

TUESDAY, 18 JULY 2006

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE E—EDUCATION AND THE ARTS

Estimates Committee E Members

Mr RO Lee (Chair)
Mr SW Copeland
Ms J Jarratt
Mr RD Messenger
Ms C Molloy
Mr J Pearce
Mr PW Wellington

In Attendance

Hon. RJ Welford, Minister for Education and Minister for the Arts
Mr P Bini, Senior Policy Advisor
Dr S Oberhardt, Senior Policy Advisor (Arts)

Education Queensland

Mr K Smith, Director-General
Mr S Kessell, Director, Office of Director-General
Ms R Logan, Director, Strategic Resource Management Branch

Arts Queensland

Ms L Tabrett, Deputy Director-General
Ms J Branch, Director, Arts Business and Finance

The committee met at 8.30 am.

CHAIR: Good morning, everyone. I declare this hearing of Estimates Committee E now open. On behalf of the committee I welcome the minister, departmental officers and members of the public who are here for this morning's hearing. I will first of all introduce the members of the committee. I am Ronan Lee, the member for Indooroopilly and chair of the committee; Mr Stuart Copeland, the member for Cunningham, is the deputy chair; Ms Jan Jarratt, the member for Whitsunday; Mr Rob Messenger, the member for Burnett; Ms Cate Molloy, the member for Noosa; Mr Jim Pearce, the member for Fitzroy; and Mr Peter Wellington, the member for Nicklin.

The committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2006 for the areas set out in the order of appointment dated 21 April 2006. This morning the committee will examine the organisational units in the Department of Education and the Arts. Following lunch the committee will examine units within the portfolios of the Department of Environment, Local Government, Planning, and Women.

The committee will suspend proceedings for the following breaks: morning tea from 10.15 to 10.30 am; a short break from 12.00 to 12.05 pm; lunch from 12.50 to 1.45 pm; afternoon tea from 3.15 to 3.30 pm and a break from 5.30 to 5.15 pm. I would remind all of those participating in the hearing today that these proceedings are similar to parliament to the extent that the public cannot participate in the proceedings. In this regard, I remind members of the public that under the standing orders the public may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee.

The committee has resolved that television footage without sound be allowed for the opening statements by the chair and by each minister. I would ask, of course, that any mobile phones or pagers be either switched off or switched to silent mode. I would remind members of the committee and the minister that under the standing orders the time limit for asking questions is one minute and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning; a double chime will

sound at the end of each of these time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will sound two minutes after the extension of time has been given.

The standing orders also require that at least half of the time available for questions and answers be allocated to non-government members. Any time expended when the committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between government and non-government members. The committee has given leave for non-committee members to ask questions of the ministers. The following persons will be participating in today's hearing on this basis: Mr Howard Hobbs, the member for Warrego and Miss Fiona Simpson, the member for Maroochydore. I would ask departmental officers to identify themselves when they first come forward to answer a question if the minister refers a question to them so that Hansard can record their name.

I declare the proposed expenditure for the Department of Education and the Arts open for examination. The time allocated is four hours. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, if you wish you may make an opening statement. I remind you that there is a time limit of five minutes for such a statement. Would you like to give an opening statement?

Mr WELFORD: Thank you, Mr Chair. I would welcome the opportunity to make an opening statement and thank members of the committee for the opportunity to participate in the estimates proceedings today. I am pleased to report on the government's budget for the 2006-07 financial year and to comment on the activities of the Education and Arts portfolios during the past 12 months.

Turning first to Education, the portfolio delivers public education to some 490,000 students throughout our state school system of 1,276 schools and employs approximately 55,000 full-time equivalent employees, including approximately 36,000 full-time teachers. The portfolio also accredits and financially assists independent and Catholic schools that provide education to over 216,000 students.

There have been some significant achievements over the past 12 months and I will touch on some of them. We now have a new system of teacher registration with a five-year renewal and compulsory criminal history checks. Our learning or earning laws have been introduced with students entering year 10 in 2006 being the first to take in Queensland's new senior schooling laws which will require all young people to be learning or earning until they are 17. Preparations have continued for the introduction of a new non-compulsory full-time prep year in 2007 and a new behaviour management approach is being initiated in Queensland state schools. We have fast-tracked the Asbestos Roof Replacement Program and will pass the halfway mark later this year. A comprehensive new blueprint has been put in place to boost student literacy in Queensland state schools.

The 2006-07 state budget will help us maintain this impressive momentum. The budget underpins the strongest growth in Queensland education in the state's history with new facilities and a raft of reforms to support students. The centrepiece of the budget is a \$1billion injection into Queensland state and non-state schools. Titled Tomorrow's Schools—Providing For a Smarter Future, it is a comprehensive five-year school rebuilding and renewal program that will modernise existing school classrooms and, where needed, build new facilities. More than \$40 million will be invested in skilling state school teachers and teacher aides to implement new syllabuses and key government initiatives. The year 2007 will be a landmark year for Queensland schooling with the introduction of the full-time preparatory year in state, Catholic and independent schools.

The budget provides \$106 million in 2006-07 for new and refurbished prep year classrooms in state schools as part of the largest single school building program in the state's history. We will employ up to 100 new state school teachers to join the existing early years teachers to staff the prep year. In addition, we are committed to smaller class sizes and will employ another 150 extra state school teachers in 2007 as the final stage of our plan to reduce class size targets in years four to 10 to 28 students is implemented. More than \$20 million will support our government's learning or earning reforms which apply to all students; not only state schools but also Catholic and independent schools.

Turning briefly to the arts, this forthcoming year's budget continues our commitment to Queensland's dynamic arts and cultural sector and funds the completion of the Queensland Cultural Centre redevelopment at South Bank, the Millennium Arts Project. This is an exciting time in the arts for Queensland. A major review of Arts Queensland was undertaken last year in order to better meet the needs of the community. New strategies are now being developed for the arts and cultural sector. These will guide the government's investment in the various artforms and arts and cultural festivals. There is more than \$109 million for the state's flagship cultural institutions and ongoing financial support for Queensland's arts organisations.

We are committed to supporting the arts in our regional communities. It is important that everyone feels that they have access to the arts, not just those who live in and around Brisbane. We are providing a total of \$3 million for the Regional Arts Development Fund and Indigenous Regional Arts Development Fund. Our Gritty Places Program will also ensure local artists and artworkers in regional centres have access to affordable studio space.

I thank the committee for the opportunity to make these opening comments and I welcome questions of the committee.

CHAIR: The first period of questioning in the area of Education is allocated to non-government members. I call the member for Cunningham.

Mr COPELAND: At the outset I thank your departmental officers for the work that goes into the preparation for estimates and, of course, for attending today. I know that a lot of work goes into today's hearings. One of the biggest changes in Education Queensland this year is the implementation of the full-time non-compulsory prep year which rolls out across Queensland next year. When prep was originally announced by your government it was estimated that it would cost \$200 million and begin in 2006. That was subsequently changed to a 2007 start-up at a cost of \$500 million. What is the current total estimated cost of the implementation of prep across Queensland?

Mr WELFORD: It might be helpful if you actually clarified what costs you are talking about. There are costs, obviously, of the capital program.

Mr COPELAND: The total cost of the implementation.

Mr WELFORD: The total costs of the program are represented by the costs of the new and refurbished classrooms together with the cost of additional teaching staff. Some of those are one-off costs, obviously, in terms of the new capital facilities. The new teaching staff will be a recurrent cost. We have the details of the new classrooms. We might need to take on notice the actual cost component of those. Facilities required to support the 2007 intake will comprise 390 new classrooms, 36 new toilet blocks, approximately 388 refurbished existing classrooms and the minor refurbishment of an additional 682 preschool classrooms. There will be 411 small schools with 16 or fewer students and 682 preschool upgrade grants will also be paid to schools. An additional \$20 million has been made available in this budget to enable schools to provide, where necessary, covered walkways and additional toilet blocks. We will come back to you with the aggregate costs of that capital program together with staff costs.

Mr COPELAND: That is not just for 2007 but also the schools that have already been introduced into the prep year over the trial period because that will be the total cost.

Mr WELFORD: Okay.

Mr COPELAND: On MPS 1-28 the estimated number of students in prep next year will be 18,500. How many classes of prep are you expecting or planning for across Queensland?

Mr WELFORD: The aim is to achieve a target of 25 students per class maximum. If you divide the number you mentioned by 25 that will give you the idea of how many classes there are.

Mr COPELAND: Obviously there are different sized schools, different sized classes.

Mr WELFORD: Sure. In some schools it will be significantly smaller, obviously. In schools in remote locations where in many cases there are less than 25 students in the entire school one might expect only a handful of students in the prep class.

Mr COPELAND: The planning that you are doing is just 25 into 18,500.

Mr WELFORD: Not directly, but the class size target is 25 and across most schools there will be 25 or less.

Mr COPELAND: There is no actual number of prep classes that you are expecting other than that division?

Mr WELFORD: The number is reflected, firstly, by not wanting to have more than 25 students in a class where that can be avoided and, secondly, by the number of classrooms that I mentioned in the previous answer that we have assessed for. As the numbers firm up between now and the end of the year, or the start of next year, it may be that in some of those schools we will need to add additional classrooms. My latest briefing indicates that I think there were about 10 to a dozen schools where the numbers look like they might require more facilities than previously estimated. But in most cases the facilities, on the numbers of registrations or expressions of interest so far, are more than adequate.

Mr COPELAND: Will you provide to the committee the details of where those extra facilities will be needed?

Mr WELFORD: Well, it is still uncertain. What we are saying is that, even where enrolments are not final, or where the current expressions of interest have not filled the classrooms, they have come to a point where, if there are many more students, we may need extra classrooms. It is very difficult to identify specifically. We can possibly give you some of the schools where there is already an overregistration or an oversubscription to applications, but beyond that it is difficult to speculate.

Mr COPELAND: You will take that on notice?

Mr WELFORD: Yes, sure.

Mr COPELAND: Terrific. Minister, will you give a guarantee that the target size of 25 will not be exceeded in any prep classes next year?

Mr WELFORD: There may be some schools where, for example, if you had 51 or 52 students you would have one class with 25 and one with 27. And it depends on the make-up of the class. If there is a class with a student with learning difficulties or impairments, then obviously one teacher might take fewer numbers and another teacher might take a couple extra. But the aim is to have an average target of 25.

Mr COPELAND: In that scenario of 51 or 52 students and you might balance it up, what would be the maximum number you will allow in a prep classroom for one teacher and a part-time teacher aide?

Mr WELFORD: That is entirely a matter for the school to determine, as they do with every other year level currently. The school principals work with the teachers in the relevant year levels. Those teachers plan their year's programs, their class allocations and their timetables around the character and make-up of the student cohort in each class, and teachers share the load according to their professional skills and allocate class numbers accordingly. I do not dictate or impose on schools what is required. If there is a significant overrun, then we provide extra teachers. But around the margins we allow schools to make their own judgements about these things.

Mr COPELAND: So there will be no maximum of 28, for example, or 30 in a classroom?

Mr WELFORD: I am not going to dictate a maximum, because that would limit the capacity of schools to allocate classes according to need.

Mr COPELAND: But surely, as minister, you would have an optimum size or a maximum size, particularly for a classroom full of 4½-year-old prep students.

Mr WELFORD: The optimum size is 25.

Mr COPELAND: But surely you have a maximum number that you would like to see in a classroom.

Mr WELFORD: We understand that in most cases it will be very rare for many of these classes to be above 25 in the years P to 3. That is certainly the aim. We will do our best to see that that is the case. Again, it is difficult to predict precisely what will happen in the prep year just yet because we do not have precise numbers.

Mr COPELAND: With the planning that you are doing for next year, how many full-time equivalent teacher aides will you need to cover the amount of teacher aide time that you have allocated to prep for next year?

Mr WELFORD: The department reports teacher numbers in terms of full-time equivalents and it reports teacher aide staffing in terms of hours. This is just a historical precedent. From time to time I insist on those hours being converted to teacher numbers, but it does not make a lot of sense because most teacher aides are, in fact, part-time. So the number of teacher aides can be quite significantly different from the number of full-time equivalents.

Mr COPELAND: Well, if you want to provide hours—

Mr WELFORD: As I indicated to you before, we are funding 100 new state school teachers for prep and allocating up to 10,000 additional teacher aide hours per week.

Mr COPELAND: So what does that take the total teacher aide hours to, with the additional 10,000?

Mr WELFORD: No, that is an additional 10,000 for prep.

Mr COPELAND: Yes, that is right. How many hours does that then provide for prep in total hours of teacher aide time—not just the additional but the total—

Mr WELFORD: My understanding is that 10,000 is around about the aggregate including for the trial schools. There is no addition to that. You are talking about prep, are you not?

Mr COPELAND: Yes.

Mr WELFORD: Well, for prep teacher aide hours, it is 10,000 hours a week.

Mr COPELAND: In total?

Mr WELFORD: It is 10,000 for prep.

Mr COPELAND: Additional?

Mr WELFORD: Yes, additional to all other teacher aide hours that currently exist across all other year levels.

Mr COPELAND: I want to be quite clear, because my understanding was that that announcement you made of the 10,000 hours was in addition to the previously allocated teacher aide time to prep. Am I correct in saying that?

Mr WELFORD: I understand now what you are driving at. The announcement of the 10,000 additional hours is an announcement of those hours in addition to the allocated component of 15 hours per class.

Mr COPELAND: That is right. So how many hours in total—

CHAIR: With your agreement, we might extend the time for the minister to answer the question. There have been a few questions going back and forth and his time has expired. I think there are another two minutes.

Mr COPELAND: Yes, that is fine. I was just trying to clarify the answers as we go. It makes it easier than coming back.

Mr WELFORD: Again, the 10,000 hours was to provide a comfort zone over and above the 15 hours per class. We cannot define precisely what the aggregate of the 10,000 plus 15 hours per class is until we know exactly how many classes there are. We do not know how many classes we have until we know how many students we have. We will not know how many students we have until they are all enrolled by early next year.

Mr COPELAND: So, based on the estimation of 18½ thousand students, you have not done that estimation?

Mr WELFORD: Not until we see how many classes there are.

Mr COPELAND: With the planning that you have done, and obviously teacher aide time has been a significant area of concern from the public with the implementation of prep, how many hours in total would be required to cover the full-time allocation of a teacher aide to every prep class based on those 18½ thousand students?

Mr WELFORD: Well, again, it depends on the allocation to classes.

Mr COPELAND: A full-time teacher aide for every prep class across Queensland next year.

Mr WELFORD: It will vary significantly according to class size and the numbers of classes. For a full class it is 15 hours. For small schools that might have only two or three students, they still get a minimum of five hours. So, until we know exactly how many classes of prep year students we are going to require, we cannot allocate the hours. But we have guaranteed that there will be 15 hours per prep year class.

The allocative model for prep year teacher aide hours is as follows: it operates on an enrolment-driven sliding scale. That allocates a base of five hours teacher aide time for each class up to five students and 30 minutes per additional enrolment per week after that up to 25 prep students, providing a maximum of 15 hours teacher aide time per week for a full class. A supplementary prep to year 3 teacher aide allocation is to be made to support the early years where the school has 3½ or more full-time equivalent early years teachers. This allocation is also weighted according to a scale of socioeconomic disadvantage.

Mr COPELAND: Has the department done any work on estimating what it would cost or what hours would be required to provide a full-time teacher aide to every prep class next year?

