and 6,000 homes were damaged or destroyed and the total damage bill is estimated to be in excess of \$1.5 billion, and counting. There was severe damage to power infrastructure in the area which resulted in widespread loss of power. Repair costs are expected to be between \$400 million and \$600 million. Emergency Management Queensland coordinated the disaster response, which included QFRS, QAS, Queensland Health, the Department of Public Works, Ergon Energy, Energex, Powerlink, Queensland Transport, Primary Industries and Fisheries, the Department of Communities and hundreds of volunteers.

There was not one department that would not have been involved in that episode. Assistance was also received from a range of agencies including the Australian Defence Force, Emergency Management Australia and the Red Cross, to name a few. The QAS and the QFRS supported disaster operations by providing considerable human and physical resources, including a number of task force teams of urban search and rescue specialists, paramedics and other support personnel. Also deployed were the state incident management teams, mobile office technology and the state USAR cache that allowed the operation to be fully sustainable in Innisfail for weeks.

The State Disaster Coordination Centre and the State Operations Coordination Centre provided 24 hour support during the response phase of this event. Around 2,000 DES personnel were deployed to the far north throughout this event. Emergency Management Queensland continues to support the Operation Recovery group in Innisfail in coordinating assistance to the far north communities.

Category 3 Tropical Cyclone Monica crossed the Queensland Coast on 19 April this year causing significant damage to road infrastructure and cattle properties in the far north region of Cape York. A number of emergency re-supplies of food and fuel, in particular fuel re-supplies, to the communities of Coen and Kowanyama ensured the continuation of electricity for those communities. The damage caused by Tropical Cyclones Larry and Monica has been extensive. It is clear that the long-term planning by the Department of Emergency Services and other agencies assisted in making these exercises very well done by our people.

The biggest issue surrounding those emergency events was getting our people off the line. They worked very, very hard and are continuing to work hard there at the moment. We will have people there for the next two years or more.

**CHAIR:** The time for government questions has expired. I call the member for Mirani.

**Mr MALONE:** I also congratulate all those who were involved in the recovery operation after the two cyclones. They did a magnificent job in cooperation with the Air Force, et cetera.

**Mr PURCELL:** Thank you. I know you support the emergency services in your area and appreciate how well they work.

**Mr MALONE:** I would appreciate being asked to go along with you next time something happens, but that is beside the point.

**Mr PURCELL:** I will keep that in mind.

**Mr MALONE:** I need to clarify the issue in terms of LACs. I have the greatest regard for the LACs; they are a terrific interface between QAS and the community. The point I am trying to make is that every dollar that is raised by the LAC is in competition with everybody else in the community who is raising money and it is becoming more and more difficult.

The point I make is that the department needs to focus on its core issues. I raise the issue in reference to question on notice 245 on 2 March 2006 in relation to expenditure from the director-general's reserve. The question I ask is: is the basketball court at Coen, where the department paid \$41,000 towards the building of that basketball court, a core business of the department and can this money be better utilised somewhere else?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. It gives me a opportunity to talk about Aboriginal communities and the support that our DGs play in that role. The Premier has tasked every DG within Queensland to be a champion of an area in an Aboriginal community. That money was expended after consultation with the Coen community on how they could best make their community safer. The member would know that sport is a great way to bring communities and people together. We all talk about idle hands and so forth, but I know that sport also makes people stronger and makes them able to cope with a lot of situations in their community. Coen is an Aboriginal community which had no sporting facilities at all. I have to be honest, it was a little bit before my time, but the reports that I have are that it has been of great benefit to Coen and has made Coen a safer place.

Emergency Services is about delivering services to communities which make them safer. We have a strong commitment to improve emergency management and public and personal safety in Indigenous communities. Queensland has Australia's largest Indigenous population and many communities are situated in remote locations in Cape York and the Torres Strait. These remote locations are often exposed to national disasters and therefore emergency management in these communities is a key priority. The Indigenous Service Delivery Enhancement Package will provide \$2.1 million over four years. These packages from DES funds deliver a range of initiatives to improve the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Initiatives include recruitment of operational staff and training of those officers, delivery of appropriate community safety program equipment and minor capital works.

The pre-hospital care model for remote Indigenous communities is something that Emergency Services is very proud of. This model has been developed and implemented in the communities of Coen, Horn Island, Cooktown and Kowanyama. This model involves the establishment of a QAS field officer trained by a permanent officer. The role of the field officer includes injury prevention and first aid training, developing the emergency response capability of communities and training primary health care workers in relation to pre-hospital care, including the use of emergency equipment such as defibrillators. Anything that we can do to continue to make Aboriginal communities a safer place has a place in the Emergency Services budget and also in the government's budget.

**Mr MALONE:** We will agree to disagree. I think that funding should come out of the Premier's department or Aboriginal affairs not out of Emergency Services. It detracts from what you guys are trying to do. I refer to MPS 3, the volunteer support package. The amount of \$1.8 million to boost Queensland rural fire operations was announced by the minister. He said that 41,000 rural firefighters would gain support from that. The \$10,000 insurance limit on rural fire volunteers for the use of their personal equipment is certainly to be congratulated. However, I have issues in terms of the health of volunteers and their work cover, et cetera. I do not believe that they are properly covered if they have an accident while attending a fire. Will this package enhance the work cover opportunities for them or is that going to remain as it was?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. It gives me an opportunity to talk about something fairly close to my heart—that is, looking after people who work on the ground for us and who are volunteers. At the moment the department is looking at our workers' compensation and our support packages for those people. On a number of visits to the bush I have come across people who have been injured—not a lot, but a few. One of those, in particular, was self employed. A lot of our people in our rural fire brigade—or our bush brigade, as I call them—are self-employed people and have special needs. Normal insurance companies or Workers' Compensation find that difficult to deal with. Those self-employed people have farms and if injured are unable to work on their farms. They sometimes have a second job because that farm does not give them enough income and therefore they work a second job. We have to work out arrangements so we can cover those areas and cover them adequately so that they are not disadvantaged by volunteering for their community and making it a safer place.



There was an issue that came my way in relation to a person who had broken their leg. I have to admit that we were a little bit tardy in getting that matter sorted out, but it has been sorted out now. I have written to that person and apologised for the amount of time it took to get that matter resolved. Some of our own people did not follow that up and he did not understand how the system worked.

One of the other things that concerns me is people who supply equipment. These days a lot of equipment on farms is very expensive. If we ask people to bring their equipment to the fire to assist us and it gets damaged it could run into a lot of money. We are looking at how we handle that a bit better. As people who come out of rural areas would know, a lot of equipment on farms is probably not insured and probably not registered. You do not need to register it on your own private place. You are not going to pay the government money if you do not need to. They do not insure it because a lot of that equipment has been written off over many years. To them it is a very vital piece of equipment. It does not have a large monetary value or the insurance company would not give a lot of money for it but it is vital to their operations. We are looking at how we can best deal with that.

We are looking at better ways, too, of giving volunteers high levels of protection. We are concentrating on their training and their personal protection equipment. I thank the member for that question. I am very interested in how we solve that in the not too distant future.

Additional support is provided for the department's volunteers through Workers' Compensation, WorkCover insurance, volunteer support and ethical decision-making. I do not want to see anybody who works for us not properly looked after.

**Mr MALONE:** I appreciate that, minister. I congratulate the department on the proposed acquisition of the three new EMS helicopters. This is obviously a step forward in the right direction. The question I have is in relation to the community helicopters and the increased funding of \$13.2 million over four years, as I understand it.

**Mr PURCELL:** I think it is \$5.1 million.

**Mr MALONE:** It is \$13.2 million over four years.

**Mr PURCELL:** Yes.

**Mr MALONE:** With \$5.1 allocated for this year. That is spread across four helicopter groups, as I understand it, plus Bundaberg which is a half. Bundaberg is the extra one.

**Mr PURCELL:** Yes.

**Mr MALONE:** Is this money in addition to what they are currently getting?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. It is. The money being provided is \$1 million over and above what we have already provided. That has been negotiated with the community providers. They have come together as a group, which I encourage. Governments like to deal with a group of people and not deal with them as individuals; therefore you can get better outcomes. We are doing that at the moment. We have not quite got the contracts nailed down. There were some fairly scathing remarks in relation to helicopter safety in the recommendations arising out of the coroner's inquiry into helicopter safety in Queensland. This money is to address that and to make sure that our staff and their staff have safety as the highest priority and that they do not fly unless it is safe and they have the required helicopter and pilot training to do so. This money is to do that.

I think you were intimating that the \$13.2 million over that period of time does not work out at \$5 million a year. The first agreement we will be making will only be for about 18 months because we want to put things in place and make sure that we are all singing off the one sheet.

**Mr MALONE:** Perhaps you might enunciate what each group is getting this year and in the next three years after that?

**Mr PURCELL:** I can do that. I cannot talk about the next three years because the agreement will only run for about 18 months—not yet, because we have not nailed the agreement down. In 2005-06 the Capricorn-Rockhampton service was given \$.918 million. Next year it will get \$1.918 million—that is, when we reach agreement with it. Central Queensland-Mackay will get the same. Care Flight on the Gold Coast will get the same. Energex will get the same. I think what the member alluded to was that Energex Bundaberg is paid \$.485 million for its service agreement but it will get an extra \$1 million next year and that will make it \$1.48 million that will come its way.

**Mr MALONE:** Those choppers are doing a magnificent job. Most of them have IFR capability. I am aware of the one in Mackay. It costs well over \$3 million a year to fly that aircraft.