Mr WELFORD: A full-time teacher aide?

Mr COPELAND: A full-time teacher aide to every prep class next year.

Mr WELFORD: I do not know that that calculation has been formally done.

Mr COPELAND: Surely it would have.

Mr WELFORD: The work that has been done is work on the allocative model that has been proposed in accordance with what was budgeted for when prep was first announced.

Mr COPELAND: Given the concern in the community—and it has been an ongoing concern; it is nothing new—about the lack of teacher aide hours in prep, surely the department has done some sort of estimation of what would be required to provide a full-time teacher aide.

Mr WELFORD: Well, no. In response to community concern I announced an additional 10,000 teacher aide hours. So in classes where there were special circumstances involving students with special needs or where additional support was required, that could be allocated. I am advised that every extra hour—and you can work this out for yourself—of teacher aide time that we were to allocate would cost \$2 million. You will be able to work out for yourself next year, when we know the class numbers and the class sizes, what it would take to increase the number of hours in a full class of 25 students from 15 to whatever number of hours you regard as a full-time teacher aide allocation. Even in the other years, a teacher allocation is usually up to 30 hours, which is not the 38¼ or 38½ hours that is standard full-time employment for teachers, which is why in terms of teacher aide reporting it is reported as hours rather than equivalent full-time positions.

Mr COPELAND: I acknowledge the extra 10,000 that you have made available, Minister, and have done on numerous occasions in the parliament, but I just cannot believe that there would not have been some estimate of what would be the total task required to provide a full-time teacher aide for all of prep next year. It has been such an issue that I just cannot—

Mr WELFORD: Well, you had better believe it, Mr Copeland, because you do not make those calculations unless you plan to do it. At no time has there been a plan or has consideration been given to providing full-time teacher aide provision to the prep year. There is a very good reason for that. Firstly, the students are at least on average six months older than students currently in preschool. The concern that arose as to whether or not teacher aide allocations in prep year were adequate essentially came from comparing what is currently preschool, a half-time cohort, with what is proposed at prep, a full-time cohort.

The additional 10,000 hours will assist schools, particularly those schools, as I say, where there are special circumstances that require some additional support, especially in the first few weeks or the first month or so of the year while students familiarise themselves with their routine. But, from my discussions with early childhood professionals and teachers who are currently in the trial prep year schools, the reality is that, because these students are full-time and not part-time, because they are, on average, older than children currently attending part-time preschool, the full-time allocation of a teacher aide to every class is not required in the way that it is required at preschool.

If there are circumstances that require some occasional additional support, then the additional teacher aide hours that we have allocated can also be pooled with the teacher aide hours that are allocated to years 1, 2 and 3. So across all those years—prep to 3—teacher aide hours can be allocated by the school and among the teachers according to the needs that they perceive to be necessary. You need to remember that a large portion of the students in prep are, in fact, the equivalent of year 1 students, and year 1 students cope quite comfortably—it could be as low as two hours a week in a class. You just need to remember we are not comparing apples with oranges. As I say, the concern I think comes from a mistaken comparison of what is currently part-time preschool with full-time prep where the students, because they are full-time and older, actually get into a routine much more effectively than preschool students currently do.

CHAIR: The first period of questioning is over. This period is allocated to government members. I call the honourable member for Whitsunday.

Ms JARRATT: Minister, I refer you to page 1-5 of the MPS and the program Tomorrow's Schools—Providing for a Smarter Future. Could you please provide the committee with an understanding of how this program will work?

Mr WELFORD: This program demonstrates our commitment to the future of young Queenslanders to ensure they have the best possible learning environment. As I indicated in my opening statement, this is a flagship program of our government in the forthcoming year's budget allocation.

Queensland already leads the nation in its education reform agenda and this program is another example of us planning for the future. Our investment of \$1 billion over the next five years is the most comprehensive school renewal program ever undertaken in Queensland. These funds will be directed to modernising and building new school facilities across the state. It will see an unprecedented degree of parent and local community involvement in deciding primary and secondary school requirements for the future. It is important to note that this funding is over and above our annual spending on school capital works.

The main features of the program are a five-year \$850 million capital injection into state schools, the largest one-off investment in school building projects in Queensland's history. This is in addition to the existing \$427.1 million capital program for next year. A \$50 million School Community Development Fund for state school communities for minor capital works projects will also be made available this year to improve a school's learning environment such as library and science lab upgrades. A \$100 million one-off contribution to Queensland's non-state school sector will improve school facilities in that sector. This was paid at the end of last financial year as a lump sum so that the non-state school sector can now allocate it as it sees fit over the next few years.

Over the last eight years our government has also been working hard to build new schools and to modernise existing schools. This has been occurring in an environment like no other in Australia where there is tremendous population growth in the most decentralised state in the country. We currently have a network of 1,276 schools, as I mentioned in the opening, and this requires significant ongoing maintenance and improvements. The \$1 billion program over these next five years will ensure we keep pace with population growth and the needs of a modern education system. Guidelines covering the \$850 million component of the Tomorrow's Schools Program are currently being finalised. These will provide the framework for the delivery of the program in state schools and underpin planning that will occur over the next 12 months. I would like to involve parents and citizens associations and local communities in an unprecedented way in shaping the direction of state school facilities in their regions for this program.

Ms MOLLOY: Minister, I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate you on the budget application, which I most sincerely think is absolutely wonderful. I would also like to comment that the schools in my electorate have benefited remarkably from the generosity of the state government, in particular Coolum State School, which has a new computer system being put in place. I know that that

community, which is socially and demographically impaired, will really appreciate it. Still on the program and your reference to the capital grants for school communities, can you provide any details of how the guidelines for these grants will apply and how decisions will be made about successful applicants?

Mr WELFORD: As I mentioned, the Tomorrow's Schools funding package will give us the opportunity to engage parents and the local community of schools in an unprecedented way in deciding the future of primary and secondary facility requirements in each district and in each region. Firstly, there is a \$50 million School Community Development Fund which builds on our government's support for school-driven improvement projects through the successful Smart School Subsidy Scheme and minor works grants to state schools that are currently in place. We recognise that parents, principals and school communities have visions for their schools and a strong view about what facilities or enhancements they need to deliver this vision. That is why as part of this package the first \$50 million will be made available to state schools and their P&Cs for immediate improvement projects.

We want to support enterprising school communities by giving them greater opportunity to improve and shape their school's learning environment. The guidelines covering this fund are currently being finalised and will be supplied to state schools in August. To give you an indication of how those guidelines will work, state schools will be able to apply for funding up to an amount determined by their enrolment numbers, location and socioeconomic indicators. Projects put forward must fall into one of a number of specified categories including environmental sustainability, special education or health and fitness.

In light of the current drought and weather restrictions, we are keen to see projects aimed at efficient water management, such as the installation of watering systems and rainwater tanks that might assist with irrigation of school ovals. Projects that enhance special education facilities to support students with disabilities, such as redesigning classrooms, will also be available. Schools will be encouraged to put forward projects that pool funding from a range of sources so that they can leverage whatever contribution we can make out of this program with other funds from the P&C or, indeed, other government programs such as the federal government's Community Water Grants Program so that we can maximise the outcomes that schools can achieve. Applications will be reviewed by regional panels made up of parent, principal and facility representatives. This group will recommend projects for funding to the regional director for endorsement and forwarding to the state office for consideration. Many of our state schools have already begun inquiring about the new fund. I look forward to keeping members updated on progress of the program in the parliament and announcing successful school projects before the end of the year.

Mr PEARCE: Minister, as you would be aware, all members of the parliament, in common with school communities right across the state, have an interest in capital works programs. What are some of the major capital works planned for the next 12 months?

Mr WELFORD: As I mentioned, our government is committed to a modern education system that meets the needs of students in the 21st century. Modernising our existing schools and building new schools across the state is a key priority of our capital works program. In the coming financial year \$497 million has been allocated for capital works for state schools. This includes the \$50 million for the School Community Development Fund that I have just talked about to the member for Noosa under the Tomorrow's Schools program. An amount of \$12.5 million has been allocated for the first-stage works at our new Queensland academies at Toowong and Kelvin Grove. Stage 1 of the Queensland Academy for Maths, Science and Technology at Toowong is currently under construction. Temporary accommodation is being leased at QUT Kelvin Grove for the Queensland Academy For Creative Arts in 2007 pending completion of a permanent building on a site in the urban village, hopefully for the start of school in 2008.

An amount of \$169.8 million has been allocated in the budget for new schools, classrooms and facilities. This includes \$11.37 million for the first stages of a new primary school at Burpengary West. Stage 1 will provide classroom accommodation and other facilities for up to 300 students from prep to year 7 and will be completed for the start of school in 2007. An amount of \$11.59 million has been allocated for the first stages of a new primary school at Edmonton West in Cairns. Stage 1 will be completed for the start of school in 2007 and provide classroom accommodation and other facilities for up to 190 students from prep to year 7. An amount of \$10.46 million for the Redlynch Middle School in Cairns has been allocated. Stage 1 will be completed for the start of school in 2007. This stage includes classroom accommodation and ancillary facilities for up to 240 students starting in years 7 and 8.

An amount of \$11.51 million has been allocated for the new Springfield Lakes State School. Stage 1 of that school will be completed for the start of school next year. This stage includes classroom accommodation and ancillary facilities for up to 300 students from prep to year 7. Lastly, \$35.3 million has been allocated for further stages of construction at several schools, including Stretton State College, Chancellor State College, North Lakes State College and Upper Coomera State College. Apart from new schools, we have also allocated \$98.5 million for a range of building improvement programs to modernise facilities, including \$7.9 million for Brisbane State High School, including a multipurpose hall and library, and \$1.6 million for the College of Wine and Tourism at Stanthorpe State High School.

Ms JARRATT: Minister, I refer you to page 1-6 of the MPS and the reference to the Asbestos Roof Replacement Program. I acknowledge that just this week we have announced another school in my electorate, Calen District State College, is to have one of its roofs replaced, and I thank you for that as do other members, I am sure, with schools right across the state having their roofs replaced. I understand that extraordinary progress is being made with this work. Could you please update the committee on the progress that is being made?

Mr WELFORD: I can inform the committee of the progress with the Asbestos Roof Replacement Program. As you know, our government was the first to comprehensively address the replacement of asbestos roofs in our state schools with this \$120 million Asbestos Roof Replacement Program. I can inform the committee today that as of last week—on 10 July—just over 12 months since the program began, we reached a major milestone when the 400th roof milestone was reached. This is a tremendous achievement and a credit to all involved. Our government has been able to fast-track the program by getting specialist tradesmen on board to work weekends as well as in school holidays. We intend to keep up this rate of work. In May this year I announced a further 177 roofs have been scheduled for replacement through to November this year. This will take the program past the halfway mark, with more than 470 roofs replaced in the first 18 months of the program.

I am also pleased to advise the committee that my department has just finalised planning to issue tenders for the replacement of another tranche of roofs—around 88—before the start of the new 2007 school year, weather permitting. In particular, I can advise the member for Whitsunday that asbestos roofs at Calen District State College and Cannonvale State School in the member's electorate will be amongst those replaced. This work will complete the replacements of all asbestos state schools in the Whitsunday electorate.

Ms Jarratt: Well done, Minister.

Mr WELFORD: That is great news for teachers, parents and students at the member's schools. Also, Ironside State School in the electorate of Indooroopilly will be in this new batch of 88. That will also complete all the asbestos roof replacement work in the electorate of Indooroopilly. This new round will take the total number of asbestos roofs replaced in Queensland state schools since the program began to more than 570 by the start of the school year next year.

That means that by February 2007 we will have completed the replacement of about 60 per cent of the approximately 930 asbestos roofs in state schools in the just over 18 months since the program began. I think members can do the quick sums and work out how long it will take to replace all the asbestos roofs in all our schools across the state, but I should reinforce that to achieve these targets we are relying on continuing fine weather and the availability of skilled tradesmen.

CHAIR: That is great news about Ironside State School. Minister, I refer you to page 1-6 of the MPS and that part that relates to Queensland academies and ask you to provide the committee with an update on how this project is progressing.

Mr WELFORD: The two Queensland academies really do represent a new era in public education. They will provide a way for our best and brightest students, as I have been describing them, to fast-track their school studies, specialise in their areas of interest and study university subjects in their final years of secondary school. They will also have the opportunity to work with industry to combine career based as well as university based studies.

These academies will be world-class, characterised by a spirit of innovation, enterprise and competitiveness that is at the cutting edge of contemporary international educational best practice. Both academies will commence in years 10 and 11 in 2007, expanding to include year 12 in 2008. I expect that students wanting to attend the academies will be keen learners with a positive work ethic, an inquiring mind, creativity, skill and talent. The academies will be innovative and will be different in design from existing schools with different modes of operation and different organisational structures and cultures.

Student selection is currently being finalised. As you may have noticed in recent media reports, nearly 400 young people sat an independently developed and assessed entrance exam recently. Interviews, including the submission of a portfolio of work or performance audition, have been occurring with prospective students and their parents. I expect the successful students to be notified in the next month or so.

We had always anticipated that around 400 students would be attracted to the two academies in their first year, and this is likely to be the final number. This really is a tremendous outcome for the first year of a totally new school facility. As members are aware, the science, maths and technology academy is being established on the redeveloped Toowong college site within your electorate, Mr Lee. The academy has links with the University of Queensland. The creative industries academy will be established in the Kelvin Grove Urban Village with links to both QUT and Griffith University. Griffith University will be able to work with both academies to offer students opportunities with specialist programs at that university.

It is planned that these partner universities will provide advanced placements for students and provide appropriate tertiary staff for mentoring and supervision purposes. The curriculum for the academies is planned to be the international baccalaureate diploma, which has become a leading, internationally recognised preuniversity qualification. The IB diploma encourages students to be inquiring, active learners, well-rounded individuals and engaged world citizens by promoting intercultural understanding and respect.

Ms MOLLOY: Minister, I refer you to page 1-8 of the MPS and the reference to literary and numeracy reforms. Could you advise the committee of progress regarding the implementation of the new literacy framework?

Mr WELFORD: Thank you for the question. It is essential that we give every student from prep to year 12 the best chance to master literacy and numeracy so that they can achieve in their other subjects and indeed meet the challenges of 21st century life. Our commitment to this is evidenced by the \$173 million we are investing in this budget to support literacy and numeracy initiatives.

Last year I launched a comprehensive new blueprint to boost student literacy skills in Queensland state schools. The plan, entitled 'Literacy—the key to learning: Framework for action 2006-2008', provides a strategy to develop higher literacy standards. It details the challenges but also provides responses. It focuses on four key elements: teacher professional development, literacy in the curriculum, student learning and leadership. The framework recognises that quality teaching can make the single biggest difference to students' literacy outcomes.

It will ensure every classroom teacher from years P to 9 has intensive training in the teaching of literacy, including the teaching of reading, grammar and spelling. Literacy skills are not just the responsibility of English teachers, however. Literacy will be regarded as an integral component of every subject taught in schools, including mathematics, science and technology.

Consequently, the framework has a strong focus on professional development for teachers, particularly in the prep to year 9 group, as well as professional development for teacher aides who work in early years classes. From October this year every region in Queensland will have a regional manager for literacy appointed to assist in improving the literacy achievement of all students in schools in the region. These managers will have specific expertise in the teaching of literacy. They will be required to lead and deliver professional development for teachers and teacher aides in the years P to 9 and build literacy leadership capacity within their region.

CHAIR: The period allocated for government questions has now expired. We will swing back to a period of non-government questions. I call the member for Cunningham.

Mr COPELAND: At the start of next year, how many prep classes will be located in demountable, modular or other temporary buildings?

Mr WELFORD: This is a false distinction that is often raised. I do not know whether you have managed to visit any of the new prep classrooms. You will see that they are of very high quality. I went out to the factory where they are being prefabricated. They are prefabricated, trucked out to the site and then stumped on site and obviously connected to facilities. If it is necessary for them to have stairs and so forth that are then set up.

I am not sure what your question is driving at. Some of our existing classrooms are brick on slab. There are a lot of schools, particularly the older ones, which were built in situ as timber construction. There are a lot of new facilities which are insulated, high-quality and prefabricated and installed on site. In most cases the classrooms in these new facilities are larger. They include kitchens and design components that are more suited to the modern teaching environment and provide space for teachers such as storage and so forth.

If what you are driving at is an issue of quality then I would caution you against making false assumptions or mistaking the fact that a building that is prefabricated and installed is of any less quality. Indeed, the new ones are of better quality than many of the older classrooms in buildings that were built from the ground up.

Mr COPELAND: How many classes of prep will be in facilities that are not planned to be the permanent facilities for those prep classes?

Mr WELFORD: That is a better question. I am not sure of the answer to that one.

Mr COPELAND: Thank you.

Mr WELFORD: It is actually difficult to estimate that at this stage. Let me say this: all the prep facilities that we have installed have involved either the refurbishment of existing classrooms or the installation of new modular buildings that you have seen—that is, the prefabricated constructed classrooms. All of the classrooms of either form have been built to the design specifications and standards that we specify for the prep year. These are high-quality classrooms for every prep class in the state.

The only circumstances where a classroom might be installed that may not be permanent would be circumstances where, as we talked about earlier, we identify at the start of next year the urgent need for another classroom, in which case it may well be that we install another modular classroom which may or may not be permanent, depending on how the numbers develop at that school in the future. If the numbers drop then theoretically the classroom could be moved to a location where numbers are growing.

All these sorts of decisions in terms of whether modular classrooms are removed or not are made on a case-by-case basis. In some cases the classrooms are not removed and in some cases they are. It depends on the needs of a region and the needs of the school concerned.

Mr COPELAND: So all those permanent facilities for those classes will be finished and ready to go come day one?

Mr WELFORD: At this stage all the planning for all the prep classes is on budget and on track for them to open next year. Every classroom that is currently planned for prep next year is regarded as a permanent classroom. As I say, any variation on that will only occur if emergent situations arise at the start of next year in terms of numbers that have not been predicted by the schools concerned or their region.

Mr COPELAND: I have some other questions on prep, but we are going to run out of time so I will move on to another area and if we have time I will come back to those later on. I refer to page 1-23 of the MPS, under 'Safe and supportive school environment'. How many assaults have occurred in Queensland state schools over the past 12 months? Have any of them involved a weapon of any sort? If so, what weapons were they and on how many occasions was a weapon used?

Mr WELFORD: Mr Copeland, I think you might appreciate that, while we do keep some broad figures on disciplinary action in terms of suspensions and exclusions, we do not require schools to drill down to every fine detail the reason for those disciplinary actions. Discipline is a matter for schools to manage. As you will recall, I have released a code of school conduct statewide which each school will now draw on to develop their responsible behaviour plans. It is a matter for schools to then manage behaviour and ensure that students behave responsibly and have respect for one another, their teachers and their school.

While we do keep records of exclusions and suspensions, we do not keep precise details on whether it is an assault or whether it is some other offence or indeed the detail that you are seeking on whether a weapon was used or not. We do keep some broad categories of whether the conduct relates to property or whether it is physical misconduct or verbal misconduct. They are very broad categories.

Mr COPELAND: So you do not keep any records of how many times a teacher in a school has been assaulted or whether other students have been assaulted?

Mr WELFORD: Not specifically. In circumstances where an assault justifies police involvement then obviously there may be some records that the police would keep in terms of school assaults. But short of something constituting a criminal offence that justifies police involvement, we ultimately do leave it to schools to manage these situations and report only according to broad categories where there are suspensions or exclusions.

Mr COPELAND: So if a student brought in a gun, in the worst instance, or a knife or a screwdriver or attacked someone with a pair of scissors, you would not be advised that anything like that had happened?

Mr WELFORD: If you want to talk about weapons, where it involves a serious offence of that kind, then the standard procedure is that it has to be reported to the police and then it becomes a police matter. Where a teacher is affected, for example, then clearly it is also an issue of workplace health and safety. So those sorts of situations that I think you are really directing your question to in terms of serious offences of assault will invariably be referred to the police for investigation and whatever action follows.

Mr COPELAND: And the department would keep a record of that, presumably?

Mr WELFORD: It may be possible for us to get that detail, but certainly the schools keep that record. We do not routinely draw upon it unless we have to, and there is no particular reason in the normal circumstances that we would need to draw upon it. As I say, once these matters are referred to the police it is a police matter. It is not a matter that our department would take any action on for any particular case.

Mr COPELAND: Can you take it on notice to provide that level of detail?

Mr WELFORD: It depends what you want me to put on notice. Do you want me to put on notice assaults of teachers or assaults involving weapons or assaults generally? We need to clarify what we are actually asking here, because some information is recorded and some is not. I can only collect information that is recorded. What is recorded are incidents which, because they involve a teacher or other staff member, require referral to the workers compensation agency. So we can actually draw that information out where that is involved. If you want that, we can provide that.

Mr COPELAND: Thanks. So in those routine cases when it involves a staff member, it obviously goes off and it is recorded. There is no recording of when it involves another student?

Mr WELFORD: The schools would keep a record of what action they took in response to the incident and that action would be a referral to the police. So we might be able to draw out data on the number of referrals to police.

Mr COPELAND: If we could have that as well, thank you.

Mr WELFORD: We will try to obtain that for you on notice.

Mr COPELAND: Yes. Thanks, Minister. Minister, moving on to similar—

Mr WELFORD: Upon your undertaking to use the information judiciously.

Mr COPELAND: Absolutely. You know that that is the case, Minister.

Mr WELFORD: Rather than more scandal-mongering purposes.

Mr COPELAND: I should be offended at that, Minister. Minister, I turn to the issue of drugs in schools. How many occurrences of drug use have been discovered in Queensland schools in the past 12 months? What drugs were they, and on how many occasions for each drug? Obviously I am trying to gauge what are the problem drugs in schools.

Mr WELFORD: Well, we are into the good news, aren't we? We do have some broad data that I can give you. I think this will give you enough for the purposes that I think you are going to use it for. We have data—this is a summary—from term 3 in 2004 to term 2 in 2005. Let me run through them. The total number of incidents resulting in a short suspension—that is, up to five days—for substance misconduct involving tobacco and other legal substances was 1,864. That is one per 1,000 students—0.1 per cent of one per cent of students. Some students got longer than five days, and there were 97 incidents of that. There may be in many of those incidents that I have mentioned one student committing more than one of them. For substance misconduct which involved illicit or illegal substances, in that same period there were 335 short suspensions and 181 long suspensions as well as 102 exclusions.

Mr COPELAND: You do not have any detail of the sort of illicit substances that have been the problem or main problem areas?

Mr WELFORD: Not in more detail than simply that illicit substances were involved. I can of course give you more information about what we are doing about these sorts of things—and I think that is probably what you are really wanting to know—as a result of that sort of information. Obviously the inappropriate use of drugs by young people in schools is a matter of great concern not only to me as the minister but also to parents. Educating young people about drugs and their harmful effects is an important part of developing their life skills.

Our state schools have a very strong drug education program guided by the Drug Education and Intervention in Schools policy. This policy aims to ensure that all students receive ongoing sequential and comprehensive drug education while they are at school. Students receive information about the types of drugs that they are most likely to encounter—not only tobacco but also alcohol, cannabis and prescription drugs. All students have access to drug education in school through years 1 to 10, particularly in relation to the health and phys. ed. syllabus as well as the life skills and pastoral care programs that are run in the senior years.

Since 1999 the department has worked with the Queensland Catholic Education Commission and the Association of Independent Schools of Queensland as well as the Commonwealth on our Queensland Drug Education Strategy. The strategy includes professional development for teachers, drug education support materials and a dedicated web site. Schools are allocated funds to engage external agencies to provide drug education programs as required. There is an expectation that if a criminal offence occurs on school grounds the matter is referred to the police, as mentioned earlier.

Mr COPELAND: Minister, I turn to the issue of retention rates on page 1-73 of the MPS. Minister, when your government came to power in 1998 the apparent retention rate for students from years 8 to 12, which is now a discontinued measure given the changes in structure, was 72 per cent. It is now 71 per cent, which is four per cent below the current target, and no retention rate at all for each of the individual areas has increased. Why have those retention rates gotten worse during this government's tenure?

Mr WELFORD: I think there are a number of explanations in relation to that. The first thing is that our target is, in a sense, aspirational. We want as many students as possible to be either learning or earning. As you know, that is our government's theme in terms of what we want to achieve in high school education. For years 8 to 12, those targets that you talk of and the previous levels that you mentioned were in a vastly different climate to what we are currently doing. Those were in times where, in a sense I suppose, there was an exaggerated emphasis on high school education for university or tertiary entrance. What we now realise is that we have a serious skills shortage when it comes to the trades occupations. That is why we have transformed our programs to the learning or earning philosophy.

The Education and Training Reforms for the Future initiative introduced significant changes to the senior phase of learning. Apparent retention rates are only one indicator of young people's participation in secondary school education, particularly in years 10 to 12. They are a simple measure that divides the number of students present in year 10 by the number present in year 12, and that is what we currently report on. But in the context of multiple pathways now made available to students under our learning or earning ethos, the measure should be interpreted with some caution. Australian Bureau of Statistics full-time retention rates for year 10 to year 12 in 2005 showed that the rate for Queensland government schools was 72.7 per cent. That is higher than the average rate for government schools nationally, which is 71.3 per cent.

Our Youth Participation in Education and Training Act introduced in 2003 and our Training Reform Act also aim to ensure young people remain in education or training until the age of 17. So from the start of this year, young people are required to stay at school until they finish year 10 or turn 16, whichever comes first. After that, they are required to participate in education or training for a further two years or until they have gained a Senior Certificate or certificate III vocational qualification or they turn 17. The laws exempt people who work for at least 25 hours per week after they have completed year 10 or turn 16. So in many cases, these students are now moving on to jobs before they finish year 12, which is why the aspirational target of 75 per cent mentioned at page 1-73 is not necessarily being achieved right now. Our Next Step destination surveys are specifically dedicated to identifying what is happening here and where students are going after year 10. That will give us a clearer understanding of the dynamics of student pathways under the new education and training reforms.

Mr COPELAND: Minister, I refer to the quality and the benchmarks on pages 1-28 and 1-32 of the MPS. Ten out of the 12 benchmarks were not met in the past year. Why have we had that performance against the national benchmarks in Queensland?

Mr WELFORD: Which benchmarks are you specifically referring to?

Mr COPELAND: Year 2 reading, year 2 writing, year 2 numeracy, year 3 reading, year 5 writing, year 5 reading, year 5 numeracy, year 7 reading, year 7 writing and year 7 numeracy.

Mr WELFORD: Again, the targets we have set ourselves are very high targets—targets that are well above national averages. So you need to see those targets as aspirational. Part of the reason that I this year launched our literacy strategy was to strengthen our effort to grow the achievement that we are already making.

Mr COPELAND: That is the national benchmark, though, in the target.

Mr WELFORD: That is what I just said.

Mr COPELAND: You said it was your target. It is the national target.

Mr WELFORD: Our target is significantly ahead of national benchmarks. In other words, it is aspirational. The fact that we do not achieve it does not mean that we are a total failure. It means that we have more work to do. We have set those benchmarks. As you can see, in the year 3 test for reading we have set it at 97 per cent. No state in Australia goes anywhere near that, but we have set that high benchmark because that is what we want to strive for.

International studies, though, show that we are doing pretty well if you want to draw comparisons nationally and internationally in the areas of literacy and numeracy. The results of the OECD Program of International Student Assessment, called PISA, show that Queensland 15-year-olds—because that is the real benchmark; what students achieve by the end of their main schooling—performed very well. Among the 39 participating countries, Australia generally was above the OECD average in all areas and ahead of countries including the US, Germany and France in most areas, including maths, reading and science. Queensland's performance on the PISA tests was similar to the national performance in all areas tested, thus demonstrating our high-level performance in the literacy and numeracy outcomes at the end of the compulsory phase of schooling when compared internationally.

At the national level, Queensland reports the percentage of students whose performance is above the national literacy and numeracy benchmarks. Performance is measured by means of a score that is overlaid on each state's results from its own literacy and numeracy tests. Each state currently has different tests in this regard, which is why we are moving to more consistent tests in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 as discussed at our recent ministerial council.

CHAIR: We will now go back to questions from government members. I call the honourable member for Fitzroy.

Mr PEARCE: I want to take you back to page 1-8 of the MPS and the references there to literacy and numeracy and equipping students with the essentials of learning. Could you tell the committee what emphasis you as the minister place on homework as an essential part of learning?

Mr WELFORD: Was your question directed specifically at literacy or numeracy or did you want to address the issue—

Mr PEARCE: I am really interested in the emphasis you place on homework as an essential part of learning.

Mr WELFORD: Yes, page 1-8 of the MPS. Homework can be a very useful and important way for students to consolidate their classroom work and get into the right learning habits. However, it is important that we recognise that children need to involve themselves in a lot of other activity as they are growing up. It is really a matter of balance and that is the emphasis of our new homework policy which, you may have heard, I am issuing today.

This new policy will provide principals, teachers and parents with common-sense guidelines on what reasonable levels of homework might be expected to be. The policy recognises the different learning needs of different age groups and provides a very solid basis for schools upon which to develop their own individual approaches to setting homework in consultation with parents.

The emphasis of the policy is on helping students establish a positive routine of regular, independent study without going overboard in terms of maintaining a life balance. For our younger students, I think it is important that parents get involved in reading to their children and encouraging them in a range of activities. For older students, the focus is on parents helping students maintain a balance between their study commitments and the amount of time they spend doing other things, such as watching television or playing sport, playing with the Xbox or, indeed, their part-time work commitments. So the key really is to achieve a proper balance while ensuring that good patterns of regular commitment to homework are established. Homework is important but so, too, are the other healthy activities that young people need to undertake.

If you look at the guideline that I am issuing today, you will see that by way of suggested levels—as a guide only—in the prep year students should not have set homework as such. In years 1, 2 and 3, homework could be set up for up to about an hour a week; in years 4, and 5, between two and three hours a week; in years 6 and 7, up to three to four hours a week; and up to five hours a week in years 8 and 9. In the senior years, there is a senior education and training plan that each student will have. They can allocate the time for homework according to the demands of their program.

CHAIR: I want to stay with page 1-8 of the MPS and make reference to QCAR, the new Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Framework. Could you explain the benefits of this new process?

Mr WELFORD: QCAR, or the Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting project will, I believe, have widespread benefits for schools and students. It is being undertaken by the Queensland Studies Authority on behalf of the government and it is being developed in partnership with all the school sectors.