**Mr PURCELL:** Yes.

**Mr MALONE:** I refer to page 39 of the MPS and the role of the QRFS in responding to hazardous substance emergencies. I refer to the industrial emergency fire at Binary Industries last year, which five crews from around south-east Queensland attended. I am concerned about a response to a question that was asked in parliament by the member for Lockyer in 2006 about the need for ongoing health monitoring of the firefighters who attended the Binary Chemicals fire in August 2005. Your response was

that QFRS has engaged a medical practitioner to conduct medical information sessions on health and safety. Surely we need to do more than that. Were those fire crews aware of the hazardous situation they were attending? What has been the follow-up in terms of their concerns?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. After that incident—and that was a very large fire at Binary Industries—there was an inquiry in regard to how the service handled it and how it performed. I went out that morning very early. I was going up the north coast. I called in on that fire just to see how things were going. The fire was under control at that stage. I can assure you that there were some very exhausted firefighters there. They had had a long night. It was a very dangerous fire to fight. The access to the site was difficult and we had a lot of personnel on site. I am informed that the people who responded to that fire knew what type of fire it was. I spoke to some of the officers there. They informed me that there had been air monitoring going on all night for two reasons: to protect their own staff and personnel to make sure that they were working in a safe working environment; and to make sure that they did not have to evacuate people in the community.

I have been informed that never, at any stage, were our people looking to evacuate. They thought they would come close if things got out of control, but they did control it. Some of those drums of chemicals exploded and were landing around the place. That was very dangerous and I want to congratulate those firefighters for the work they did there containing it in the manner in which they did.

In responding to any incident, the safety of staff and volunteers is one of the department's highest priorities. That was certainly the case with our response to the Narangba fire. Our scientific unit was on site and carried out, as I said earlier, testing throughout the period of time that we were on site. No unsafe levels of contamination were detected. The QFRS is confident that none of our personnel was exposed to any chemical contamination that exceeds safe levels.

Under the Dangerous Goods Safety Management Act 2001, the Department of Emergency Services led and coordinated the actions for the containment of the on-site hazardous materials. I have to say that the staff of the council and the works supervisor, whom I met when I was there, were very good. It was through his efforts that a lot of that contamination was contained within the creek. He worked very well. We are out of time. I probably should give the commissioner—

**Mr MALONE:** I am happy to oblige.

**Mr PURCELL:** I would like to give Lee a chance to answer. I thank the member for that, because I know how important the safety of firefighters—

**Mr MALONE:** Can I just clarify the issues that I am chasing: that the firefighters are well looked after, that those people who responded to that fire from out of the district were completely aware of where they were going and had the right equipment to do that, and that once they went back to their respective stations they were kept informed of the issues. I believe that gloves and so on eroded away. The acids that they were handling were quite severe. What continuing efforts are being made to make sure that they are responded to in a proper manner?

**Mr PURCELL:** I will give my commissioner an opportunity to answer those.

**CHAIR:** There can be an extension of time of two minutes.

**Commissioner Johnson:** The fire at Binary Chemicals at Narangba was a major incident. The site itself is well known to firefighters in the district as a chemical and industrial area. We have had quite extensive investigations. Also in this room is Dr Michael Logan, the manager of our scientific unit, who has released a scientific report on the findings of the operation that night.

As the minister has said, air monitoring was conducted on 13 different occasions throughout the night to ensure that the air was not hazardous and the situation as to whether the residents in the general area should be evacuated was closely monitored. It came close as some readings did start to climb throughout the night, but they did not get to the level where evacuation was considered necessary. Often in these circumstances it is better to actually evacuate in place—that is, stay inside your house.

Some of the firefighters who attended this fire came from outside the Brisbane region. One crew in particular did raise a series of concerns with me and through the union. Those concerns have been thoroughly investigated. We believe that, essentially, the concerns have not been substantiated. In relation to the issue about the decontamination of individuals and equipment, that particular crew left the scene without undergoing decontamination. That is a point that was picked up by the incident controller. Instructions were radioed to them en route back to their station and when they arrived back at station.

We have conducted the first of our health briefings with Dr Keith Adam, who is our occupational physician, to reassure our firefighters. Unfortunately, blood testing and things do not really prove anything. None of our firefighters has exhibited any symptoms or issues as a result of this fire. We have set up a project under the deputy commissioner, together with our organisational health people and the union, to look at this whole issue. It is a very complex one and we will continue to work through that as to the best way to approach this type of incident in the future—as to what long-term monitoring of health needs to happen.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. The time for non-government questions has expired. I refer to page 17 of the MPS which discusses baby capsule hire. What is the baby capsule hire service? Can you explain the benefits of the program—and I must add not necessarily for me, because I am very familiar with the baby capsule program, having just returned my baby capsule to the recently opened hire centre at Firth Park in Mudgeeraba, which was very convenient as well. I want to thank the minister and the department and the officers there who helped me. I first hired the capsule at the Southport centre and I took it back to Firth Park at Mudgeeraba. That service is going well. I think the officer there has ESP, because he came out to the car to greet me as I arrived and that was very helpful. So can you tell the committee about this program?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. I think a very good present to a new mum from grandparents or friends is for them to hire a baby capsule. This service is another community safety initiative that was introduced by the Beattie Labor government. It demonstrates our commitment to protecting young people in our community.

This is one of the good news stories that the opposition has differing views on. The Liberal member for Chatsworth has been quite critical and cynical about the ability of ambulance officers, yet his National Party coalition colleague the member for Cunningham cannot praise the service enough.

The QAS baby capsule hire service hires and installs baby capsules and provides a free safety check for privately owned and installed restraints right across the state. This is a major child injury prevention priority for the Beattie government. In 2005-06 the QAS fitted 11,226 baby capsules across Queensland. This is an increase on the previous year of 21.5 per cent. The privately owned child restraint fitting service is an advisory service to parents and carers, community organisations and other government departments and is offered to raise people's awareness of child restraints.

The Queensland Ambulance Service checked in excess of 5,000 child restraints this financial year. This service contributes to reducing the incidence of injury and the severity of road trauma for young children. The service also provides an affordable child restraint hire option for new parents and creates greater awareness of child safety.

The Queensland Ambulance Service also provides information sessions about the baby capsule service to the district health services, to the Nursing Mothers Association and to the Family Day Care Association. I know that we also offer the service at the RBWH because my daughter had a baby at the RBWH. The Queensland Ambulance Service also provides free restraint checks at shopping centres throughout Queensland.

This year the QAS developed a community based baby capsule hire service with the Inala Community Justice Group and provided 23 baby capsules and support in the Inala community. In addition, an awareness campaign about child restraints in vehicles has been conducted among Indigenous people living in south-east Queensland. This included print media with posters and a radio campaign on 98.9FM Murri Radio. A baby capsule fitting service is being established in Woorabinda as part of the Indigenous Australian Service Delivery Enhancement Package.

This is a great service to the community. Our children are our future. It is our responsibility to ensure that they are safe. One of the anecdotal things that came back from our QAS officers who attended some of the 10,000 accidents throughout Queensland—and our QFRS officers also—is that you do not lose babies if they are properly restrained in a capsule in the back of the car. They have a very high survival rate.

**CHAIR:** I will just add quickly to that. Even though I had purchased a brand-new baby car seat that could be used from birth, having the baby capsule from birth for the first few months makes an enormous difference in the safety that is provided. It also gives parents that peace of mind, knowing that someone professional has fitted it and talked you through that process. As you say, you know that there are demonstrable results. There is a record of safety. So it is a wonderful service and I commend everyone who is involved.

**Mr PURCELL:** It encapsulates a baby inside a restraint. It is world-class technology to keep that baby safe.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** I had a question regarding the volunteer support package, but if you have no further information that you want to give on that, I will go on to my second question. Are you wanting to add anything further to that?

**Mr PURCELL:** Any opportunity that I have to talk about our vollies I would like to take.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** All right. Go ahead.

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. It gives me an opportunity to talk about our volunteers—our vollies, as we call them. They do a fantastic job. Our SES—and since Cyclone Larry they have been renamed our 'orange angels'—our rural firefighters, our Volunteer Marine Rescue Association, our Australian Volunteer Coast Guard, our Surf Life Saving Queensland, our Royal Life Saving Society and let us not forget our Emergency Service cadets all deserve the best that we can give them. The Beattie government continues to demonstrate its commitment to supporting volunteers through a \$21.83 million funding package over three years.

Funding has been allocated over three years for equipment, vehicles, training and support for State Emergency Service and rural fire volunteers. The package acknowledges the many thousands of Queenslanders who volunteer and who selflessly devote their time to assist their local communities. It ensures that those volunteers are adequately resourced and able to respond to their community's needs.

The Department of Emergency Services provides funding through the emergency service volunteer support package. This funding also includes support for local governments and community councils through ongoing annual local government grants for administration costs, accommodation of subsidies for new or upgraded facilities, SES motor vehicle subsidies including motor vehicle accessories subsidies and registration and insurance, and volunteer executive allowances.

In 2006-07, the department's volunteer support package has committed \$2.45 million for SES which will provide floodboats, personal protection equipment, road accident rescue equipment, rescue trailers, communications equipment and an extra set of overalls for active SES members. For our rural fire brigades, the volunteer support package will provide new appliances and trailers, radio equipment, improved training, personal protective equipment and an expanded range of essential equipment. In addition, \$250,000 has been allocated to ensure that our rural fire brigade radio equipment, including radio repeaters, are serviced and maintained as required.

Volunteers are vital to life in Queensland. The Beattie Labor government is ensuring that they have the resources to do a great job. As I said earlier, I am amazed at the number of people who are volunteers in Queensland, and we should be very thankful for what they do for us.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** And we are, Minister. They are wonderful people. I refer to page 42 of the MPS. How has the QFRS been able to maintain its excellent performance by again meeting or exceeding all of its response time targets?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. The QFRS, as I said earlier, is a very dedicated body of officers. The Beattie government's record Emergency Services budget for 2006-07 provides \$324 million to the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. This will enable the QFRS to continue to deliver enhanced training, new and refurbished fire stations, additional urban and rural vehicles and, of course, continue to deliver a world-class fire and rescue service to all Queenslanders. The QFRS responds to a range of incidents such as fires, road accidents and other rescues, hazardous substance emergencies—and the QFRS responded just recently to some containers on board a ship that came into the Brisbane port—chemical spills, floods, earthquakes, storms and landslides.

On average, Queensland fire crews are on the scene at a structural fire in an urban area in just over seven minutes. In the 2005-06 financial year, 96 per cent of all structural incidents within urban levy boundaries were responded to within the 14-minute national benchmark. I congratulate the service for that great record. This really is a great effort. This is well above the target set and is a credit to our hardworking fireies. The QFRS continues to meet its targets, despite the number of incidents increasing.

Page 41 of the MPS indicates that in 2005-06 the QFRS responded to 60,953 incidents compared to 59,400 in the previous year. In reality, this represents an increase of around three to four call-outs per day. As I said, sadly an increasing number of those are road accidents.

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. The QFRS continues to improve the operational preparedness of firefighters across Queensland through world-class training and innovation, allowing QFRS to maintain world-class emergency responses to the communities of Queensland.

In 2005-06, the QFRS managed to reduce the amount of damage done by fire to \$3.88 million per 100,000 population. This is significantly lower than the estimates figure for 2005-06 of \$4.5 million. The estimated amount of property saved in 2005-06 is an amazing \$372 million per 100,000 people—a magnificent figure, I must say, and is due to a lot of hard work by our fireies.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** Minister, I refer to page 14 of the MPS, which deals with ambulance community and business services. Are staff members who participate in the One Step Ahead child safety program required to hold a blue card and what benefits does the program provide?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. Unfortunately, Queensland has one of the highest rates of injury in Australia, and children are particularly vulnerable to injuries such as drowning, poisoning, snakebites, burns and falls. The Beattie government is committed to creating safer communities, with a particular focus on programs to reduce injury rates for children. The child injury prevention project is a pilot project in partnership between the Department of Emergency Services and Queensland Health. The project is being conducted over a five-year period and focuses on reducing the incidence and severity of injury in children aged four or younger in Mount Isa and Mackay. Once the course is fully evaluated it will be refined and will ultimately be delivered across all regions of the state.

As part of the project, the QAS has developed the One Step Ahead short course. This course is targeted at the carers of children aged four or under and aims to raise awareness of the dangers that exist in and around the home environment and provide practical strategies for addressing the identified

risks. The materials prepared by the QAS have been designed to enable delivery in a range of settings including rural and remote locations where electronic aids may not be available. Some great work has been done there.

In relation to our blue card requirements, the department is committed to the government's priority of protecting our children and enhancing community safety. Professionals working in direct service delivery to Queensland families have a vital role to play in keeping our children safe. In 2005-06, the department received the portfolio partner award from the Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian's awards for excellence in 2005—a great achievement. This was in recognition of our commitment as a partner in the objectives and values to the commission and recognising our contribution to delivering positive community outcomes for the children and young people in Queensland.

All 400 paramedics delivering senior first aid, PrimeSafe and One Step Ahead have been issued blue cards. The department has put in place a comprehensive child safety policy for anyone who delivers programs to children. This includes: an information kit for emergency service personnel and volunteers to assist them to respond appropriately to suspected child abuse and neglect; a training resource developed specifically for paramedics to assist them in identifying the signs of abuse and neglect, and to inform the Department of Child Safety or the Queensland Police Service if they are concerned about the welfare of the child—sadly that is becoming more prevalent—and a criminal history policy that provides employee screening across the department. The Beattie government is committed to protecting our young people and will continue to ensure that only those assessed as suitable will have any dealings with children in the course of their employment.

**Mr LIVINGSTONE:** Minister, page 39 of your Ministerial Portfolio Statement refers to the creation of an emergency strike team. Could you please explain this initiative by your department?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. The Beattie government is determined to ensure that our counter-terrorism arrangements and preparedness are the best for Queensland and consistent with national policy. The special Council of Australian Governments meeting on 27 September 2005, initiated by the Premier of Queensland, along with other state premiers, set the national counter-terrorism policy direction across a range of areas. The department is focused on delivering the COAG and Queensland government initiatives.

Our response capability draws on the expertise of all emergency services and includes: managing major events; planning for mass casualties; response to chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, incendiary and explosive incidents; and technical rescue—a huge task. The department has implemented the requirements of the government asset protection program, which established a counter-terrorism risk management framework within the department.

The special operations centre at Cannon Hill, which opened in 2005, ensures greater coordination among our specialist response groups. The Premier recently announced \$6 million funding over five years for the establishment of an emergency strike team which will be integrated with the special operations centre. The establishment of the emergency strike team is underway and is part of the 2006-07 and future budgets. Officers are being appointed and operational and communication equipment purchased.

The strike team consists of three firefighters, one scientific officer and five paramedics. The role of the strike team is to respond to acts of terrorism and provide advice to incident commanders about chemical, biological, radiological, incendiary and explosive incidents; respond to acts of terrorism and provide support for the use of detection equipment, sample gathering, decontamination and mitigation; respond to large hazmat incidents to provide advice to incident commanders—as we did at the port recently—and deliver training to Emergency Services and other government staff.

In addition, the department is participating in a Commonwealth chemical, biological and radiological, or CBR, enhancement program. This program is designed to provide each state and territory with the same base level of detection and personal protective clothing, decontamination and mass casualty management capability for deployment at a CBR incident. Such enhancements are a clear indication of the Beattie government's determination to provide a world-class counter-terrorism capability. In today's changing world, sadly, as the committee would know, those incidents happen on a more regular basis.

**Mr LIVINGSTONE:** Minister, I refer to page 30 of your Ministerial Portfolio Statement and the government's commitment to community safety and awareness. Can you tell the committee what measures are being put in place to ensure that Queensland is as best prepared as possible for the ever present threat of bushfires?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. I know that he has a number of bushfire brigades in his electorate. As the members of the committee would be aware, Queensland is facing dangerously dry conditions, leading into our fire season, caused by the drought currently affecting much of the state. Never has it been more important that Queenslanders are bushfire prepared.

The good news is that our fire services—urban, auxiliary and rural—are well drilled and well equipped. This budget has delivered additional funding for critical communications repeaters and other communications infrastructure. Funding of \$400,000 has been allocated for the UHF based network and \$250,000 for the VHF based network. These annual allocations will further enhance communications operation and reliability. As we all know, in Emergency Services we are dependent on communications and we live and die by them.

With an initial commitment of \$250,000 from the Beattie Labor government, the QFRS has developed one of the most advanced bushfire community education programs in the nation titled the *Bushfire Prepared Communities* initiative. *Bushfire Prepared Communities* provides advice and assistance, enabling householders to better protect themselves and their property and to be ready to respond to a wildfire threat. This forms part of a wider QFRS project that is also looking at planning and development issues in the iZone, and operational improvements to ensure that QFRS is better prepared to respond to major bushfire incidents. The QFRS delivers the *Bushfire Prepared Communities* initiative in consultation and collaboration with other stakeholders such as the Queensland Police Service, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation—they all contribute to this program.

The QFRS gets its message out to the community by letterbox drops, inserts in local newspapers, the internet, public meetings or even by gathering in the home of a concerned community member. The QFRS also runs advertising campaigns that target at-risk communities to reinforce the themes and messages of the program. The campaigns use television, radio and printed press to help inform communities how to prepare for bushfire. The QFRS is reviewing wildfire readiness plans to ensure the best possible bushfire readiness for the protection of Queensland communities.

The QFRS and the Rural Fire Service, along with the Beattie government, have done a lot of work to ensure that Queensland communities are better prepared than ever before for when the bushfire season is upon us. As I said earlier, the bushfire season is not the traditional bushfire season these days—it has started already.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I appreciate the depth of that answer. I think every member here, apart from perhaps the member for Woodridge, certainly has a major concern about bushfire every year. We appreciate the work that our Queensland Fire and Rescue Service team do in that prevention program.

Proceedings suspended from 4 pm to 4.17 pm.

**CHAIR:** If we are all ready, we will get into the home stretch. I call the member for Mirani.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, I have actually come across a number of costs involved in putting together the Queensland Combined Emergency Services Academy. Quite some time ago it was \$11.3 million and at a later stage it was \$13.2 million. Can you update me on the cost of the emergency academy as it currently stands?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. I may have to get some assistance on this, but I think we are talking about an overall budget now for the academy when it is finished. We have an expenditure over last year, this year and next year of about \$20 million. There has been some expenditure down there and there will be some expenditure, to my knowledge, in the future also. It is a world-class facility.

**Mr MALONE:** I realise that.

**Mr PURCELL:** It is used not only by our firefighters but also by our police, some of the armed services and other people who wish to use it. There has been a bit of criticism from within our own ranks that people would like to get to use it more often, and we are looking at ways we can possibly make it more available to some of our people. But it is a very, very good facility. It is world-class.

We have committed \$20 million, as I said, over three years for the Combined Emergency Services Academy to construct a state-of-the-art breathing apparatus set-up, hazardous material facility and scenario landscape. The landscape is yet to come. This initiative will support cooperative training between the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, the Ambulance Service and Emergency Management Queensland. This will benefit the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service in the first instance to focus on the critical replacement of dated breathing apparatus and hazardous materials training facilities which we decommissioned as part of the Roma Street fire and ambulance station redevelopment. A lot of the facilities which were there have been demolished.

The Queensland Combined Emergency Services Academy was launched back in December 2004 by the Premier. The initiative heralds a new era of integrated, cooperative operational training. As I said, it is used by a number of emergency services people within Queensland.

**Mr MALONE:** What is the projected income?

**Mr PURCELL:** Any income we get from it goes back into the training of our auxiliary fire service people from our country areas.

**Mr MALONE:** How much?

**Mr PURCELL:** I do not know, and both officers are shaking their heads. I think we are out of time.

**Mr MALONE:** We will leave it at that. It appears you are not familiar with whether there is any projected income out of the facility at this stage. In reference to VMR, what criteria is used to determine whether a squad is eligible for a new craft or a refurbished craft?

**Mr PURCELL:** I will pass this question to Frank Pagano very shortly because it is an operational question. On anecdotal evidence from the visits I have done to them, they like to renew them about every 10 years, but it really depends on the wear and tear of the boat, the cost of buying another boat and what moneys they can get there. Frank, are you able to help me out? If we do turn them over on a regular basis, how regular is it?

**Mr Pagano:** I may ask for assistance from Ron Melton, who leads up the VMR program for me, if I may. The replacement program is based on a life cycle of the vessel of 10 years and the support will grant packages of up to \$100,000 for each vessel. I think the question was: what is the criteria for whether they get a new vessel?