The framework maps out what must be taught, how students are assessed and how their results are reported to parents from prep to year 10. For the first time in our state's history we will set common assessment standards in English, maths and science plus one other essential subject for years 4, 6 and 9. This assessment will be in addition to the existing national 3, 5 and 7 tests. All students, whether they are in the city or in the country and whether they are in private or public schools, will receive equal treatment when their work is assessed under these year 4, 6 and 9 assessments. This will give parents a clearer understanding of their children's progress and identify for parents and teachers those students who need extra help and those who are gifted and should be advanced. I expect that parents will welcome easier to read report cards written in plain English.

The framework will also provide our teachers with greater clarity on what they must teach and tools they can use to assess a student's progress. It will ensure that students from prep year right through to year 10 will also be assessed on a similar basis across schools so that we know which students need additional help and which are performing above expectations. With all students undertaking common tests, it will also be possible to compare the performance of different schools, to learn from schools performing well and to focus extra attention on schools that are struggling. In addition, parents will be better informed on their child's progress. Rather than each school reporting results in a different way, we will have a common reporting scale. Consistency from one school to the next will especially benefit the 25 per cent of Queensland children who change schools each year.

The QCAR project will be developed over the next two years with trials beginning in schools next year in the lead-up to full implementation by all schools—public and private—in 2008. To date, we have established the QCAR board with representatives from the state, Catholic and independent schooling sectors to oversee the work. We have published some draft essential learnings and standards on the Queensland Studies Authority web site. We have commenced trials in both state and non-state schools this year and there will be further trials next year in the lead-up to full implementation in 2008.

Ms JARRATT: Thank you for that information about the assessment framework. I want to flesh out a little further the reporting framework and ask you to provide information about how parents can access information about schools, particularly in regard to report cards and teachers.

Mr WELFORD: Yes. The past two years have seen a significant transformation in school reporting accountability in our state. As members may be aware, our government initiated some widespread community consultation in 2004, which attracted some 700 submissions from parents,

teachers and principals. This culminated in a report on changes to school reporting. The outcome of that process was that from this year we want to guarantee parents that there will be at least two written student report cards a year and parent-teacher interviews each semester so that we make sure that there is an established and uniform minimum standard of engagement with parents on their student's progress.

Since 2005, every school was required to publish information about its annual performance. It was also agreed that a broad range of year 12 results for all Queensland schools will be published every year. That happened earlier this year, as you probably recall, in the *Courier-Mail* and it will happen again next year. Schools are required to include key aspects of this data in their school annual report. From this year, these reports must be augmented with post-school destination information following the release of the Next Step destination survey, which is available in August each year. The survey provides valuable information on the study, employment and other destinations of year 12 students in the year after leaving school.

We also are committed to presenting the results of statewide literacy and numeracy tests for years 3, 5 and 7 in a new, easier to read format. In addition, all Queensland schools will report in their annual report their student performance information for parents and the community of those schools. This year, there has been an additional requirement that a school's annual report must be accessible on the school web site by 30 June each year.

In April this year I announced that a new grading system for students will be introduced into Queensland state schools—again to provide clearer, plain English and more consistent information for parents. Schools will provide students with twice yearly reports in a common format that will detail the areas of learning a student is studying and their results. It will also record teacher comments as well as extracurricular activities and the number of days a student is absent.

I think it is important that parents and the community have confidence in the quality of education being delivered in our state schools. The best way to do that is to ensure that parents are kept informed of the achievements of their children at school.

Ms MOLLOY: I refer to pages 1-28 and 1-32 of the MPS and the reference in there to numeracy and literacy tests. Being a parent of children who have been educated in almost every state of Australia, I think it is important that Queenslanders can see how we compare to the other states when we are looking at the targets that are set.

Mr WELFORD: Thank you. This is a useful follow-up question to the question from the member for Cunningham in relation to our benchmarks, especially for literacy and numeracy, in the MPS. Firstly, I think it is important that I explain how the targets are set in terms of the national benchmarks. Put simply, our targets are a goal for schools to aim for. They are an incentive to continue to strive for excellence. So the targets are, as I said before, intentionally aspirational. That means that they are deliberately set high. The targets set in the MPS each year are influenced by the students' performance in the prior year's test. They are only broad indicators of performance. To use these outcomes of benchmark testing to claim that Queensland education is failing shows a misunderstanding of what the reporting system is designed to achieve in the MPS.

The latest published national data for 2003-04, the National Report on Schooling in Australia, shows that Queensland is performing very well at the national level. The vast majority of Queensland students are achieving the literacy and numeracy benchmarks. The report shows that the overwhelming majority of Queensland students are above the benchmark for reading, writing and numeracy. In all areas, more than eight out of 10 students achieve these benchmarks and in most areas more than nine out of 10 students are achieving the national benchmarks.

Although the 2005 nationally comparable data is not yet available, Queensland students are not and cannot in any way be seen as failing, as the opposition might be minded to suggest. In 2005, not only have year 3 students exceeded the target set in numeracy with 91.4 per cent achieving the national benchmark but over 92 per cent of students in year 3 in 2005 also achieved the national benchmark for reading and over 87 per cent achieved the national benchmark for writing. Queensland also does extremely well in literacy and numeracy tests at the national level. The results from the OECD PISA tests that I mentioned earlier show that Queensland 15-year-olds perform very well against international standards.

I should mention that not only do we exceed national benchmarks at higher levels than every other state except Tasmania with those figures that I just gave you but we do that in the context where the student cohort in our schools being tested is uniformly six to 12 months younger than students in the other states, because we have yet to adjust our year levels, after the introduction of prep, to the same year levels and age groups as the other states have. So we are exceeding national benchmarks for literacy and numeracy at higher levels of student proportion than every other state except Tasmania and we are doing it with younger students. That is not a bad effort.

Mr PEARCE: I would like to take you back to page 1-7 of the MPS. You have already made a number of responses to non-government members with regard to the prep year. Could you summarise where we are at with the preparation for the introduction of this new year of schooling?

Mr WELFORD: Yes. I am happy to give some more information about the rollout of prep this year. Of course, next year will be a landmark for our education system with the introduction of the new full-time prep year. The real purpose of prep is to give children a head start in their education—not only to set them on a path to lifelong learning but to accelerate them into year 1 so that rather than starting year 1, in a sense, flat-footed students are acclimatised to the learning environment and hit the ground running right from year 1.

Whether in a state or non-state school, in urban or remote areas, prep will be available as a universal service next year in contrast to the part-time geographically distributed preschool, which is not available everywhere and which is not open to everyone once the preschool quotas are full. So prep year is a significant step forward for access to education in the year prior to year 1.

We have started phasing in the prep year at 96 state and 24 non-state schools to road-test the new curriculum, facilities and resources and to determine the professional development needs of staff. An advertising and awareness campaign alerting parents and the general community about the introduction of prep year was stepped up in late February and will continue throughout this year to encourage parents to ensure that they get their child enrolled in prep as soon as possible. With just over six months remaining before prep goes 'live' at the start of next year, preparations are well and truly on track.

We will be employing, as I have indicated, an additional 100 teachers next year to supplement the early education staff who are already in preschools. Prep teachers for 2007 from the existing state school workforce have been identified and will be attending professional development this term to introduce the new curriculum for prep. Our regional HR managers are working with local principals and their permanent teacher aides currently employed in preschools to coordinate their deployment.

In terms of training, \$1.4 million has been allocated in 2006-07 for staff professional development specifically for the prep year. In our state schools, over 900 primary school principals and 1,400 early years teachers and teacher aides will attend workshops this year in terms of professional development for the early years curriculum. The *Early Years Curriculum Guidelines* has been published and provided to district officers for distribution to schools and is already being piloted by the teachers in our trial schools. State schools are currently buying curriculum resources such as books, art and craft materials and indoor play equipment.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank not only the state school teachers involved but also the Catholic and independent sectors for their cooperation in the introduction of the new prep year and the trials that they have been conducting in their schools.

CHAIR: Minister, I refer you to page 2-2 of the MPS and the work of the Queensland Studies Authority to prepare the *Early Years Curriculum Guidelines*. Could you explain the curriculum and how teachers are being prepared?

Mr WELFORD: While I am getting more information on the curriculum component, I should perhaps fill out some of the information that Mr Copeland was seeking. In terms of the capital works program for the prep facilities, we have allocated up to \$350 million to provide the facilities in state and non-state schools. In this coming financial year, the component of that \$350 million is \$106 million towards new and refurbished state school facilities. In our state schools, work commenced in 2004. In aggregate, there will be 1,600 new or refurbished classrooms by 2008. So we have budgeted on 1,600 classes or thereabouts, and obviously that will firm up once we get a clearer indication of figures. Eighty-two per cent of the new classrooms and 61 per cent of the refurbishments are pretty much complete at this stage.

In terms of the curriculum, the QSA is responsible for the *Early Years Curriculum Guidelines* to support the introduction of the prep year next year. The guidelines were completed in September last year. Teacher support materials as well as the curriculum guidelines are now on the Queensland Studies Authority web site. All prep year teachers and school principals received a copy of the *Early Years Curriculum Guidelines*, a CD-ROM of resource material as well as posters that they can use in their classrooms.

The Queensland Studies Authority has delivered workshops to 132 prep facilitators from across the three school sectors in March this year, and those facilitators will now provide face-to-face professional development for prep teachers in the latter part of this year and into next year. QSA will finalise and publish the professional development materials to support those teachers who do not receive face-to-face PD from the prep facilitators, and they will also provide telephone support.

CHAIR: Thanks, Minister. We will return to questions from non-government members. We have about 11 minutes before morning tea and we will continue with non-government questions after morning tea.

Mr WELLINGTON: Minister, with respect to page 1-5 of the MPS under the heading 'Building new schools for new times', what effects do you anticipate the proposed Traveston Dam will have on school communities in the Mary River? Are there any resources and funding implications for your department and, if so, do you know what they might be?

Mr WELFORD: That reference is to our Tomorrow's Schools program, the \$1 billion program that I talked about in my opening statement and in response to some of the questions. That will see a significant investment in not only new schools but also renewal of existing schools. At this stage it is not expected that any schools will be inundated by the Traveston Dam. It is possible that schools in the neighbouring district could be affected by student attendance in terms of whether the location of the dam results in some students travelling to different schools from the ones they currently travel to because of the effect of the dam on the travel routes in the area. At this stage no schools that I am aware of will be inundated or have to be closed down, except if there are consequential impacts of the dam—that is, if for some reason students at a small school who live in a geographic location so affected by the dam that it affects their travel arrangements and a large proportion of them go to another school and thus leave their existing school with too few students to be viable.

The schools in the area—and you would be familiar with some of these—are Federal State School, Kandanga State School, Kandanga Creek State School and the Mary Valley State College at Imbil. At this stage we do not anticipate any short- to medium-term impact on those schools, as I say, until we see whether the travel patterns of students attending those schools are affected by the first stage of the dam. Of course, that could change in 30 years time if the further stages of the dam are pursued.

Mr WELLINGTON: Minister, with respect to page 1-8 of your MPS under the heading 'Equipping students with the essentials for learning and life', some schools in my electorate have had school chaplaincy for many years and believe that this provides a very valuable service for students. Are there any opportunities in your budget for schools to receive any financial support for this school chaplaincy program? If not, can you advise what resources are allocated to the school nurse program in the state and, in particular, in the Sunshine Coast area?

Mr WELFORD: The program of chaplaincy services commenced as an initiative of local churches providing religious instruction to their members in schools. These, of course, are optional services, and I should say at the outset that there is no specific government budget allocation for the provision of chaplaincy services. I have chaplaincy services at a number of high schools in my own electorate, and I am aware that those services are provided through a combination of school resources, funds raised by P&Cs or community sponsorships to provide chaplaincy in schools from corporate sponsors and the like. My department does not employ chaplains as such to provide chaplaincy services. The schools, however, are free to engage chaplains and raise funds for that purpose.

Scripture Union has statewide accreditation to employ chaplains for placement in state schools and is currently the only statewide organisation active in this role. I support Scripture Union in its role. The chaplains whom I have met at a number of schools on the north side of Brisbane are outstanding, mostly young people who relate marvellously well with students in the schools and provide great support and pastoral care for those students. The chaplains are not strenuously involved in religious instruction as such. They provide general care to all students regardless of religious denomination or religious interest. I support the operation of chaplaincy in schools. I welcome schools who seek to expand that service and anyone who wants to assist schools in that service, but there is no current plan to specifically allocate government funds to what is a complimentary service.

In relation to school nurses, they are employed by Queensland Health and allocated to schools. I am advised that we currently have 121 school nurses working in state high schools. We also have 113 youth support coordinators, who are funded by my department but employed by the Department of Communities so that they are seen to be independent of the high schools where they work. So, as I say, we have 121 nurses, 113 youth support coordinators, chaplains on an optional basis where schools choose to have them and, on top of that, 35 full-time police.

Mr WELLINGTON: Minister, with respect to page 1-9 of the MPS under the heading 'Students with disabilities', do you plan to build any more stand-alone special schools like the Nambour Special School? I heard your answers earlier about the capital works program.

Mr WELFORD: At this stage there are no specific plans. Obviously I will be monitoring that, because in past years a number of the facilities certainly in and around Brisbane were closed. We have just built a new one for the Coolangatta Special School. The Coolangatta Special School on the hill at Kirra on the Gold Coast was closed. It was a very old facility and certainly needed new facilities for that school. A new facility has been built for that school. That is the latest in terms of new stand-alone special schools.

We will continue to monitor the demands upon schools where students are currently being integrated. If there are sufficient numbers of parents in a region where a stand-alone special school can be justified or is necessary, then obviously that is something that we will consider. We currently have 45 special schools across the state.

Mr WELLINGTON: With respect to page 1-8 under the heading 'Supporting better behaviour in the classroom' and your answers to my questions on notice and other questions this morning, what are the criteria that a school principal can rely on to remove students with bad behaviour from their schools? You have spoken about your moves to improve the requirement of better behaviour, but what can a principal do to remove students who are simply not suited to their current classroom environment?

Mr WELFORD: Let me step through the logic of the school behaviour framework that I envisage for our schools following the release of the code of school behaviour statewide. The starting point is that the statewide school behaviour code sets the broad parameters of what the expectations are in terms of behaviour. Following that, each school develops a responsible behaviour plan and in that plan they can specify the sorts of penalties that can apply for various categories of misbehaviour. Ultimately, as in the courts—as you as a lawyer would understand—the principal exercises discretion around these things. The starting point in the exercise of that discretion as I see it is that by and large we want to direct students' energies towards a positive outlook to learning. In other words, wherever possible we do not suspend or exclude students—that is a last resort. We have a range of measures now in place to address the issues of learning and behaviour, starting with the management of minor disciplinary matters by the school according to their responsible behaviour plan; the professional development of teachers to better engage students and inspire or excite them in their learning so that they are not distracted into misbehaviour; and then the establishment of what I am calling positive learning centres. You are probably aware of a number of them. I announced an additional six bringing the total to 11 positive learning centres across the state currently. I am aware that the Queensland Teachers Union has asked for more and, resources permitting, I will look at that option in due course.

The positive learning centres are an opportunity for time-out in a sense. A student is removed from the classroom, from the school, and goes to a positive learning centre where they get dedicated support to re-focus their attention back on learning. The idea of the positive learning centre is not to create a permanent Gulag or a prison cell for these students, it is about re-engaging them so that we can get them back into the classroom as quickly as we possibly can, back with their peers and engaged in learning in a positive way. That is why we call them positive learning centres.

As a last resort there is the option of suspending or excluding students. I think the emergence of positive learning centres could well see suspensions decline a little and there is less reliance on suspensions and more on specialist support. Ultimately there has to be a sanction where students are simply incompatible with school education and in those circumstances after exclusion they will have access to distance education.

CHAIR: Thank you, everyone. It is time for little lunch. We will resume at 10.30 am.

Sitting suspended from 10.16 am to 10.34 am.

CHAIR: Welcome back, everyone. The committee will now continue its examination of the portfolio of the Minister for Education and Minister for the Arts. I call the honourable member for Nicklin, who has another seven minutes.

Mr WELLINGTON: Thank you, Mr Chairman. With respect to 1-5 of your portfolio statement under the heading 'Meeting Growth and Modernising Our Public Schools', I ask: is your department working with the Department of Transport to ensure that the education transport subsidy scheme is relevant and consistent with parents' expectations as to the schools that they would prefer their children to go to?

Mr WELFORD: I thank the member for Nicklin for the question. We are wanting to make sure that all our schools are not only up to scratch in terms of the quality of the learning environment, the classrooms, the modernisation of our schools, but also we want to make them accessible. We are in constant liaison with Queensland Transport about the program. It has been refined over the years. Every now and then there are glitches where parents write to me or the transport minister to alert us to what they see to be an anomaly in the availability of access to the transport subsidy scheme. Queensland Transport currently provides more than \$120 million in subsidies under this scheme. This will assist about 140,000 students travelling in 2006-07. It assists students in mainstream schools, but there is a separate program which my department manages that assists students with disabilities with transport between home and school as well.

Queensland Transport is responsible for the bus transport policy. Queensland Transport manages that component of transport assistance. We do, as I say, liaise with them on policy and operational issues. Essentially the eligibility requirement is that if a student lives more than 3.2 kilometres from the nearest state primary school or 4.8 kilometres from the nearest state secondary school then they are eligible for the subsidy. Certain what are called safety net students are also eligible for a subsidy where there are special circumstances that affect those students and they are closer than those thresholds. We have also worked with Queensland Transport on a code of conduct for students travelling on buses so that bus drivers know how they can manage student behaviour.

The allocation for this coming year is \$120.3 million. That does not include an additional \$27 million that is available for funding to assist students with disabilities to travel between their home

and school. There are about 5,350 students with disabilities who receive transport assistance: 4,350 students use taxis or contracted mini buses, another 1,000 use public transport or, alternatively, their parents are subsidised for driving their children to school.

Mr WELLINGTON: Following on from your answer and also the announcement of the 11 positive learning centres across the state and, in particular, on the Sunshine Coast, if it is the case that it is planned that some students in my electorate of Nicklin who are simply not suited to pay travel to one of these positive learning centres—and the experience has sometimes been that the parents are not very supportive of the children—how would you propose that those students travel from, say, the northern parts of the Sunshine Coast to the closest positive learning centre?

Mr WELFORD: There are 11 positive learning centres across the state. They are not like McDonald's stores; they will not be in every suburb of the state. The costs of that would be prohibitive. We would hope that in most circumstances arrangements organised through the school would enable students to attend these centres. But there may be some circumstances where that is logistically very difficult. The schools will need then to revert to other measures within their behaviour management plan to either manage that student within the school or manage them in another way outside the school. The positive learning centres are not a panacea.

The important message that I want to deliver to every Queensland family, teacher and school is that responsible behaviour is fundamental to student learning. We will not compromise on this. I do not want to sound as if we are just getting tough, as it were. It is not about getting tough, it is about ensuring that our schools give priority to what they are supposed to give priority to—that is, maximising the opportunity for every student to learn.

We will continue to work with teachers. Professional development is a very, very important issue here. Different teachers manage difficult students with different levels of success. We have to ask ourselves sometimes why it is that some teachers rarely have problems with difficult students in their class whereas the same students in other classes are causing all sorts of difficulties. Essentially most young kids are good kids deep down, but there are some children who present at school with enormous stresses in their lives: family dysfunction, domestic violence, sexual assault—all sorts of traumas are being suffered by a very small portion of young people across our schools. Our schools are in that sense for some students the only safe haven in their lives. That is why professional development is probably as significant an issue in terms of addressing support for students in these circumstances than anything else—positive learning centres or any alternative. It is a mix of measures that we have to bring to bear on this issue. I am aware that it is high in community consciousness and in the minds of teachers, but it is something on which we all have to work to make sure that students get the best possible opportunity to learn.

CHAIR: We will return to government members' questions now. I call the honourable member for Noosa.

Ms MOLLOY: Minister, still on behaviour management. In the past 12 months the government has doubled the number of positive learning centres. Can you identify where these centres are and how they do support the students? You have talked a little bit about this so I do not want to labour the point, but if you could just flesh out any other aspects of the support that you think that we should be aware of.

Mr WELFORD: We are committed to helping all students, including those who find the school environment more challenging. I have just been talking about the hierarchy of measures that are available for schools to deploy in addressing behaviour. The positive learning centres are in one sense, in my view, a relatively new and yet to be fully developed concept in terms of how these centres can support schools. There are a number of issues to consider in the design and operation of these centres: should they be located in a separate class within schools or should they be located off site; should they be used routinely or should they be reserved only for the most intransigent or intractable behaviour problems? These are things which we will continue to develop some intelligence around, as it were, as we gain experience in these things.

The positive learning centres will be incubators of innovative ideas. They will be places where specialists will develop skills and techniques which we can then transfer to mainstream schools for teachers to use in the classrooms to hopefully prevent students from having to go to positive learning centres. It is really about an iterative process of continually improving the collective skills of the organisation, as it were—of all teachers—in dealing with this problem.

In September last year I announced the additional six positive learning centres to take the total to 11. The ones currently operating are in Townsville, Mackay-Whitsunday, Wide Bay North, Sunshine Coast South, Brisbane North and Gold Coast District. We are looking to allocate these centres according to the level of demand for support of a specialist kind. That is why there are some areas that do not currently have a positive learning centre, because they are the areas, although they have issues with behaviour, where they have less problems than the areas where we have allocated the centres currently. We will continue to allocate the centres according to the priority of need across the state.

Emphasis has been placed on areas outside Brisbane so that students can get access to places in the regions as well as around Brisbane. Student numbers in the south-east corner are such that it will be inevitable that more places may be needed in the south-east corner. The ultimate aim of these centres is to try to reintegrate students into mainstream schooling or into more appropriate learning or vocational pathways. Some students may, as a result of going to these centres, get a clearer sense of their future directions, particularly in the secondary years, and move into training or vocational education school based apprenticeship learning pathways.

Mr PEARCE: Minister, with regard to disengaged students, I note that there are several references in the MPS regarding the provision of flexible learning options for students at risk of disengaging through i-support programs. The programs that have been identified are Ollie Up and Stepping Stones. Can you provide more details about these innovative programs?

Mr WELFORD: Yes. ICTs, or information communication technologies, are increasingly becoming an important part of the education of young people these days. The i-support program is now in its fourth year. It uses ICTs, coupled with innovative teaching practices, to engage and broaden horizons for at-risk students. Many students who would not normally adapt well to conventional classrooms thrive in a classroom surrounded by computers, computer technology, computer software and computer games which they themselves can design.

Students participating in the i-support program are based across the state, many in rural and remote areas, but they are connected by a range of online technologies. The online tools and resources are provided by Education Queensland's online learning site called the Learning Place. This facility allows voice and data conferencing, chat facilities, discussion forum facilities and online courses. There are two components of the program. One is called Ollie Up and the other one is called Stepping Stones. Ollie Up supports students in the middle phase of learning—that is, years 4 to 9—targeting literacy, numeracy and social skills. In the year just past, the program supported 150 students in 48 schools, 28 of which are in rural and remote areas. Schools surveyed in December last year reported significantly improved student outcomes and compliance in areas of interactions with classmates, skills using ICTs, communication and self-esteem. A clear example of success is that of a 2004 Ollie Up student who went on to become school captain the following year—so successful was using this particular program at re-engaging the student positively in their school.

Stepping Stones is the other program. It supports years 10 to 12 by providing programs which are more focused on careers education and school to work transition. Last year the Stepping Stones program provided services to 85 students in 26 schools, 19 of those schools in rural and remote locations, with access to these innovative online programs. The Stepping Stones materials are designed to fulfil the requirements of a work education certificate 1, which is a nationally recognised vocational education and training program. Topics include career planning, job search, interview skills, occupational health and safety, industrial and workplace relations and enterprise education. In addition to completing certificate 1, students can also gain a range of new skills and achieve significant personal development. There are about 235 students currently engaged in the i-support program, so I am sure many more success stories will come out of it.

Mr PEARCE: As a member representing a large rural electorate, I am well aware of the problems that face geographically isolated students and their families. I note a reference in the MPS to a plan to trial an option for geographically isolated students to live away from home in private board with local families and attend state high schools to complete their education. It sounds very interesting. I ask if you could outline how this program will work.

Mr WELFORD: Thank you, Mr Pearce. After I became minister, I received a representation or delegation from the Isolated Children's Parents Association in relation to the challenges faced by children in isolated parts of the state, some of whom are living on rural properties. Some, of course, have access to distance education. Others look to travel to secondary schools in regional cities or here in the south-east corner. We are committed to giving students who live in these isolated areas the best chance of success in school.

For some students, following their interests or their ambitions may not be possible where they live, so we are looking to extend the current program of assistance that families get for boarding school, which certainly does not cover the full cost. It is a federally funded scheme. We are trying to expand access for students who want to pursue their ambitions away from home with a pilot homestay program for senior students from next year.

This is a significant new initiative of our government's Blueprint for the Bush. The homestay program will enable students to have a home away from home so they can study in proximity to a school that provides precisely the sort of education or the particular subject offerings at the senior level that they are seeking.

In the trial that we are going to run next year, participating students will be able to enrol in one of seven state high schools and live with local families. We are building a network of families who will be able to billet these students. The adult residents in the homestay family will of course all have a current blue card. The host schools that have indicated an interest in participating in this program are Trinity Bay

State High School in Cairns, Kirwan State High School in Townsville, North Rockhampton State High School, Centenary Heights State High School in Toowoomba, Maroochydore State High School, Miami State High School on the Gold Coast and Balmoral State High School here in Brisbane.

All of these schools offer an extensive curriculum. They offer vocational education as well as industry programs, and they have strong school community relationships. We will provide each pilot school with \$2,000 per student toward the cost of employing a coordinator, probably on a part-time basis, to administer the homestay program and provide support for students and families and their homestay families.

The pilot will be for three years commencing next year. The first intake will be years 10 and 11 students. We will have a maximum initially of five students accepted into each pilot school next year. In the following year, students in years 10, 11 and 12 will be eligible to join the pilot, with 15 students eligible to be enrolled in each pilot school.

CHAIR: Minister, I refer you to page 1-7 of the MPS and the government's comprehensive learning or earning reforms. Could you elaborate on these reforms and on the support services that are being funded in 2006-07?

Mr WELFORD: The learning or earning reforms are part of the educational pathways ethos that Education and Training Reforms for the Future has introduced in Queensland. In many respects, this is an Australian first. No other state in Australia is as advanced as we are—and I can say this from my discussions with other state ministers—in creating the range of educational pathways through upper secondary school into vocational education, the industry partnerships and the academic pathway as well.

Our learning or earning reforms are designed to equip young Queenslanders for the future by giving them greater flexibility to achieve qualifications beyond year 10 either in school, in TAFE or through other forms of learning such as on-the-job training. The reforms came into force this year, requiring all Queensland students to be learning or earning until they are 17-years-old. The compulsory school leaving age has been raised to 16, and students in year 10 this year are the first to be required to participate in education and training until they are 17.

The new laws are backed up by a range of programs and support services. In this financial year, for example, we have allocated \$5.25 million in recurrent funding for access to pathways grants. These grants will provide schools, TAFEs and their local communities with the capability to develop initiatives to retain 15- to 17-year-olds in the learning environment.

We are also providing \$2 million each year over the next four years for flexible learning services to help re-engage young people aged 15 to 17 who cannot be accommodated in mainstream learning environments. We have also provided significant support for those young people at risk of becoming disengaged. This includes \$900,000, starting with \$300,000 per year from 2004-05 to 2006-07, to implement the Queensland Community Mentoring Program. This is a program that provides one-to-one mentoring support for young people disengaged or at risk of disengaging from school.

This year's budget has also allocated \$9.6 million to provide 113 youth support coordinators to support young people throughout Queensland to stay in education and training. From this year all young people in year 10 will register with the Queensland Studies Authority and open a learning account. \$1.5 million has been allocated for the information technology systems necessary to register young people and track their achievements from year 10 onwards from this year.

Our learning or earning reforms will benefit young people and Queensland. Importantly, they will help our young people realise their potential through participation in school, vocational education or training, employment or a combination of these options.

Ms JARRATT: As a former teacher I was very pleased to notice that page 1-6 of the MPS indicates that even more teachers will be employed in the state this financial year, some of those obviously to cater for the enrolment growth. Could you detail for us how Queensland compares to the other states in terms of school enrolments and our retention rates?

Mr WELFORD: Thank you, Ms Jarratt. The enrolments in Queensland state schools are growing at a higher rate than any other state or territory. I just made this comment to the media in response to opposition concerns that parents were not choosing to come to state schools. Total enrolments have grown significantly between 2003 and 2005. The strongest growth in the Queensland state school sector has been in secondary enrolments.

Over the three years to 2005, the increase in state secondary enrolments has been 2.9 per cent. Over the same period, enrolments in the state primary sector have also increased by just over half a per cent. In 2005, state school enrolments made up almost 70 per cent of total Queensland school enrolments—almost three per cent higher than the national average. It is important to point out that our state schools are performing above the national average in relation to apparent retention rates as well.

The ABS full-time apparent retention rates, years 10 to 12, for 2005 show that the apparent retention rate for Queensland government schools is 72.7 per cent. That is a full 1.4 per cent—nearly

1½ per cent—above the average rate for all state schools in Australia. I make the point that, although the apparent retention rates are often used to report on student participation in years 10 to 12, it is only one measure and does not track young people's non-school learning options. The ABS has recognised the need for more refined measures at a national level. So it is working with the states and territories regarding different analyses of retention data that provide, in a sense, a more accurate picture of true retention where students are not only staying at school but are moving into TAFE and the other pathways about which I have just spoken.

As members may be aware, the Queensland Youth Participation in Education and Training Act and the Training Reform Act of 2003 aim to ensure that young people remain in education or training until they reach the age of at least 17. From the start of this year young people are required to stay at school until they finish year 10 or turn 16 and then they are required to participate in education or training for a further two years. Many will go on to either gain a Senior Certificate or a certificate III vocational qualification by the time they turn 17 at which time they can then leave school. Year 10s enrolled in 2006 are the first full cohort of students who will be affected by these changes. The impact of these changes will become more evident in future years obviously. We will be tracking the changes through that destination survey I spoke about earlier each year from now on as well as tracking the students' learning accounts from year 10 onwards in future years.

Ms MOLLOY: Minister, I refer you to page 2-3 of the MPS and the reference to the Queensland Studies Authority working with state and non-state schooling sectors to implement the new Queensland Certificate of Education. Could you advise the committee about the new certificate and the involvement of the QSA, please?