**Mr MALONE:** Yes.

**Mr Pagano:** I certainly do not have the detail on that and, if I may, Minister, perhaps Ron can assist. We understand that is more in relation to the flotillas of the VMR Association themselves and not an EMQ or DES decision, but I will just check. That is right.

**Mr MALONE:** Is it a requirement when a craft that is no longer needed is sold that half that money comes back to the department?

**Mr PURCELL:** To my knowledge, all that money would stay with that service.

**Mr Pagano:** That is right.

**Mr PURCELL:** If you like, they would probably trade it in on the new vessel if they could or they would put it up for auction to help them fund the new vessel.

**Mr MALONE:** What is the budget for VMR replacement this year?

**Mr PURCELL:** I will find out for you, Ted. I saw a figure earlier today.

**Mr MALONE:** It does not appear to be in the budget papers that I can find.

**Mr PURCELL:** I do not think we have a set budget in regard to new vessels, because it is a 10-year occurrence, and we put aside an amount each year. The budget for last year was \$1.177 million. The budget for this year is \$1,177,531. We put the knife in that and each association gets a share of those funds.

This is the answer I was looking for and probably what you are looking for also. The Beattie government made an election commitment in 2004 to provide an additional \$300,000 over three years to assist the VMR squadrons and flotillas to meet increased operational costs. The breakdown of these additional funds means that each accredited volunteer rescue unit receives \$2,000 each year for three years to assist with operational costs, and there is \$3,000 to each state association each year for three years to assist with their operational costs.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, I have not actually got an MPS page reference for it, but what protocols do the ambulance transport drivers operate under? Obviously they have a duty of care, but what qualifications do they need to have? They are not basically employed as drivers, but we have had a number of cases where patients have been injured in terms of transport, and I am just concerned that the duty of care is not being carried out as well as it could. What qualifications do those drivers need to have? Are they qualified ambulance officers or are they employed under different conditions?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question, and I will answer it as far as I possibly can. I do know that some of them are paramedics and they wish to be just transport drivers. I take it you mean the people who take people to and from appointments or between hospitals?

**Mr MALONE:** That is right.

**Mr PURCELL:** A number of those are paramedics. I recently visited the RBWH. I pulled in there to have a look at their incident room for large disasters, but I never got to it because I was so busy in the emergency service area, talking to our personnel and people there. It is a very, very busy hospital with a very, very busy area for transport drivers. Some of the information I gleaned from them was that, out of the eight ambulances that were there, seven of them had paramedics. They do not have to be a paramedic to drive the transporters, but they need to have senior first aid. I would like to ask the Commissioner of the Ambulance Service to respond on my behalf to give you a complete answer in regard to their qualifications.

**Commissioner Higgins:** Thank you, Minister. Our patient transport service officers have specific training relevant to their role. We have staff who are engaged at a certificate II level, which was the previous qualification for PTS staff working in our non-urgent transport service environment. That has increased over the last few years. About three years ago the requirement was upgraded to a certificate III level program.

Within that, our patient transport officers are trained to an advanced first-aid level. They are also trained in the use of semiautomatic defibrillation, so if they encounter a collapsed patient they are able to deal with them effectively. They are also able to use oxygen resuscitation equipment to assist in the resuscitation of a collapsed patient.

We have a number of staff who work in that environment who are paramedics who have sought to reduce their commitments by moving away from the acute services environment and emergency responses. They do so voluntarily, but that allows us to utilise their skills to provide additional support to patients, particularly in the interfacility transfer category, where they are responding to incidents that require a higher level of assistance. So we have three levels of training: certificate II; certificate III, which is the predominant training; and a number of paramedics who assist in that area as well.

**Mr MALONE:** I refer to page 5 of the MPS—\$3.7 million to commence or complete joint emergency service facilities at Highfields and Palm Island. Can you tell me what is happening at Palm Island? Can you tell me how the funding will be distributed across the service areas that are involved in the delivery of that emergency service building?

**Mr PURCELL:** Thank you very much for the question. It gives me an opportunity to talk about two areas. First of all, I will talk about the easier one, which is Highfields, which is in the electorate of the member for Toowoomba North. There was a block of land set aside for a joint facility there. In conjunction with the community and the different providers for fire and ambulance, the block of land was never big enough to have both those facilities on site. We have decided with Highfields—the client has—that we would put a stand-alone ambulance station at Highfields, because we need about 3,000 metres to do that properly. As I mentioned to the committee earlier today, we want to make sure we get this right so the conditions for our staff are the best we can possibly provide, and that is the sort of land we need to do that. I do not know whether we have the land yet. The commissioner is nodding his head, so we would have a block of land in conjunction, I think, with the Crows Nest shire. We have been talking to them about a fire station in the Highfields area. Palm Island is another case altogether.

**Commissioner Johnson:** Minister, if I could just add, we have not finalised the purchase of the land, but that is going through at the moment at Highfields.

**Mr PURCELL:** With respect to Palm Island, we are having some difficulty getting the land at Palm Island. When I first became minister I was told we had a block of land. I think on probably no less than three or four occasions that has changed. At this point in time we do have a block of land and we are looking to start some building work there in the not-too-distant future. That could change but, with respect to the services we offer and have on Palm Island, we have a staff of four who operate from the Joyce Palmer Health Service on Palm Island. They attended in excess of 2,000 responses last year. The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service rural fire brigade is staffed by 12 volunteer firefighters and the brigade operates from the Ranger station. Emergency Management Queensland supports the State Emergency Service with 12 active volunteers on Palm Island. The State Emergency Service also operates from the Ranger station. The proposed facility will enhance the delivery service on that island. We want to get on with it as quickly as we possibly can and provide suitable accommodation. As I said earlier, we want to make sure we have the right accommodation for our personnel, but I will not kid anybody: we are having some difficulties in getting that sorted out.

**Mr MALONE:** How many staff work at Kedron, Minister?

**Mr PURCELL:** I could take an educated guess and say about 670, but the DG, Fiona McKersie, would have a much better handle on that than I would. I think that was the last count that I was aware of.

**Ms McKersie:** The department currently has, as at 31 March 2006, 811 full-time equivalents at the emergency service complex. That includes operational staff from the Queensland Ambulance Service, Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, Emergency Management Queensland and the public servants who support the operational divisions of the department. It should also be noted that a number of non-departmental people are located there, including the 000 cafe, the Queensland Police Credit Union, the Queensland Audit Office and shared service providers. The minister's office is located there as well.

**Mr MALONE:** Is that including the minister's staff?

**Ms McKersie:** No, not in terms of the 811 full-time equivalents.

**Mr MALONE:** Thank you. I appreciate that. Minister, in relation to the acquisition of ambulances and, more particularly, the Mercedes Sprinter, I notice from the contract for the Sprinters that you do not have an alternative at this stage. Basically, the Sprinter is the vehicle that you are currently working with. Has the department got protocols in place in terms of looking at alternative vehicles and examining the



costs of operation of operational alternative vehicles? I particularly raise the issue of the Iveco van, which is a cheaper alternative but quite a good vehicle. The question is: have you looked at alternative vehicles and how do they stack up against the Sprinter?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. I will answer part of it and then I will ask the commissioner to answer the operational part of it. I know that the Sprinter has been, and is, a very good vehicle and meets all the requirements of our paramedics and drivers. They are very pleased with it. It is a vehicle that I think has gone out of production. There is a new model on the market and we will look at that. It does not operate in all terrains. We tend to have a more rugged vehicle for our country service vehicles, but where it is predominantly urban it does a very good job. They are very well outfitted these days and meet the needs of our operational people. I will ask the commissioner to give you a more succinct answer in regard to what vehicles we are going to look at if the Sprinter goes offline.

**Commissioner Higgins:** We have a number of vehicles used within the Queensland Ambulance Service. The Mercedes Sprinter is the front-line response vehicle used throughout Queensland, predominantly in urban and provincial areas. The Mercedes Sprinter has been a very successful vehicle for the Queensland Ambulance Service. It has met all of our operational requirements including operational efficiency and effectiveness. It is a much more efficient vehicle in terms of maintenance and operating costs than the traditional Ford and similar vehicles that have been used by the Queensland Ambulance Service, and in some cases continue to be used.

We are exploring alternative vehicles to ensure that we have the best fit for the Queensland environment. The vehicle that you mentioned is one that is under active consideration, along with the VW Caravelle. That is another opportunity for us to look at. So we will continue to look at the most efficient and effective vehicles for the service.

**Mr PURCELL:** Those people who drive the F350s love them. If you run into someone who has an F350, you could not give them any other vehicle. I do not care what you give them.

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

**Mr LIVINGSTONE:** Minister, I refer to page 17 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement which identifies an increase in the educational qualifications attained by Queensland Ambulance Service staff, and I ask: can you please advise how the actual figure more than doubled the estimates figure in 2005-06?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. The short answer is that Queensland is training more paramedics and other operational staff than ever before. The Beattie government has delivered record numbers of operational ambulance staff, with over 500 additional paramedics provided in eight years of government. This has contributed to the increased number of qualifications achieved.

Under this government, this trend is going to continue. In 2006-07 the Beattie government has committed \$6.4 million to paramedic education. We have committed a further 207 operational positions in this record \$355.7 million ambulance budget. This includes the last 70 of the 240 paramedics that were committed over the three years from 2004 and 102 of the 144 ambulance officers committed this year to improve the working conditions of our paramedics, from the EB negotiations.

In addition, 35 additional communications officers will be recruited and trained to address the increased demand in emergency 000 call taking in Queensland. All of these officers will require some form of training. The Queensland Ambulance Service has achieved a great deal in the area of education and training, and has won state and Commonwealth government awards. Additionally, over the past six years paramedic training has moved to a full degree program—a course offered in partnership with the Queensland University of Technology.

Continuing education is a critical issue to maintaining the excellent skills of our paramedic graduates. The QAS School of Ambulance and Paramedic Studies continues to provide high-quality education services to staff as a result of the record levels of funding the Beattie government has invested in them. This government values our paramedics and has no problems investing in them, and will continue to invest in them in the future. It is simple: if we invest in our paramedics by giving them excellent working conditions and access to ongoing professional development, the winner will be the Queensland community.