Mr WELFORD: Students who are currently in year 10, as I just mentioned, are the first group to be studying towards the new Queensland Certificate of Education. This represents a material change to the way learning achievements in the senior phase of learning are certified. It strengthens the overall standards of student achievement and attainment in a wider range of learning options. It also provides greater flexibility in what, where and when students learn and provides information on students' literacy and numeracy. A wider range of learning will be able to contribute to the new QCE. This learning includes the academic subjects and the vocational education and training programs that are currently recorded on the Senior Certificate but also includes new options of workplace learning subjects, self-directed learning projects and university subjects.

For the first time, achievements such as participation and leadership in community or sporting programs or a student's research into topics of their own interest may count towards a senior qualification. This means students will have a broad base from which to move into further education or training and will be better able to signal the range of their abilities to employers. This is in contrast to the existing Senior Certificate, which simply records a student's level of achievement, whether it be high or low, in a limited range of recognised subjects. To be awarded a QCE, a student must have achieved a significant amount of learning to set standards including core studies, either secondary school subjects at senior level or recognised VET qualifications. Potential employers will have confidence that students who have been awarded a QCE will have achieved a solid senior secondary education and are well prepared to take the next step into employment, training or further study.

Mr COPELAND: Minister, I refer to the proportion of Queensland students in years 8 to 12—and you have just answered a question from the member for Whitsunday along these lines. I refer to pages 1-73 and 1-72 of the MPS. When your government came to power in 1998 the proportion of Queensland students in years 8 to 12 in state schools was 65 per cent. That is now 63 per cent. The proportion of students in years 1 to 7 in 1998 was 76 per cent and it is now 73 per cent. Whatever way you look at it, the total proportion of students in Queensland attending state schools has decreased over that time. Why are more students now not attending state schools than they were in 1998?

Mr WELFORD: You referred to page 1-73?

Mr COPELAND: Page 1-72 is years 1 to 7, and 1-73 is years 8 to 12.

Mr WELFORD: This is consistent with national trends. By national comparisons we are still doing very well, as I mentioned to the member for Whitsunday. These figures will jump around from—

Mr COPELAND: They are not jumping around; there has been a steady decline over time.

Mr WELFORD:—a year or two from decade to decade. They will change. At the present time Queensland is not dramatically different to everywhere else in Australia. In terms of the secondary or senior years there are, as I mentioned earlier, some unique characteristics in relation to the employment market. There is a very strong economy in Queensland, which is attracting students away from school before they finish what is currently year 12. So there is a range of dynamics at play. I do not think we should get too hung up on any particular percentages at this stage. If Queensland was dramatically out of kilter with trends in the rest of Australia, then there might be some justification for concern. I am not concerned at what is happening currently. As I say, our state school population in Queensland is still growing stronger than anywhere else in Australia. By comparable benchmarks, our state schools are doing very well.

Mr COPELAND: On total numbers that obviously is going to happen because of the population growth in Queensland. The figures have not jumped around at all over that time; it has been a steady decline. If you want to have a look at the actuals it is 65, 64.6, 63.5, 64, 64, 64, 63 for secondary schools. It is a gradual decline and there has to be some reason for that decline.

Mr WELFORD: You have just explained in your own figures how irrelevant that change is. It is not a dramatic change. You mentioned 64, 64, 64.5, 63, 64. Who cares about one or 1½ per cent? The reality is our schools are performing in Queensland as well as any in the country. If you want to go out and start talking down our state schools, you go right ahead. I would like the 70 per cent of students and families of students in state schools to hear you tell them that their schools are no good or that there is something that is happening and that they are going to miss out on a decent education. You go right ahead. I am happy for you to do that. If that is what your agenda is, I will happily report your view to as many people as I can because that will expose you for the foolishness in which you are engaged.

I am not sure what your agenda is on this front, Mr Copeland, but, as an aspiring future education minister, you should be providing reassurance to parents that, whoever is in government, the priority for all of us is to make sure that we provide a quality education across all school sectors. Whether individual parents choose a Catholic school, an independent school or a state school is precisely the sort of choice that we as members of government should be making available to people and not damning their choice one way or the other.

I am comfortable with whatever proportions of parents make choices about these things. The reality is that state education and state schools are the bedrock—they are the foundation—upon which the vast majority of families in our state will rely for a quality education. My job—and I would have thought your job—is to reassure parents that we in this parliament are all going to work to make that education the best possible quality that we can. So far, I think the efforts of our government and previous governments of all political persuasions have been reasonably successful. In fact, the level of transition from students from state schools—indeed, all our schools—to tertiary education has grown significantly in the last 30 years. You are well aware of the trends over that time that emphasise the value of education and the importance of gaining tertiary qualifications.

Mr COPELAND: Minister, I have an absolute commitment to quality of education in Queensland, which is precisely why I have asked a series of questions about quality measurements and trend lines as to why decisions may or may not have been made. I move on to MPS pages 1-72 and 1-73 regarding the total number of schools in Queensland. A new measure was introduced in 1999 at which time the number of state high schools in Queensland was 182. There are now 177 state high schools in Queensland, which is a net decrease of five. For state primary schools, in 1999 there were 1,054 and now there are 1,041, which is a net decrease of 13 primary schools in that time. In a growth state, why has there been a decrease of that magnitude in the number of schools in Queensland?

Mr WELFORD: In the case of primary schools, that is very simple. There are some schools in remote locations which declined to such a level that they ceased to be viable. So there has been some consolidation in school numbers over that time. In terms of secondary schools, a similar trend exists. Some consolidation occurs. The emergence of P-12 schools will see some schools close and other schools combine to become P-12 schools as distinct from stand-alone secondary schools. The numbers you mentioned are again—the changes are negligible in the scheme of things. I am not at all concerned about those numbers changing around.

Our school population has continued to grow. So whether there are more schools or fewer, it is not relevant to the quality of education. What is relevant is our focus on ensuring that wherever students go to school, whether they are in a large school or a small school, they get access to a good education with professional teachers in classes of reasonable size. That is the focus, and we have delivered on that focus over the years we have been in government, too, progressively driving the target class size in all years down so that it is 25 in the early years and 28 in the middle years. We have delivered on the education agenda in spades.

Might I say, just speaking in global terms for a moment, we have delivered on the educational agenda in stark contrast to the federal government's current agenda, which has been one of abject neglect when it comes to investment in education and training. We have a skills crisis in this nation and in our state at the moment precisely because we have a federal government that has an absolute blind spot, that has its head in the sand when it comes to investment in fundamental infrastructure and in education and training. Our universities have never been more lowly funded. When it comes to your concern about the trend towards parents choosing non-government schools, you might want to talk to your federal colleagues about why they allocate federal funding of \$4 for every \$1 in favour of non-government schools and then wonder why there is not an impression being developed deliberately driven by the federal government—your colleagues—which is trying to drive a non-state school agenda. If you want to join that rampage, as you appear to be doing in the media today and in here, as I say, we will let state school students and their families know what your agenda is. Your agenda is to drive people out of state schools into non-state schools so that they have to pay more of their education out of their

own pockets. That is the federal government's agenda. That seems to be the conservative political agenda in this country.

Mr COPELAND: That is nonsense, Minister, and you know it is nonsense.

Mr WELFORD: No, it is not. It is what is happening.

Mr COPELAND: We are trying to find the measures of quality within our schools so that we can continue to improve that to provide a quality of education to all Queensland students. Minister, I refer to question on notice 1,055, which I asked regarding a list of schools which may potentially close in 2007. I think 'on watch' is the terminology. You replied to that question, 'There is extensive consultation with the communities about the future of schools if enrolments drop below set levels. It would be premature and disrespectful to these communities to nominate any school for potential closure before the proper process is conducted.' Minister, I simply ask what schools are on that list. As a local member, I know that that list exists because there are two in my own electorate about which I have been working with the staff of Education Queensland. The list should not come as any surprise to the school communities because they, likewise, should have been consulted and should know that they are on that list. I would ask again, Minister, for the list of those schools that are on watch for next year.

Mr WELFORD: As you know there is a process that the department applies to consulting with schools about closures. Sometimes that process results in a school closing and sometimes it does not. It depends upon whether students can readily access alternative schools. The decision to close a school is never taken lightly. It comes at a point when schools start to become difficult if not impossible to maintain, in staffing or facilities terms, with very few students. When enrolments drop below certain levels it obviously becomes very difficult to provide students with the range of subjects or learning experiences that every student deserves to have and which every parent expects for their children.

There are benchmarks that are used to decide whether a school is becoming unviable. The starting point is enrolments. For example, in a primary school if enrolments fall as low as 12 or in a secondary school if they fall as low as 30 that is an alert for us to start having a look at that school and decide whether we put it into the program where we start consulting with parents. The factors we take into account in this process include: the distance to the next closest school, the transport available, the possibility of future enrolment growth and whether the school is the best educational option for the students given its size. The needs of students and parents are always considered very seriously in this consultation process.

It is a two-stage process. The first stage involves monitoring the enrolments. Schools with declining enrolments are identified according to those thresholds that I mentioned earlier. The second stage sees the commencement of a formal consultation process on whether to mothball the school. The school is considered mothballed when it is vacated and educational services are officially suspended. If at the end of the monitoring period enrolments remain unviable the department seeks my approval to complete community consultation to mothball the school. The mothballing period usually goes over 12 months during which time demand in the school's catchment is monitored.

As I say, there have been occasions when mothballing occurs when the student population reaches zero. We had one primary school in central Queensland where the school population last year was down to less than a dozen students. This year, with a number of students moving on to high school and a number of other students realising that there would be so few students at the school, no-one turned up on day 1 except the school teacher. After waiting a few weeks we realised that there was no point keeping that school open. Although it had been monitored it was not subject to formal consultation at that stage.

Mr COPELAND: I completely understand the process because we are going through it at home at the moment. I am happy with the way that has been handled by the local staff. There are no problems there at all. I again ask you to provide the list of those schools around the state for which that process is being undertaken.

Mr WELFORD: I am trying to get specific details on which schools we are consulting the community on so I can tell you. Here is the list for you, Mr Copeland. I am not sure of the precise geographical location of some due to their school name. As you know, some are named according to their location and some are given another name. They are: Jimna State School, Memerambi State School, Moore State School, Ropeley State School, Back Plains State School, Cecil Plains State School—only the secondary component—Quinalow State School—again the secondary provision—Cameron Downs State School and Mistake Creek State School. The first three—Jimna, Memerambi and Moore state schools—look like they will proceed to mothballing stage. At this stage, all the others are still just subject to monitoring. No decision has been made to mothball or close any of those at this stage.

Mr COPELAND: Will the decision be made for the rest of those well and truly prior to the start of the next school year?

Mr WELFORD: What we will do is liaise with the principals—as we do with every school before the start of the next school year—about anticipated numbers. We try to get from the principals and the

community intelligence on estimates of incoming students. With those schools that we are monitoring the difficult issue is trying to assess whether they might actually recover next year and there might be an influx of new students. We will try to get that before the end of the year.

In circumstances where we are confident the school might further decline and therefore prejudice the educational opportunities for students we obviously want to get not only the community's concurrence but also plenty of notice to them about the alternatives available. There is one more school which was on the preceding page which I did not realise was on the list—Hopeland State School. The usual procedure is that we give families at least one term's notice.

Mr COPELAND: In the decision-making process regarding those schools—not all of them but most of them are small primary schools—has the introduction of prep had any influence on them given the additional difficulties of providing a prep year class in a multiage classroom with one teacher?

Mr WELFORD: The short answer is, no. In some schools the addition of prep may help the viability of those schools in terms of student numbers. We have specifically sought to make prep a universal provision. We do not anticipate any major difficulty there. Most schools where there might be a multiyear level class involving prep are schools where composite classes are already quite common so the teachers are well adapted to them and are very skilled at handling them.

Mr COPELAND: It is different curricula though.

Mr WELFORD: Yes, but the reality is that curriculum for the prep year students, although it is play based, is not so dramatically different from year 1 that they cannot be integrated with the year 1s. Depending on how teachers manage these things, in those small schools especially—and I think that might be where your concern is coming from—they will have a guaranteed teacher aide to support the extra curriculum of the prep students. If you think of the practical reality, those students will actually do a composite of play based and year 1 type curriculum. With the level of resources in terms of teachers and teacher aides available to them and the integration of those students with year 1s, some parents might see that as an advantage.

Mr COPELAND: Maybe. I just want to clarify one of the statements you made regarding the list of schools you provided for closure. You stated that these are the ones for which consultation is underway. For the ones where there is not any consultation underway—I presume there is also a list of those, but I will not ask you for that at the moment—can you give a guarantee that they will not be closed next year given that we are getting towards the end of the year.

Mr WELFORD: Let me clarify for you your confusion surrounding when consultation occurs and when it does not. There is no school being monitored for numbers and potential mothballing other than those that are subject to consultation. There are no circumstances where we either monitor or move towards a mothballing arrangement without consultation occurring. To use the examples in your electorate, except where no kids turn up suddenly in a year consultation occurs routinely for at least 12 months and, as I indicated, with at least a term's notice before any closure occurs.

I just want to reiterate, because you keep using the word closure, that the fact that a school is being monitored and consultation is occurring does not mean a decision has been made to close it. We want to reassure parents that we look at all options equally and no predetermined decision is made before consultation is commenced. We commence consultation only because in those schools certain thresholds have been breached in terms of the lower student numbers. These are alerts for us to start to talk to parents about whether there are concerns about the range of educational options that are available, the logistic and resource implications for those schools and the comparative benefits for their children in attending that school with declining numbers as compared to alternatives that might be available to them with support that we can give them if those alternatives are available.

In reference to your comments about numbers of schools and numbers of students attending state schools, we need to put all this in context that in March last year we actually embarked upon a program where we are going to actually build nine new schools in this term of government. The timing of the new schools is of course dependent on the rate of residential growth in some areas, but we have already identified at least nine areas for new schools. That was announced last year. Since then that has been revised to 10. Three new schools have been provided already—Narangba Valley State School, Meridian State College—the primary component—and Stretton State College—the primary phase. They all started either last year or this year. Four new primary schools are planned to open this year—Springfield, Burpengary, Edmonton and a middle school at Redlynch, which I mentioned before.

Mr COPELAND: They are absolutely necessary because we are a high growth state. There has been criticism of the government that it has not been providing schools in those high growth areas and that it has fallen to the independent sector to provide schools in those high growth areas.

Mr WELFORD: I am not aware of criticism to that effect. If you can point to areas where you can say—

Mr COPELAND: The Catholics clearly criticise the government. They say that they are having to pick up the slack in growth areas.

Mr WELFORD: That is your misinterpretation of what they are saying. The Catholic Education Commission works very closely with us on the demographics of where schools are and where they will be provided. They are quite keen to provide schools and grow their student numbers. Like any organisation outside the government sector they are looking to grow their business. We work with them on that.

In some areas we consciously give them space to enable them to establish a school where they believe there is a need for a Catholic school in the vicinity of a substantial Catholic congregation or church. It is not as if they are criticising us for not providing. On the contrary, on some occasions they ask whether they can have an opportunity to establish their school before the area grows sufficiently for us to establish ours. It is a cooperative thing. It is not a competitive thing. It is not one of criticism—us of them or them of us.