The QAS is a registered training organisation and can deliver a variety of nationally accredited courses. In partnership with regional staff development units, the Queensland Combined Emergency Services Academy's School of Ambulance and Paramedic Studies Lutwyche campus, which is just down the road from my office at Kedron, provides education for ambulance officers from across the state.

As an example of this government's commitment, this financial year we will deliver pain management packages, chemical, biological and radiological agent awareness, child protection, 12 lead ECG, mental health crisis management and a multiple of mixed in-service education packages. Our paramedics will continue to study. With the improvements they have made in the last 15 years from a stretcher bearer service to where we are today, they will be continually studying.

**Ms MALE:** Minister, I refer to page 4 of the MPS and ask: how will the \$6.8 million for communications operations and information technology equipment for the Fire and Rescue Service be of benefit to the firefighters?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. I know the member has a lively interest in emergency services in her area. The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service continues to develop its ability to deliver emergency services to the people of Queensland. I am pleased to tell the committee that, as part of this year's record emergency services budget, there is a \$6.8 million capital allocation for the QFRS operational communications equipment and information technology. \$3.4 million will be used to upgrade core information systems infrastructure and replace older communications equipment. This will provide improved network resilience and redundancy. \$2.1 million has been provided to fund the replacement of key operational equipment and the acquisition of specialist equipment to improve the service's ability in specialised areas such as counter-terrorism.

A modern Fire and Rescue Service must continue to refresh ageing equipment in order to improve its communications capability. Video conferencing facilities were used for the first time with the state incident management team's mobile office during the deployment for Tropical Cyclone Larry, and this is continuing to be developed for future use across the state.

The QFRS is continuing to develop and replace communications infrastructure to support operational requirements. Key projects in progress include the following: iZone communications; UHF and VHF radio upgrades; remote fire alarms and station turnout expansion; replacement of communications network equipment; and the upgrade of the fire communications centres.

Any radio communication black spots are being identified and solutions are being investigated and implemented. Our fires do wonderful work for Queensland and the Beattie government is proud to provide them with world-class equipment so that they can continue to provide world-class services.

On my trips to provincial areas we have identified some issues with our communication equipment—not only for our fires but for other emergency services—that we need to address and spend some money on. I am very pleased to say that DES is addressing those issues by bringing all of our emergency services personnel together to look at better ways of delivering communications in provincial areas. As you know, Queensland is a vast state. We have to cover vast land masses. We have some rugged areas where communication is nearly impossible. We have portable aerials for such areas. We can put them on the highest point in times of emergency to make sure we have communication in those areas while doing operations.

**Ms MALE:** Also on page 4 of the MPS there is a reference to the department's Indigenous Australian service delivery enhancement package. Can you tell the committee what the Beattie Labor government is doing to enhance safety in Indigenous communities?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. The Beattie Labor government is very proud of what it is doing in Indigenous communities and this package is a part of that. The Department of Emergency Services is continuing its strong commitment to improving emergency management and public and personal safety in Indigenous communities. The department works with Indigenous communities to provide a range of services including prehospital care, counterdisaster and fire rescue services. It also works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to boost their ability to prepare for, prevent and respond to emergencies and disasters.

I am pleased to announce today that the Indigenous Australian Service Delivery Enhancement Package, which has run over the past four years, will be continued and boosted for a further three years. This package has so far delivered a range of initiatives to improve the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. One of the features of the package so far is the establishment of a prehospital care model for remote Indigenous communities which has been developed and implemented in Coen, Horn Island, Cooktown and Kowanyama. This involves the establishment of a QAS field office which services local and surrounding communities and, importantly, the related homelands and outstations. The role of the field office includes injury prevention and first aid training, developing the emergency response capability of communities and training primary healthcare workers in relation to the prehospital care, including the use of emergency equipment such as defibrillators.

From this financial year the package will be known as the Indigenous Communities Safety Enhancement Package. This department will spend \$750,000 this year and \$2.25 million in total over three years for further measures to boost safety for Indigenous communities. Given the impacts of tropical cyclones Larry and Monica, special consideration will be given to initiatives in Cape York. Other departmental initiatives include: the Strategic Plan for Indigenous Australians 2005-08 which outlines strategies to improve service delivery to Indigenous communities; an active recruitment and training program to ensure that the department is more representative of the community it serves; and the Cairns based Indigenous Coordination Unit which engages with Indigenous communities on emergency management and community safety. When Cyclone Monica went across the coast I had a look up there.

**Ms MALE:** Page 11 of the MPS mentions the 12-lead electrocardiograph, or ECG. What is this initiative and does it assist paramedics and benefit the community?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. The QSA is committed to providing quality patient care every time they are called out and respond to a job. Research indicates that introducing the 12-lead electrocardiogram, or the 12-lead ECG, will provide paramedics with a means to significantly improve a patient's recovery. Paramedics attend over 20,000 emergency chest pain cases across Queensland every year, and that number is increasing. With access to the 12-lead ECG paramedics can identify heart attacks earlier and make better decisions quicker so they can rapidly provide the necessary treatment resulting in a quicker and better recovery.

The 12-lead ECG will help paramedics adopt an integrated approach to treatment, help to establish which facility to take a patient to—very important—and provide care if there could be a delay in transporting the patient to hospital, such as in rural areas. The benefits of this new equipment are reflected in key clinical guidelines such as those produced by the National Heart Foundation, the American College of Cardiology and Queensland Health. This is considered world's best practice intervention provided by paramedics. We believe it will impact positively on some patients suffering cardiac arrest.

The QAS has already made a great contribution to survival rates for out-of-hospital cardiac arrests. A 23.1 per cent survival rate was reported for 2005-06. The target for this critical measure is to achieve greater than 15 per cent. Queenslanders deserve the best ambulance service bar none. The Beattie government will continue to deliver key initiatives such as the 12-lead ECG to save lives. I will ask the commissioner to elaborate on some of the technical achievements this equipment will deliver.

**Commissioner Higgins:** This is one of the most exciting initiatives that has ever been introduced into the Queensland Ambulance Service. What this means is that, in the first instance, our intensive care paramedics who are already utilising 12-lead ECG monitor defibrillators will have the capacity to effectively diagnose ST elevation in acute myocardial infarction. In essence, that means that we can provide much better treatment for those people experiencing a heart attack. That will be rolled out ultimately to our 1,500 advanced care paramedics as a precursor to the introduction of the thrombolytic therapy. Basically that means dissolving clots to prevent people having heart attacks in the first instance. So rather than trying to resuscitate people after a heart attack, the Queensland Ambulance Service paramedics will be preventing heart attacks in the first instance—a much better service to the Queensland community and a very exciting initiative for the Queensland Ambulance Service and our staff.

**CHAIR:** Outstanding.

**Mr PURCELL:** Thank you, Commissioner.

**CHAIR:** Very animated.

**Mr PURCELL:** He is very excited about the new equipment we get.

**CHAIR:** Page 5 of the MPS refers to additional staff for the Rural Fire Service. Will you please advise the committee of the benefits that will flow from these additional staff to enhance the safety of rural communities and support our local rural fires on the ground?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the chairman for the question. This enhancement package for the Queensland Fire and Rescue Services's rural operations branch is the largest increase in staff numbers since the Rural Fire Service was established in 1948. Enhancement is designed to significantly increase training and support for 41,000 rural fire volunteers and 2,500 fire wardens.

This enhancement package is designed to: support, train and develop volunteers and volunteering services to communities; build community capacity, resilience and ownership of mitigation and response; create a seamless and integrated delivery of operations in rural environments; define rural operational reporting structures at large-scale bushfire incidents; strengthen and regionalise strategic thinking and planning associated with bushfire management and volunteer support; and address concerns raised by volunteers, staff and stakeholder groups that have long advocated for more staff on the ground. The model will provide increased staff to support and maintain a strong and effective volunteer contribution to mitigation and response services whilst providing clearer roles and responsibilities, ensuring that volunteers are appropriately trained and resourced to safely undertake their roles and tasks.

The organisational capacity of rural operations will be strengthened by a clear path for staff and improved opportunities for volunteers to move into employment with rural operations at the ground level and having the ability to access promotion and progress through the various ranks. I know some of our country members will be pleased with that. We are looking to put our country cousins in.

Quite clearly, this model will see more people out in the regions, more people on the ground at operational level, strengthening and focusing expertise in supporting volunteers and providing a rural voice on regional Rural Fire Service matters. This model, by aligning with the seven regional models of the QFRS urban operations, will achieve greater synergies by combining urban and rural functions, increasing resource capability to deliver on the key priorities—for example, co-locating and access to human and physical resources.

The appointment of regional managers will reduce the administration workload of staff within district locations to better service, support and train our rural firefighters. That is something I have heard in every part of the state I have gone to. Overall, this enhancement package supports rural volunteers through the introduction of an enhancement structure that provides greater opportunities for staff and volunteers whilst aligning with departmental structures.

The structural enhancement package will see an increase of 23 full-time equivalent positions, with the vast majority of these positions located in regional and rural Queensland. It is proposed that they all have new positions filled by the end of this year.

**CHAIR:** Page 11 of the MPS refers to planning and participation by your department in major exercises. What involvement has the Department of Emergency Services had in preparing for the consequences of terrorism and other such disasters?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank you, Madam Chair, for the question. A week before Tropical Cyclone Larry devastated north Queensland, the department was conducting scenario based training centred on a high-category cyclone hitting Queensland. This training has proved to be invaluable for preparing our emergency services and other agencies to respond quickly and efficiently. Fortunately, major incidents and disasters like Larry are not frequent. However, this means that people who plan for and respond to such events do not have many opportunities to develop and maintain their skills on the job.

Exercises simulate a real event and allow staff to test their skills and to evaluate the effectiveness of disaster planning. I have found from talking to our people in SES and other emergency services groups within the portfolio that they want to put their training into use. The department has both a legislative responsibility and a duty of care to prepare and conduct exercises with the focus on a whole-of-government approach to major events.

During 2005-06 the department has been involved in a number of exercises. These included: Exercise Orchid Alert, a national counter-terrorism exercise held in 2005 which aimed to enhance Queensland's investigation and outcome management capability and arrangement in the context of a terrorism incident; Exercise Weeping Maiden, a cyclone simulation conducted in November 2005 which assisted authorities in Cairns and surrounding areas in their preparation for a major tropical cyclone; and Exercise Pandora, an exercise designed to test the strategies and decision making and communications of the State Disaster Management Group to a large-scale pandemic.

As a result of Exercise Weeping Maiden, local governments in north Queensland were able to clearly identify the risk posed by tropical cyclones Larry and Monica and ensure that effective preparation, response and recovery strategies could be implemented. This reduced the overall impact of the events on the communities in far-north Queensland. All our prayers were answered and nobody died in those incidents.

A number of exercises have been planned for 2006-07. This includes three further catastrophic cyclone events which will be done at large centres down the coast, a large-scale pandemic and an exercise to assist the preparedness of south-east Queensland to a tsunami. The department is also involved in the preparation of a national pandemic exercise, along with Queensland Health, in October this year. The department is very well prepared for the consequences of terrorism and other disasters. Sadly, they are becoming more common events.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. The time for government questions has expired. I call the member for Mirani.

**Mr PURCELL:** Madam Chair, could I just ask your indulgence. The member for Mirani asked a question earlier on QCESA, which is our training centre at Whyte Island for Emergency Services. I have some more information which will make the record more complete for the member. The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service focuses on the provision of training, fire related consultancy and service to the industry. In 2004-05 the Commercial Development Unit issued 24,000 awards for fire and emergency related training. In 2005-06 some 26,000 training awards have been issued. The Commercial Development Unit has a turnover from its commercial activities of \$5.2 million and produced a surplus of \$940,000. It is expected that an increased surplus of approximately \$1 million will be produced from a turnover of approximately \$5.6 million for the 2005-06 financial year. As I said earlier, that money, as far as I know, goes back into training our staff. We are required by the government to have a commercial arm and we are to make sure that all activities down there are done on a commercial scale.

**Mr MALONE:** Thank you for that, Minister. That is great. I refer to question on notice No. 884 asked on 28 May 2006 which refers to the Bronto skylift vehicle. It is high-lift firefighting equipment that is worth about \$1.5 million. I may not have got the designation right, but I refer in particular to the one in Cairns. There are four of them throughout Queensland, as I understand it. One is based in Cairns along with a technical rescue appliance. Up until a certain period of time the situation was that they were cross-crewed so that in actual fact one vehicle could go out but not the other. This is not a satisfactory outcome. Has that issue been sorted? They call the issue 'ghost crewing'. The reality is that, under the circumstances, there are four vehicles throughout Queensland. It is not really the way to operate a fire service if only one high-value risk vehicle can be operational at any one time.

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. I know that they are a very much sought after vehicle by firefighters for different areas, and they certainly do provide a very safe working platform—

**Mr MALONE:** Fourteen storeys, I believe.

**Mr PURCELL:** Yes, for fighting fires. I will ask the commissioner to answer that with regard to the crews, because that will be an operational matter. I just have to say that something that I do not think will be fanciful in the future is ladders, and I have discussed this with the commissioner. They are probably old hat and we need to move on to platforms—platforms that could be used on every truck.

With regard to the development of fire trucks, they need to look at this issue. In relation to getting up to even a two-storey or three-storey building with a ladder and then trying to assist someone down, I would not like to be trying to do it on occupational health and safety grounds. But if there was a platform that enabled me to get up there from the back of a truck, it would be much better. But I have been told that one of the problems is that you have to get the truck close enough, but we will work on that. I will get the commissioner to give the answer with regard to the platforms and the problem that you have alluded to in Cairns.

**Commissioner Johnson:** The Bronto skylift that you are referring to is one of four in Queensland with 42 metres in reach located at Cairns along with the technical rescue vehicle. The issue of cross-crewing is quite a common practice, particularly in areas where the requirement for a first turnout response for highly specialist vehicles is not as high. We will continue to monitor that and see how it transpires over the next probably couple of years, I would say, at least.

We have always worked on a call-back basis. Obviously the nature of the call that comes in reporting a fire or other emergency will determine the most appropriate initial response vehicle to go along with the pumping appliance—the fire appliance itself—and crew, and that is a determination of the crew as required. Should it subsequently be found that more equipment is needed, our call-back systems would kick into place and the specialist vehicles, if needed, or indeed other fire appliances would be called to the scene. Maroochydore also has one, as do the crews in Brisbane. Another one is on purchase, I think, for the Gold Coast to replace one there. So cross-crewing, or sometimes referred to as ghost-manning, is a fairly common practice. It really comes down to the amount of response for that specialist vehicle.

**Mr MALONE:** Thank you, Commissioner and Minister. I refer to the MPS at page 4 relating to providing for replacement vehicles. I follow up on question on notice No. 704 asked on 10 May in which you answered that there were 37 Q-Fleet vehicles used by Public Service employees under their salary package. I was interested in research going back some time—four years ago—that a similar question was asked and there were 534 Q-Fleet vehicles within Emergency Services. Minister, can you tell me what has happened to all of those vehicles over four years?

**Mr PURCELL:** That is a very good question the member has asked.

**Mr MALONE:** It seems quite—

**Mr PURCELL:** I might like to know what has happened to them also. I do not know whether we hire our operational vehicles from Q-Fleet or not, but I will endeavour to get you an answer. The department currently has 620 vehicles under lease with Q-Fleet which includes 362 passenger vehicles and 258 commercial vehicles. The 620 vehicles are made up of 458 in two-wheel-drive configuration, 157 in four-wheel-drive configuration and five in all-wheel-drive configuration. The lease consists of 159 four-cylinder vehicles, 429 six-cylinder vehicles and 32 eight-cylinder vehicles. Of the 620 leased vehicles, 30 are Senior Executive Service level vehicles and one hybrid vehicle, which is gas and fuel, and the department fleet and equipment management unit continues to closely monitor all documentation to ensure that the department complies with all current government directives applicable to its leased vehicle fleet.

We have a lot of vehicles. It is like communications for this department. We rely very heavily on communications in Emergency Services—it is our lifeline—but we also need to have the vehicles to respond to all of the incidents that we do. We certainly have a lot of rubber on the road. I can assure you that, because of the cost of fuel at the moment, this department is going well over budget in what we were supposed to spend on fuel. If costs continue to go up, we will probably have to get an injection of money for fuel.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, that was what I would expect. The question on notice, as I said, was asked on 10 May and said that there were 37 Q-Fleet vehicles. Obviously there is some mix-up there.

In reference to fire safety inspections on budget accommodation, what number of budget accommodation facilities have achieved compliance to date? What number of budget accommodation facilities have not achieved compliance and what enforcement action has been taken against them? What number of budget accommodation facilities have been threatened with enforcement action?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. The BOLA legislation came into being in April 2002, and that is what gives us the power to inspect buildings and to bring those buildings into line and do it retrospectively. The act established a range of fire safety criteria which each budget

accommodation building had to comply with. For some budget accommodation owners, compliance was required in two separate time frames. Stage 1, with a due date of 1 July 2003, required all budget accommodation buildings, irrespective of the date of construction, to have a fire safety management plan as well as early warning installation—that is, smoke alarms and emergency lighting. Stage 2, with a due date of 1 July 2005, required some budget accommodation buildings to have additional fire safety installations or requirements. The type and number of installations or requirements depend upon the floor area of the building. Stage 2 also limits the number of people who can be accommodated in bedrooms according to the bedroom floor area. We have been assisting building owners to comply with the legislation, as you would realise.

**Mr MALONE:** How many have been inspected? How many have complied? How many have not? What action was taken?

**Mr PURCELL:** QFRS and Local Government officers complete a joint first inspection of budget accommodation buildings for compliance with stage 2 with a target date of 30 June 2006 in all regions apart from far-north Queensland, which was affected by the impact of cyclones Larry and Monica. By 30 June 2006 QFRS had completed 1,574 inspections of budget accommodation buildings built before 1992, when the Building Code of Australia became operational. At 30 June 2006 some 93.7 per cent of buildings were either compliant or very close to compliant. Follow-up inspections are carried out by the QFRS and Local Government officers if the building is non-compliant or requires building work. QFRS carries out follow-up inspections alone if there are only deficiencies in the fire safety management plan.

The department will continue to provide resources for budget accommodation building fire safety requirements and will continue to work with owners to make sure that all budget accommodation becomes fire compliant with the legislation. I do not think I have a list, to my knowledge, of buildings that are not compliant. I could ask the commissioner, if you like, to—

**CHAIR:** Do you want an extension of time, member for Mirani?

**Mr MALONE:** I might get the minister to take it on notice. I imagine that it would be quite extensive.

**Commissioner Johnson:** The list I do not have before me at the moment, but I was going to refer to the prosecutions.

**Mr MALONE:** Can we put that on notice, Minister? I am happy for you to take it on notice.

**CHAIR:** You can take that on notice, Minister, if the member for Mirani wants to go on to his next question.

**Mr PURCELL:** Okay. That is fine. I have the figures there.

**Mr MALONE:** I am not going to ask you to read it. Minister, I continue to hear concerns from QAS officers—paramedics—in terms of the rostering system. Has there been an increase in overtime worked? Has there been an increase in sick days? Has there been some flexibility built into the current arrangements?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. Not long after I became the minister I visited QAS stations all over Queensland and that was probably one of the main issues that came my way. There were EBA negotiations going on at the time, and certainly that was a burning issue with officers. I sat beside them in the car and worked with them on operational matters. Anecdotally, they all like to do the 12/14 rosters. They like the leisure time. It used to be four days on, four days off. That was a very good lifestyle. But some of the issues we get with regard to that have made it very hard for the QAS to continue with that 12/14 roster.

In relation to the amount of time that our QAS people spend on the road now out of our 12-hour shift, they are just about on the road all of the time. If they get towards the end of their shift and they get further call-outs, they could be on the road for another two hours or more, depending on the patient and the call-outs and where they had to drive to. Those 12-hour shifts sometimes turn into 14 or 16 hours. On occupational health and safety matters alone, as the employer of those people we had to seriously look at that. I know that they would like to do the four days on, four days off. But the simple fact is that we cannot sustain that and we would be putting our officers at risk.