Mr COPELAND: There has certainly been criticism, Minister, and if you have not heard that criticism then that is a worry. I wanted to clarify one of your answers earlier because I wanted to absolutely be clear about the full-time teacher aide allocation. Can you assure us that no-one in your department has made an estimation of the hour requirement or the full-time equivalent requirement that would be needed to cover prep next year with a full-time teacher aide? How much is it if that has been done?

Mr WELFORD: I do not know. My director-general informs me that he has not sought any such advice. I certainly have not sought—

Mr COPELAND: Has it been done?

Mr WELFORD: Hang on a minute. You asked the question; I will answer the question. The starting point is this: as I said before, any direction I or the director-general gives on behalf of the executive government is based on the policy position that the government currently has. The policy position that the government currently has is that we will provide universal access to prep on a full-time basis across the state in the 2,200-odd classrooms that I previously indicated and we will provide teaching resources for those classrooms that includes 15 hours per class of, on average, 25 students and a minimum of five hours in smaller classes with a 10,000 hour per week supplement to be distributed according to need across the state.

Mr COPELAND: You still have not answered it. Has the work been done, regardless of whether you sought it—

Mr WELFORD: To my knowledge the answer is no. But if you have a leak from the department where someone has done a back of the envelope calculation, well good luck to you. They should focus on the things that we are directing them to do and not things that are irrelevant.

Mr COPELAND: I would not have thought that that was irrelevant.

Mr WELFORD: It is irrelevant to government policy. I have explained that to you about five times this morning. But you have a point of view.

CHAIR: The time allocated for that period of questions has expired. I call the honourable member for Fitzroy.

Mr PEARCE: Minister, our schools are now proudly preparing young people for employment in very practical ways, and I note the references in the MPS to the fact that we have increased the number of school based apprenticeships and trainees from approximately 4,500 commencements in 2004 to over 4,700 in 2005. Could you advise the committee of the ways in which Queensland schools are supporting students who want to take on a trade?

Mr WELFORD: Thank you, Mr Pearce. One of the, I suppose, key priorities that we need to focus on is how we skill our students in Queensland for the jobs that are going to be the future jobs available to them. It is not just about focusing on jobs that are available now but giving them the skills and the aptitude really for the emerging jobs of the future. We want to make sure that the skills our students are learning match the needs of industry, particularly in the high demand areas which currently are construction, manufacturing and engineering. Apprenticeships and traineeships give young Queenslanders a head start on their training and a launch pad into their future careers while at school.

We remain the strongest performing state in the area of school based apprenticeships and traineeships, as I mentioned earlier. According to the latest statistics, Queensland has more than 40 per cent of the total national commencements in school based apprenticeships and traineeships—40 per cent of the nation. This is despite having less than 20 per cent of the national population. We outstrip every other state and territory by a country mile, with Victoria having the second highest with just over 20 per cent followed by South Australia on 11 per cent. We have got, as I say, 40 per cent.

In 2005 Queensland had almost 7,000 school based apprenticeship and traineeship commencements. Our government's comprehensive education reform agenda recognises the importance of giving students more choices and flexibility during their senior years. Through these reforms, schools have access to a range of strategies to expand opportunities for young people to explore learning and earning pathways. The Industry-School Engagement Strategy and the successful

partnerships which have developed out of it, which I outlined earlier, encourage local relationships and skills solutions between businesses and schools. This strategy is helping build a skilled and sustainable Queensland workforce while providing students with job-ready skills and knowledge while still at school.

As part of our commitment to implementing the Education and Training Reforms for the Future, our Department of Employment and Training has also developed a resourcing system which provides for a number of programs and pathways appropriate for 15- to 17-year-olds. Under this strategy from this year, school students or other young people who undertake a nationally recognised VET qualification as part of their senior studies will receive free entry to their first certificate III level or above qualification at TAFE. This also applies to certificate I and certificate II level qualifications that are identified in a student's senior education and training plan, and that will count towards the achievement of the new Queensland Certificate of Education. Students currently in year 10, as I have previously indicated, will be the first to start working towards this new Queensland Certificate of Education. The new qualification is achievement based and flexible enough to accommodate new and different learnings undertaken in a variety of settings, not just the school based one.

CHAIR: Minister, a little while ago I had the pleasure of attending a celebration at Indooroopilly State High School that was also attended by past Indooroopilly High student and Nobel prize winner Professor Peter Doherty. At the celebration one of Indooroopilly's students flew their plane across the celebration and gave those gathered a wing salute where they move the wings to say g'day. I refer you to page 1-35 of the MPS and the work that has been done to develop aerospace studies and also the work that has been done to develop the College of Wine Tourism and the gateway schools for the minerals and energy sectors. How are these industry-school strategies benefiting students?

Mr WELFORD: Thank you, Mr Lee, and thank you for reminding us just how good state schools are when they produce Nobel prize winners. If you listen to Mr Copeland, you would not think that state schools could produce those sorts of things. But state schools are the engine room of genius in our state. They really do deliver some outstanding leaders in many, many fields. The involvement of our schools with industry is one of the most significant developments in education in recent years, and of course it is one of the ways we are reshaping our education system in Queensland in advance of the rest of Australia.

We recognise that the world is changing faster than ever before. It is very different to a decade ago, even more different to two decades or 50 years ago. Many of the jobs and professions today did not exist a generation ago. Many of the jobs and professions that students of today are studying for have yet to materialise. So it is a timely reminder really that globally and nationally we live in a fast-changing world where the nature of employment and the nature of the skills required for employment is changing dramatically.

The skills our young people need today to find employment were often barely imaginable just a few decades ago. That is why our School-Industry Engagement Strategy is involving schools in working with industry to identify the range of skills and aptitudes that students will need for the jobs of the future. At the moment we have special partnerships in four key industry areas—aerospace, information communication technologies, wine tourism, and the minerals and energy sectors. These are all sectors that are likely to have enduring futures in terms of job growth. These initiatives are providing tremendous opportunities for our young people to gain firsthand experience. The number of industry partners in the aerospace project has grown. Australian Aerospace, Smiths Aerospace and the Brisbane Airport Corporation have all joined Boeing and Aviation Australia in working with Education Queensland. In all, there are 10 gateway schools working with the aviation industry, including four new schools which joined this year. Almost 200 year 11 students are working to the new Queensland Studies Authority syllabus in aerospace studies.

The Queensland College of Wine Tourism in Stanthorpe is another exciting initiative. Seven gateway schools share in that college's activities—not just Stanthorpe but across six south-east Queensland wine regions where schools develop relationships with their local wine and tourism industries. The Minerals and Energy Academy is another example of a strong partnership with the mining and energy industries through the Queensland Resources Council. Some 19 schools are involved across the state centred on three hubs of the Queensland resource sector—Mount Isa, Moranbah and Gladstone.

Ms JARRATT: Minister, that is very exciting stuff. While we are on the topic of partnerships between school and industry, I would ask you to advise the committee on any actions being taken to increase direct student pathways into the ICT and related industries?

Mr WELFORD: Yes. Thank you, Ms Jarratt. As I mentioned, ICT is one of those priority areas, and partnerships between industry and schools are opening up a whole range of new opportunities for young people in those areas. There is no question that ICTs are an essential commodity for job creation in the future of the state. So I am pleased to advise committee members that a new initiative designed to increase direct student pathways into ICT and related industries is now available. The ICT industry project is another part of our government's successful Industry-Schools Engagement Strategy. This is involving schools with industry in a range of areas and on a range of levels.

For this project, the department has formed a strategic partnership with the Australian Information Industry Association and Microsoft Australia. Six Queensland schools will be involved in the initial phase of the ICT industry project and will be branded gateway schools to the ICT industry. They are Chancellor State College on the Sunshine Coast, Harristown State High School, John Paul College, Lourdes Hill College, Mount Gravatt State High School and Smithfield State High School. The spread of these schools reflects and accommodates the diverse nature of ICT and related industries. The project specifically targets students in years 10, 11 and 12 and will eventually be expanded to other schools.

The main objectives of the partnership are to create new partnerships between schools and industry; enable sharing of ideas, expertise and experiences; develop structured ICT related work placements, traineeships, scholarships or cadetships or other 'in-industry' learning opportunities; increase demand for ICT based subjects by providing incentives and rewards and scholarship opportunities in partnership with industry; align school ICT curriculum to the industry standards; establish educational opportunities for students to ensure they have the skills, experiences and opportunities to efficiently transition into ICT and related industries; and of course provide appropriate professional development and incentives for teachers to build their knowledge and skills related to the ICT industries. Several Queensland universities are working closely with our project team to provide students with expertise and pathways into ICT and related industries. The preliminary work with schools to get this project underway has commenced, and it is anticipated that students entering directly into ICT work placements and traineeships will be implemented from next year.

Ms MOLLOY: Minister, I refer you to page 1-3 of the MPS and the reference to the newly formed Queensland College of Teachers. Could you outline the reforms introduced to raise professional standards and provide new levels of student safety?

Mr WELFORD: The changes we have introduced through the Education (Queensland College of Teachers) Act 2005 represent a major overhaul of teacher registration which will raise professional standards and provide new levels of student safety. The new College of Teachers is overseeing the most comprehensive changes to the registration of teachers in a long time. Teachers now have to renew their registration every five years and to gain renewal they have to show they have maintained their professional skills through ongoing professional education and recent teaching experience. There are also compulsory criminal history checks.

The new College of Teachers has enhanced responsibility for developing professional standards and registration of teachers, including criminal history checks, approval of entry courses and conduct of disciplinary processes. The primary focus of the college is to uphold the standards of the teaching profession, maintain public confidence in the profession and protect the public. It will develop and implement professional standards which will become the benchmarks for granting provisional and full registration and for renewal of registration. It will also be the key—that is, the college—to identifying acceptable preservice teacher education programs, re-entry programs and teaching experience requirements for full registration. These requirements will also give teachers a personal opportunity to update their skills, gain personal professional development opportunities and for Queensland's teaching profession to maintain and renew its teaching excellence. There is also a two-tiered approach to dealing with disciplinary issues. A Professional Practice and Conduct Committee will hear matters that could result in a low-level sanction such as issuing a reprimand or a warning and an independent Teachers Disciplinary Committee will hear matters that could lead to high-level disciplinary sanctions such as suspension or cancellation of registration.

The college has the power to cancel a teacher's registration where they are convicted of a serious sexual offence involving a child and a custodial sentence or disqualification order is imposed. It also has a discretionary power to suspend a teacher's registration if they are believed to pose an imminent risk of harm to children. There is now a mandatory requirement for all schools to advise the college when it undertakes an investigation into allegations of potential harm to a child and subsequently the outcomes of the investigation.

Our government is committed to ensuring that the children of Queensland have a safe environment and that the professional standards of teaching are maintained. I am confident that the College of Teachers will ensure that public confidence in the profession remains high in the future.

Mr PEARCE: On page 1-25 of the MPS there is a reference to the new enterprise agreement with teachers. I am interested to know how this new agreement will impact on both teachers and students.

Mr WELFORD: The new enterprise agreement will provide a tremendous foundation for our Smart State education system over the next three years. It is good for teachers in terms of the additional salary and conditions available but also it is good for students. The increases provide deserved recognition for the work of our teachers and ensure that their pay and conditions are among the highest in Australia.

The creation of 300 new positions as heads of curriculum in our primary schools will provide new career opportunities for teachers and, more importantly, provide a stronger focus on programs for students. These positions will be placed at selected primary and special schools where there is most need, with smaller primary schools between 225 and 324 students being allocated 100 of the positions.

The agreement delivers a range of improvements to teachers' working conditions. It provides a four per cent per annum salary increase over the life of the agreement, an increase in paid parental leave from six weeks to 12 weeks, improved professional development, the new curriculum positions that I have just mentioned, and greater incentives to attract and retain teachers in remote and rural school locations.

The agreement will also ensure that our principals and deputy principals are given recognition for their important roles. A separate classification of school leader will be created in recognition of the key role that school leaders play in delivering improved results for students. This will include additional salary increases for principals and deputy principals in the school leaders stream during the third year of the agreement. There will also be a new classification structure to remove overlaps in the current classification system and improve career pathways for school leaders. The transition to the new structure will begin in 2009.

We will also introduce this year paid internships for preservice teachers to help us attract high-calibre graduates. There are two types of internships. The first will place some of the best performing final year undergraduates in rural and remote locations in semester 2 each year. Currently there is a trial of these internships underway with at least six Queensland universities and six state schools involved. The successful interns will be offered permanent employment in their location.

The second type of internship will involve final year undergraduates in specialist teaching roles, such as maths, science and languages other than English, for up to two days a week during the final year of their studies. Once again, the successful interns will be made an early offer of employment subject to the successful completion of their course and meeting registration requirements.

CHAIR: I refer you to page 1-6 of the MPS and the government's intention to fund more than 470 new teachers in the 2006-07 year. This is a large overall increase, and I ask: could you explain how these teachers will be allocated?

Mr WELFORD: Yes. The latest ABS data shows that our population is growing strongly. The figures show that in the September quarter of 2005 our population grew 1.5 per cent—nearly double the one per cent in the rest of Australia and faster than any other state or territory. As well as migrants settling in Queensland, the major contributor to our population boom is the high rate of interstate migration.

The ABS reports that Queensland is one of only four states in Australia experiencing new enrolment growth in state schools. In fact, in case Mr Copeland had not heard, we lead the nation in the rate of growth in state school enrolments. This growth puts pressure on all sectors of our economy, including our schools. That is why we continue to invest heavily in our schools capital works program and that is why we continue to invest in new teachers.

In 2006-07 we allocated \$37.2 million for extra teachers. We will employ up to 224 additional teachers to meet enrolment growth. There will also be another 150 extra teachers appointed as the final stage of our government's commitment to reduce class size targets in years 4 to 10 to 28 students. We will also be employing 100 new state school teachers to join the existing early years teachers to staff the prep year, as I have mentioned earlier. We will also be creating the 300 head of curriculum positions in our state primary and special schools. We will be providing a stronger focus on programs for students through those head of curriculum positions, greater curriculum leadership and new career opportunities for primary and secondary teachers.

Supporting school staff is also a priority. That is why in the coming year we will invest \$40 million in skilling state school staff through professional development around the new syllabus and government initiatives such as literacy and numeracy and behaviour management. We have also provided professional development for principals, teachers and teacher aides in a number of areas to prepare them for the prep year. We will work with our universities to identify and respond to the training needs of beginning teachers and to establish more preservice courses.

Our new Queensland College of Teachers is also developing and implementing higher professional standards that will describe the abilities, experience, knowledge and skills expected of teachers rather than simply applying a rigid formula of required courses. As I have mentioned, from now on teachers have to renew their registration every five years. To gain renewal they will have to maintain their professional skills through ongoing professional development or professional education as well as recent teaching experience.

Ms JARRATT: I note that on page 1-54 of the MPS international student enrolments in Queensland universities have increased by 15 per cent. Could you outline what is being done to encourage this growth in the sector and the economic contribution that international students make to the Queensland economy?

Mr WELFORD: Thank you. Our international education export programs are a major contributor to our economy and a significant priority for our government. International students contributed an estimated \$1.083 billion to the Queensland economy last year. The international education sector generated an estimated 7,000 jobs for Queenslanders. So higher education represents over 60 per cent

of Queensland's international enrolments with our universities recruiting students from over 140 countries. The most recent figures show an increase in international enrolments in Queensland universities of some 15.3 per cent since 2003-04. This growth is continuing.