I think the statistic is that after being on duty or driving for 12 hours it is the same as being under the influence of alcohol. We had to seriously look at that. We did not want to put our staff at risk. We have introduced a new roster system. It is still being bedded down in some areas. Not all of our stations are on the new roster system. As officers are trained and come on line we go to that system. As you would imagine, if we are reducing the hours that people work we are increasing the amount of staff we need to work those rosters. Therefore, as staff become available we reduce the roster times.

We made a commitment this year that we will shorten the week for our paramedics. It was part of the EB negotiations that they have a 38-hour week. We need to put on an extra 144 paramedics to take up those rosters so that they can have more time off. One of the things that paramedics took up with me was quality time with their family. They do work very hard when they are on roster. When they are off roster we want them to spend as much time as possible with their families. We are very aware of that problem.

**Mr MALONE:** It would be inappropriate if I did not ask a question on the response to the cyclones. Firstly may I congratulate your staff, your officers and those in charge, for the way in which they operated. It was magnificent. The question I would ask is: what lessons have we learnt out of it? There were simple things like putting generators on communication towers. I know that we were desperately short of tarps and had to fly tarps in from New South Wales. In a couple of minutes can you tell me what we have learnt from it.

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. I know that the entire committee would like to congratulate the Emergency Services personnel who responded to those incidents up north. It is a fact that we had 68 shires declared affected by cyclones. More than half the land mass of Queensland was inundated with floodwaters and had ruinous things happen with regard to their roads, communication and electricity network.

To answer the member's question, we have a program in place for looking at the lessons learnt out of the cyclone. There are a lot of lessons to be learnt. There is a very comprehensive document being put together for us at the moment. That will not just be for Emergency Services; it will be for all parts of government. Some of the lessons that certainly I learnt on the first day in Innisfail hours after the cyclone crossed was that nothing much happens without power. As you said, generators become the lifeblood of any community. We certainly will be looking at how we place our generators and what we do with essential services.

When the Premier chaired the first Emergency Services local committee meeting, the first thing that local government and our own Emergency Services personnel were tasked with was to get power back on to our water, sewerage and into essential areas so that shops could open and have lights. One of the things that nobody realised was that there was no money because the banks could not operate. That was a huge problem for the first two or three days. I must thank Warren Pitt's Department of Communities for making \$4.3 million in cash available so that people could buy essential services from stores just to survive—fuel, gas, candles and things that were needed.

There will be a comprehensive study of that event and I know that we will be much better prepared. After Cyclone Monica one of the things that was noted in the cape was that the equipment was in place but it was not working. We are looking at how we make sure that that equipment is kept in good working order. We will have a comprehensive report on that which we will make available to all and sundry.

**CHAIR:** That is the end of this block of non-government questions. I call on the member for Ipswich West.

**Mr LIVINGSTONE:** Page 16 of the Ministerial Policy Statement refers to the training initiatives in the Queensland Ambulance Service and the fact that they will be built on. Can you advise the committee how this will occur?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. If we could boast a little bit, Queensland has the best trained paramedics in Australia bar none—possibly anywhere else in the world. This is as a result of the record investments the Beattie government has provided into resources and excellent paramedic training.

Just a month ago the QAS won the 2005 Australian Training Initiative Award, which is a Commonwealth government award. The Queensland Ambulance Service also won the 2005 Queensland Public Sector—Best Learning and Development Initiative Award. The QAS was also a finalist in the 2005 Premier's Awards for Excellence in Public Sector Management in the innovation and creativity category. Over the past six years paramedic training has moved to a full degree program in partnership with the Queensland University of Technology. Continuing education is crucial to maintaining the skills of our paramedics.

With Queensland such a highly decentralised state, with many of our paramedics working in isolated and remote communities, methods for offering continuing education is critical. The QAS has met this challenge and has proudly been acknowledged nationally for its innovative approach to training. The QAS is implementing a virtual classroom for tutorials, meetings and educational sessions by experts unable to travel to remote locations. Education will also be delivered using videoconferencing technology. This will include the delivery and assessment of clinical processes and procedures in partnership with the medical director's office. The QAS will also develop more online multimedia training packages in consultation with other emergency training organisations.

The QAS will not rest on this record of high achievement and will continue to develop the best ways of delivering quality education services. The Beattie government is committed to the Smart State, smart services and smart initiatives.

Our commitment to investing in our paramedics by ensuring that they have access to the best ongoing training and development demonstrates that we value them and the greater Queensland community. In moving around Queensland and meeting our QAS paramedics in the bush—where they do a marvellous job—in most cases they work one out in a car. One of the issues that we are looking at is to make sure that those paramedics do have an opportunity to come down and re-skill themselves

and work with a busy station to get their confidence up and to be a part of the very vibrant QAS operation down here. We would like to see that happen in the future. I know the commissioner would. Sometimes they feel a bit isolated out in the bush and we need to make sure that they do not feel that way in the future.

**Ms MALE:** With reference to page 4 of the MPS, could you detail how the \$3.5 million that has been set aside to provide rural fire vehicles will improve the firefighting capability of our volunteer rural firefighters?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. The member will no doubt recall joining me last month to officially hand over new fire trucks to the Coochin Creek Rural Fire Brigade. I would also like to highlight the great support the member shows for Emergency Services in her electorate. She is very well known to her rural firefighters and other Emergency Services personnel in her electorate.

The Beattie government is committed to providing our hardworking Rural Fire Service with the right equipment. This will ensure that they can continue to keep residents and property in rural areas safe. In 2006-07 the Beattie Labor government has delivered the Department of Emergency Services a record budget of \$744 million. This will help fund several projects that boost our rural fire services and provide support to our volunteers. It is anticipated that \$3.5 million, as the member said, will be for constructing 55 appliances comprising five heavy cab chassis vehicles, 35 medium response appliances—these are called attack vehicles by our personnel—and 15 light attack appliances. Also \$300,000 will be allocated for the construction of 20 rural firefighting trailers.

The continuing success of the Rural Fire Service's vehicle building program can be attributed to continuing funding from the Beattie government. I can assure you that it is very well appreciated by our cousins in the bush. Due to the vehicle replacement program that was undertaken to replace 20-year-old vehicles, there are nearly no vehicles over 20 years old in the bush. The government has provided \$19.25 million over seven years for that vehicle replacement program.

These new vehicles that the government is providing for rural brigades are world class. The light and medium response vehicles have been designed in consultation with the Rural Fire Brigade Association of Queensland, with direct input from the volunteers. This ensures that they meet the needs of the firefighters around the state. The vehicles can connect to urban appliances, fire hydrants and rural water tanks, which is a real improvement. Rural firefighters are getting into iZone areas more and more often and need to be able to plug into that water as quickly as possible.

The Rural Operations Division of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service provides these firefighting appliances to rural fire brigades. I can assure you that rural fire volunteers are very proud of the equipment that we give them. At this point in time—and the commissioner may correct me—some 600 new vehicles have been provided under that program which is a great achievement.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** Page 20 of the MPS refers to the Pandemic Influenza Task Force. How does this task force provide for safer and more secure communities and what is the role of the Department of Emergency Services?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. In October 2005 at a meeting of the State Disaster Management Group the Queensland Pandemic Influenza Planning Task Force was created to coordinate planning for Queensland in the event of a pandemic of influenza. It was further determined that this task force be supported by a core group comprised of functional agency representatives. This core group was established to action the planning priorities of that group with members from the departments of Emergency Services, Public Works, Communities, Primary Industries and Fisheries and Queensland Health.

Emergency Management Queensland, a division of the Department of Emergency Services, provides coordination to the pandemic task force by embedding this core group into the disaster operations section of Emergency Management Queensland. In Queensland any influenza pandemic would be managed through the disaster management system, with Queensland Health having lead agency responsibility for health care and protection in the event of a pandemic and the State Disaster Management Group having responsibility for consequence management involving local disaster management groups and district disaster management groups. Whole-of-government arrangements in the event of a pandemic influenza are based on the principle that lifesaving and health protecting actions, including responder health and safety, will take precedence over all other response activities.

Within the Department of Emergency Services, a working group has been established with Emergency Management Queensland coordinating efforts to ensure that the department meets the objectives identified in the whole-of-government plan, meets time lines in the implementation plan, incorporates the event of pandemic influenza into the department's business continuity plans and arrangements, incorporates the response required to the event of a pandemic influenza into the standard operating procedures of the operational divisions and ensures that the components of the departmental plan are consistent with the strategic developments of each division and the department.



The department will continue to work with stakeholders to ensure the continued provision of prehospital and ongoing emergency care in the event of a pandemic outbreak in Queensland. I want to add to that. I can very well remember the Sunday afternoon that other ministers and I were called into the Premier's office to have a look at how we would handle a pandemic here in Queensland. I think all DGs were called in at the same time. The Premier has taken a very close interest in this. Not one director-general or minister was not at that meeting. A very comprehensive plan has been put together to protect Queenslanders and anybody else who happens to be in Queensland at the time from this pandemic—if it happens to come into Queensland.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** May it not happen. Thank you very much. I now refer you to page 4 of the MPS where it states that \$2 million will be spent on the continued implementation of the strategic information management initiative. Can you advise the committee how this will benefit ambulance officers and Queenslanders?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. The additional \$2 million in funding for the implementation of SIMI builds on our commitment from last year to ease the workload of our paramedics. We are introducing a paperless reporting system and eliminating the need to enter the necessary information twice.

I inform the committee that the improvements are well underway and are strongly aligned to the government's Smart State priorities. By the end of this year, all paramedics across the state will be using a rugged and robust portable computer to collect ambulance case information at the scene. This paperless system will free paramedics up from lengthy paperwork and increase their availability to respond to demand for paramedic services. More importantly, this system focuses on improving health care and strengthening services to the community. Other advantages of this new technology include assisting hospitals with a concise prehospital patient care record, improved accuracy of patient and clinical data and improved information collection that will improve dispatch and patient management protocols.

During 2006-07 this system will be interfaced with the new generation computer-aided dispatch system currently being commissioned by the QSA and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. This will create further information sharing and exchange between these systems during prehospital care services. The overall SIMI that is being introduced by the QAS in 2006-07 will improve workforce planning, scheduling and operation coordinating capabilities. The outcome from this initiative will include improved response capabilities and improved meal break and fatigue break times. I know our paramedics and other QAS personnel are hard pressed these days because of the amount of work that we are doing. With an ageing and growing population, our paramedics are working harder than ever before. We are increasing our population in Queensland by about 190 people a day. With an ageing population and us baby boomers getting to that age where we need more care—I will not speak for you, Dolly—we need to continue to balance our paramedics' work and family life. As the commissioner has reminded me, we are improving our response times all the time. If we are going to continue to do that, we need to make sure that we balance that work and life leisure time for our paramedics. As the member for Mirani said, in relation to the 10-14 rosters he made inquiries about, you do not give people a very good family life. We are about trying to make that as good as we possibly can in the very busy world of our paramedics.

The member for Mirani asked me a question earlier in relation to question on notice No. 704. He asked Minister Schwarten about the Q-Fleet vehicles used by Public Service employees. Our total figures include operational Q-Fleet vehicles as well. That is the reason there are the differences.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** I refer to page 33 of the MPS, and I ask: what community education programs are offered by the Fire and Rescue Service? How do these programs form an important part of creating a safer Queensland?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. The Beattie Labor government's record \$744.1 million Emergency Services budget has again allocated funding in 2006-07 for the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service to deliver wonderful community safety programs that improve fire safety in Queensland communities. A range of key initiatives will improve fire safety preparedness and contribute to the protection of people, property and the environment from fire. The QFRS delivers these programs across the whole state. They range from in-home programs, such as Safehome where firefighters each year conduct as many as 5,000 household fire safety visits, to school based programs, such as Fire Ed, which passes on fire safety messages to more than 50,000 year 1 students each year. The Road Awareness and Accident Prevention Program delivers road safety and social responsibility messages to over 32,000 year 12 students each year.

In the next financial year, QFRS programs will continue to take the fire and general safety message to a wide range of groups in the community. One particular at-risk group is young children within their own homes. The QFRS targets this group through school related programs as the best way of delivering the fire safety message to young families. Other programs such as Safehome and Fight Fire Fascination provide additional support to families either in or outside the school environment.

Preschool and kindergarten children also receive visits from their local firefighters in response to requests. Firefighters use the opportunity to introduce basic fire safety messages such as ringing 111 for emergencies and 'firefighters are your friends'. In the last calendar year 40,000 children received a visit under that program.

The Beattie Labor government is committed to continuing to promote community education programs that help make Queensland a safer community from fires. In relation to the fire education program in schools, my grandchildren have been a part of that program. Now that I am part of Emergency Services, they delight in telling me what to do in a case of a fire at home. At that age they are very good at remembering what to do. They say to me, 'What do you do in the case of a fire, grandpa? You get down low and you go, go go. You get under the smoke and get outside. If you catch alight, grandpa, you stop, you drop and you roll and you put the fire out.' And then, 'What do you do grandpa when you get outside?' Because I will not tell them they say, 'Grandpa, you must go to the mailbox so that we can count everybody to make sure that everybody is out of the house.' Those messages really stick with children and I think in years to come that will certainly make Queensland a safer place. They will remember that when they are adults.

**CHAIR:** I can vouch for that. Last year my son's class had the visit from the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. I well remember him trying to teach his father to drop and roll. That is not a picture that anyone wants to envisage. I was going to ask you about budget accommodation, but I think you have answered that—unless you have something further to add to that.

**Mr PURCELL:** I have some figures that might be able to help Ted, if you would not mind.

**CHAIR:** Yes, please elaborate.

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. In April 2002, as I said earlier, the Building and Other Legislation Amendment Act—the BOLA Act—was passed by parliament in response to the tragic Palace backpackers' fire at Childers on 23 June 2000. The committee will no doubt note that the inquest into the fire was concluded last week. It has been conducted since 2000 with the coroner handing down his findings on Friday.

The BOLA Act established a range of fire safety criteria with which each budget accommodation building must comply. For some budget accommodation owners, compliance is required in two separate time frames. Stage 1, which had a due date of 1 July 2003, required all budget accommodation buildings, irrespective of the date of construction, to have a fire safety management plan as well as early warning installations and emergency lighting. Stage 2, which had a due date of 1 July 2005, required some budget accommodation buildings to have additional fire safety installations or requirements. The type and number of installations or requirements depends upon the floor area of the building. Stage 2 also limits the number of people who can be accommodated in bedrooms.

A whole-of-government strategy, with the Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation as lead agency, was implemented to assist building owners comply. That is what the department is all about—getting them to comply. Implementation of stage 2 required the allocation of two dedicated QFRS officers for each of the seven Queensland regions. The government has provided up to six community liaison officers to directly assist owners in the lead-up to the compliance date. What we are trying to do is make people comply, not make them law breakers. The Department of Emergency Services funded one community liaison officer position and will continue to do so until September this year.

QFRS and local government officers completed joint first inspections of budget accommodation buildings for compliance with stage 2 by the target date of 30 June 2006. Throughout Queensland, only 14 known budget accommodation buildings in cyclone affected far-north Queensland were not jointly inspected by that date. At 31 May 2006, 92 per cent of buildings were either compliant or very close to being compliant. The department will continue providing resources for budget accommodation building fire safety requirements and will inspect these buildings for compliance with the Fire and Rescue Service Act to ensure that their management plans are in place.

Owners of over half the buildings with major issues to address reported that the work either had been done or is being addressed. Follow-up inspections will continue. Like I said, we are not trying to make lawful people into law breakers. What we are trying to do is have a system to get their buildings compliant. It is a very important requirement. Lives could be put at risk. However, if owners of those buildings do not comply we will prosecute. We do find more—two buildings became known to me today that are not compliant. Local governments assist us with that. They have informed us. Our officers have made inspections—and that was at Bargara, near Bundaberg. We are assisting those owners to make them compliant. If they do not, we will issue them a notice and we will prosecute or we will close the buildings down so that they cannot be used.

**Mrs PRATT:** Minister, you mentioned very briefly the impact of rising fuel prices in answer to an earlier question. In question on notice No. 20 from non-government members I asked what was the increasing cost attributable directly to having to bypass hospitals, to which you responded, 'The Queensland Ambulance Service does not record this data.' I also asked how many procedures

conducted by ambulance personnel were directly attributable to bypass, to which the reply was the same: 'The Queensland Ambulance Services does not record this data.' Will you be recording data of the impact of bypass from both of these issues in the future?

**Mr PURCELL:** I thank the member for the question. It is very difficult to answer a question that is not our problem: It is a Health problem.

**Mrs PRATT:** But you pick up the tab.

**Mr PURCELL:** We do, and our paramedics do it quite well. The patients are in the best of care when they are in the back of our ambulance with our paramedics—

**Mrs PRATT:** They are. I agree with that.

**Mr PURCELL:**—irrespective of whether they are outside a hospital or en route to hospital or at the accident scene.

**Mrs PRATT:** They would probably get better care in the ambulance at the moment.

**Mr PURCELL:** Well, I would not say that. We do not keep track of how many hospitals we go past. Some misinformation has been put around—and it was done for a reason, and I can understand the reason. If I were on the other side of the House I would probably do the same. There was an accident outside a hospital at Caboolture and that person never went to Caboolture Hospital and they said it was because it was on bypass. Whether it was on bypass or not, it was a road accident and that person was airlifted to the RBWH because they had head injuries and that was the appropriate hospital for them to go to. We go past a lot of hospitals from time to time because our medical director, who is a part of our 000 calling system, will direct our paramedics to do so. Or if we have an intensive care paramedic on the scene, he can make a decision about which hospital that person should go to because of the injuries they have.

Not all hospitals are the same, as we know. Some specialise in areas and others do not. We take patients to the most appropriate hospital from the information that is gathered by the paramedic, by our medical director or by our intensive care paramedic. How much fuel it costs we do not care. We will take them wherever we need to take them to make sure they get the best care in the quickest possible time. I ask the commissioner to complete that answer, because I may have missed out on some of the things that he would know better than I would.

**Commissioner Higgins:** It is, in fact, a very complex issue. The utilisation of different hospitals for different purposes is something that is designed into the Queensland emergency medical system. We actually have structured bypass arrangements for specific patients where a hospital's capability is not suitable to look after a specific patient. We are, in fact, planning, with our new electronic ambulance report forms, to capture the information that identifies the time that patients are moved off ambulance stretchers into the emergency department environment and where any delays occur. However, we do not actually trap the information related to bypassing which hospitals, because it is determined by the capability of the hospital and identifying which is the best hospital to deal with the patient's needs.

In relation to the particular procedures that are conducted, they are all in accordance with the clinical protocols that exist within the Queensland Ambulance Service, and paramedics will continue to perform those procedures whilst the patient is under their care.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Commissioner. The time allocated for the consideration of the expenditure of estimates for the portfolio of the Minister for Emergency Services has now expired. I thank the minister, his advisers and all the departmental staff for their attendance today. I thank all of the committee members. I particularly want to make mention of the way committee members conducted themselves and their questioning today. It was a most enjoyable process for everyone involved. I thank Hansard and all the attendants. I thank everyone for their patience with my loose time-keeping. That concludes the committee's consideration of the estimates.

**Mr PURCELL:** I would also like to thank committee members for the courtesy that they have given to me and my staff with regard to their questioning. It has helped us to understand our portfolio a lot better than we did before this process, I can assure you. I would also like to thank my own staff and all of my departmental staff for the many, many hours that they have put in. I can assure you that there was a lot of midnight oil burnt and a lot of early starts. A lot of people have worked very hard. I publicly thank them for the willingness with which they have done that. For me, it has been a fairly high learning curve. I think this process is a very good service. I know that some people think it is a waste of time, but I do not. I think it helps me, and certainly my staff and other operational staff, to understand where the money goes, what we spend it on and what we do.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. I certainly agree that it has been a most informative and educational day.

Committee adjourned at 5.50 pm.