The benefits of international education go well beyond the economic benefits. The internationalisation of learning prepares students to be global citizens and fosters increased tolerance and diversity within societies. The growth in international student enrolments in Queensland is, to an extent, a natural development given Queensland's attractiveness as a study destination. We are close to Asia, we have lower living costs compared to those of New South Wales and Victoria, we have a great tropical climate, we have a safe and friendly society, multicultural communities and strong ties to our neighbouring Asian countries.

Of course, the success of our international activities depends very much on relationships with other governments and institutions. My department manages a highly successful initiative with the cooperation of all nine of Queensland's universities to raise the profile of Queensland as a quality education destination. Some of the recent things we have done to strengthen these international relationships include a ministerial mission, which I led late last year, to the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Europe and my recent visit to Malaysia and Singapore to promote educational exchange between the universities. Also, there is the Australian Universities International Alumni Convention to be held in Brisbane in September where Asian students who graduated at Australian universities will come together for a major reunion convention. We did an ambassadors tour to Hessen in Germany, involving representatives of all nine Queensland universities, to build partnerships with institutions in Germany and also to explore ways in which we can broaden our engagement between institutions in both countries. There was the inaugural Shanghai Cup Chinese language competition for students in Queensland schools and universities and visits to Queensland by a number of ministers for education over the past 12 months, including from China, Sarawak in Malaysia, Singapore, Turkey, Vietnam, Brazil and Oman. We will continue our efforts to internationalise our schools and universities and also build our reputation as a very high-quality destination for school and university education.

Ms MOLLOY: Because we all love food, I would like to refer you to page 1-8 of the MPS and the Healthy Food and Drink Supply Strategy, which is being implemented in all state schools. Could you advise the committee how this new strategy will contribute to improved student health?

Mr WELFORD: Thank you. Like you, I like food, which is why we have to focus on healthy foods and healthy nutrition. I am pleased to inform the committee that, consistent with my announcements earlier this year, we are stepping up our efforts to make young Queenslanders healthier. The level of obesity in Australian children is increasing at what appears to be an alarming rate. The latest estimates are that 25 per cent of Australian children are currently overweight or obese. This is a big jump from five per cent in the 1960s. Unless we address this issue, some of the present generation of children are at risk of dying before their parents of preventable, chronic illness from lack of nutrition. That is why our government is taking decisive actions to attempt to halt this alarming trend.

Our Smart Choices Healthy Food and Drink Supply Strategy is the most comprehensive strategy in Australia to address healthy food and drink supply in schools. From 1 January 2007 it will be mandatory for state schools to supply and promote food and drinks that are low in saturated fat, sugar and calories and significantly limit tuckshop items that are low in nutritional value. Many schools have already begun offering healthy food choices with great success. We are also strongly encouraging non-state schools to adopt this new approach.

The strategy addresses all types of foods and drinks with limited nutritional value and all aspects of the school environment, including tuckshops, vending machines, fundraising, school excursions, camps, curriculum and class rewards. We have been very careful to involve the Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens Associations and the Queensland Association of School Tuckshops. They have been conducting seminars across the state to assist P&Cs and tuckshop convenors with the implementation of the new strategy.

Two new Healthy Schools vans are also on the road this year going to schools in Brisbane and Townsville to reinforce the message of the importance of physical activity and healthy food choices. They have joined the vans that are already operating in the Logan-Beaudesert area as part of a trial since last year. These vans will be staffed by a nutritionist and teacher duo who will work with all schools, tuckshops, parents and school communities to promote healthy eating and physical activity through workshops, forums and newsletters.

This is only one part of our government's efforts to encourage healthy eating and improve physical activity in children and young people. Other initiatives include the expansion of our Active-Ate healthy eating program, an online resource for teachers on CPR training for students before they leave year 12 and, of course, opening up school sport and recreation facilities to the community where that is feasible. As you know, we are also reviewing the level of physical activity in sport in Queensland state schools.

CHAIR: Thank you. The hearing is now going to take a short break so that people can stretch their legs or have a coffee if they are feeling a bit tired. We will resume at 12.05 pm with an examination

of the portfolio of the Arts. I want to thank all of those people who came along from Education Queensland.

Mr WELFORD: Before you adjourn, with your indulgence I would like to take this opportunity to put on the record some information for Mr Copeland in relation to questions that he asked and which I took on notice. It relates to the total cost of implementing the prep year. I can inform the committee that the amount allocated by the government for state and non-state capital requirements for the introduction of prep is \$350 million. The total capital spend will be dependent upon the enrolment demand. So it could fall less than that if, in fact, enrolment demand is less than estimated on that investment basis. It depends, of course, on the demand in specific schools and thus the demand for the number of new classrooms that will be required. Just by way of an example, between—

Mr COPELAND: It was also non-capital items.

Mr WELFORD: Yes. In terms of the recurrent costs for prep, including staffing—that is teachers and teacher aides—grants to schools for curriculum resourcing and professional development for staff in the new curriculum and the additional costs associated with students with disabilities needing transport to prep classes, the cost since the first prep trial in state schools plus the estimated cost for this coming year is \$228 million. Obviously, that does not include those recurrent costs of staffing and so forth in non-state schools, because they are matters for the non-state schools themselves to which we nevertheless contribute in accordance with the basket/nexus funding arrangements based on student numbers. But the state school funding on a recurrent basis, up to and including this next financial year, is \$228 million. I have just had it clarified that the costs associated with school transport and students with disabilities is in addition to that \$228 million,

Mr COPELAND: Have you got that figure as well?

Mr WELFORD: No, but we can get that for you.

Mr COPELAND: Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you. We will be back at 12.05 pm.

Sitting suspended from 12.01 pm to 12.11 pm.

CHAIR: The committee will now continue its examination of the portfolios of the Minister for Education and Minister for the Arts. We will begin examination of the area of the arts.

Mr COPELAND: Minister, I refer to the PFTC, which is referred to variously throughout the MPS, and the assistance given to the *Big Brother* program. Can you provide details of the total assistance given to *Big Brother* or the producers of *Big Brother* or anyone else associated with *Big Brother* for the last financial year, regardless of the type of assistance, whether it was by nature of a loan, grant or rebate?

Mr WELFORD: I certainly can. Let me just put this in context for you. Through the PFTC we attracted the *Big Brother* series to Queensland in 2001 against strong competition from New South Wales. It began filming series 6 on the Gold Coast in April this year and it has brought significant benefits to the state. Some payments have not yet been made that might accrue as a result of their investment in the current series in terms of the various incentives that are available to them.

Mr COPELAND: Could you provide those details as well?

Mr WELFORD: It is estimated that, when payments are finalised for all of the six series of *Big Brother*, the incentives paid will total \$1.39 million. Series 6 is estimated to receive the following, by way of example: a \$200,000 cast and crew salary incentive—that is an incentive to use Queenslanders on the set in the production to develop skills as cast and crew, predominantly crew of course; a \$25,000 head of department incentive; and a \$150,000 post-production incentive. The series is also eligible for a payroll tax holiday or rebate through the Office of State Revenue, but I do not have details of that at present. You would have to ask the Treasurer.

Mr COPELAND: There is no estimation of that?

Mr WELFORD: No. You would have to ask the Treasurer about that. It is all about creating jobs in Queensland and, in particular, building skills so that we can have an ongoing critical mass of skilled staff to undertake film and television production in the state. I should mention—and I think this is an amazing example of the value of this investment, despite the criticism about the quality of the product, which people can debate all day—that for every dollar the Queensland government has invested in *Big Brother*, taking into account that that investment is \$1.39 million, the production has spent another \$38 million in Queensland. So our investment is delivering a return of 38 to one. That is about as good a leveraging of public funds as you are ever going to get in job creation.

Mr COPELAND: Minister, that is \$275,000 for this series, not including the payroll rebate; is that correct?

Mr WELFORD: No, \$375,000.

Mr COPELAND: Does the \$1.39 million in total assistance—I assume that is from the time the company was pursued to be brought to Queensland—include the loan that I understand was given to—

Mr WELFORD: No. A revolving film finance loan of \$2.5 million was provided, and that full amount was repaid in August last year. So there is no outstanding loan. A loan was given as part of the revolving fund, and that has been repaid.

Mr COPELAND: With interest?

Mr WELFORD: Yes, with interest.

Mr COPELAND: At commercial rates, I assume.

Mr WELFORD: No, at half rates roughly. I do want to emphasise the value of this investment. I share with a lot of people some reservations about whether reality TV is of any benefit to any of us, but *Big Brother* is not the only reality TV program on free-to-air television in Australia. The quality of product and whether the product offends community standards are not matters which our government regulates. They are matters that the federal government is responsible for. If members of the opposition want to represent concerns about the quality of the program in terms of community standards, then those are matters that they should take up with the federal government regulator who is responsible for that sort of thing.

We neither dictate nor ask for poor quality. What we do ask for is the employment of Queenslanders in an industry that has huge potential for our state. It is a very significant component of our creative industries development initiatives and part of making Queensland a Smart State. This type of training in, as I say, achieving a critical mass of skills of Queensland employees that allow us to continually snowball the level of film and television production is very important. That is where our investment is directed. Our investment is directed not at dictating the program or its type but at creating that skills set which can then transfer presumably to a whole range of other programs, some of which may be what some people would regard as higher quality.

Mr COPELAND: Minister, I am not debating the quality today. The issue is whether a program in its sixth series warrants the continued support. Has there been any agreement reached for supporting *Big Brother* in 2007 and, if so, to what quantum?

Mr WELFORD: At this stage there is no commitment in that regard. The *Big Brother* production house has spent about \$14 million on the current series. There are spin-off effects, consequential investments in economic activity, amounting to \$25 million that we can actually measure and identify in terms of support resources and so forth that are purchased. As I say, the estimate is that the six series in total have spent something like \$53 million in Queensland, with an economic impact of \$134 million.

The fact that the program runs for as long as it does—three months, full on—for each series gives us a much stronger purchase on the range of skills that are developed as part of the training program. The emphasis for us really is on an investment in training. It is not unlike many of the programs that the Department of Employment and Training invests in. We do it because we want to create an industry around film and television production.

In terms of whether it is still necessary after six series, I think that is a fair question. But the reality is that we would not be able to capture and maintain this skills set of Queensland staff if we did not continue to be a participant in investing in the production. The reality is that if we downed tools and did not provide a suite of incentives of some kind New South Wales would take it tomorrow, absolutely, because there is at least as much benefit for them as there is for us in accumulating the additional employment. Fox Studios is in Sydney. They have an edge on us already in terms of being able to attract international productions to Sydney as distinct from Brisbane and the Gold Coast, which are less well known in international circles.

We are doing everything that we can to promote our capacity here but each of the studios, operating as they do in the relatively small market of Australia, are always clamouring for extra production activity to fill their studio space. New South Wales would like nothing more than to add the *Big Brother* production, which is a pretty substantial television production, to the level of production that it has down there now.

Mr COPELAND: The \$1.39 million in total that has been given over the six series, does that include the payroll rebate?

Mr WELFORD: The \$1.39 million is the investment made by the PFTC for which I have ministerial administrative responsibility. There may well have been payroll tax rebates on top of that. I am just seeing whether we have any records. I do have some figures for you. There is a state tax rebate. Now, remember, this is payroll tax that would not have been paid if the production had not come here or if we had not maintained it. So far they have received the following amounts in payroll tax rebates: for the 2001 series, \$74,137; for the 2002 series, \$134,777; for the 2003 series, \$126,267; for the 2004 series, \$156,487. As at the present date they have made no claim for the 2005 or 2006 series so we will have to wait and see whether they make that claim.

Mr COPELAND: It was reported late last month that the PFTC announced an independent review into the organisation's strategic direction following the publication of a very negative survey of the Queensland industry and Screen Hub. The agency has been subject, through that publication, to a range of criticism and all sorts of statements. Where is that review at, will it be released in full and what has it found?

Mr WELFORD: Thank you for the question. The PFTC was established in 1991. As you say, there was some recent criticism in a Melbourne based online newsletter called Screen Hub about the PFTC. The review was recently announced. It is proposed to identify an expert reviewer. We will get a specialist consultant. It has not commenced yet. We will obviously call for expressions of interest or tenders in relation to a consultant to undertake that review for us.

The review will look at the corporate plan, whether we are achieving the goals that we should be achieving and whether there should be a reallocation of resources of the kind that the Screen Hub criticism flagged. It needs to be remembered that the PFTC has the dual responsibilities of supporting the local film and television industry while also attracting interstate and international production to Queensland.

In the forthcoming year, the budget of the PFTC will be \$9.8 million and that will be allocated to support the ongoing development and growth of our film and television industry through a range of strategies. It will provide production finance for new short film directors, screen development assistance for writers and interstate and international market support for producers to raise production finance for projects here.

It needs to be remembered, and I think this is something that the Screen Hub criticism possibly overlooked, that \$3 million is allocated directly to support local film makers and that has generated a total of \$9.6 million in production. We have produced 15 documentary projects worth \$4.3 million; \$300,000 in funding was allocated to QPIX, Queensland's screen resource centre, generating 15 short films, together with two other short films PFTC invested in worth \$300,000; and four new media projects were produced worth \$500,000 including *Postcards from the Torres Strait*, *Andrew's Guide to Being a Man*, *PS Trixie*, and *Did You Know?*

Mr COPELAND: I look forward to the review because there were some pretty damning statements in the survey.

CHAIR: I will stop you there, member for Cunningham. We should offer the member for Nicklin an opportunity to ask questions. He is entitled to seven minutes worth of questioning, on my estimation.

Mr WELLINGTON: With respect to page 5-1 of your portfolio statement where reference is made to the government's aim of delivering an effective statewide museum service through decentralised facilities and outreach programs I ask: what resources and support are available to assist and support local community museums on the Sunshine Coast?

Mr WELFORD: Thank you for that question, Mr Wellington. Just before I answer the question, I would like to clarify for the member for Cunningham that having checked the data in relation to the tax rebate and the PFTC investment in *Big Brother*, the state tax rebate is, in fact, part of the \$1.3 million not in addition to it as I had previously thought. I was treating the tax rebates totalling about \$490,000 as separate, but it is actually included in that \$1.39 million.

In terms of support for regional communities in relation to museums and the like we do have a number of initiatives that provide regional support. The major program is the Regional Arts Development Fund which provides funding to local arts initiatives. That can include museums and a range of other art forms. We have a BioBus touring program, a travelling biotechnology exhibition, that is touring rural and regional Queensland, which is in partnership with the Department of State Development.

We work with local councils in relation to the Regional Arts Development Fund. All 124 local governments are eligible for funding under this fund. It is the largest funding program available to artists and artworkers at the regional level. It includes museums. It supports professional development, employment of artists and artworkers and cultural development in rural Queensland.

Since 1998 we have increased funding from \$1.5 million to \$3 million per year. We are maintaining that \$3 million in this coming year. Last year 122 councils participated in those programs, giving almost all regions of Queensland the opportunity to access the fund. We expect 119 councils to participate in the coming year. The slight drop is due to some councils electing not to bid, we understand, due to the low priority of bids that they have had from artists or they have a surplus left over from last year that they are going to use. There is a museum development officer based in Noosa who is also dedicated to service the small museums in your area.

Mr WELLINGTON: Can I ask a supplementary question?

Mr WELFORD: I took a little while to get the last answer so we should give him a bit of time.

Mr WELLINGTON: Can you provide on notice the particulars of the Noosa, Caloundra and Maroochy councils' applications under the RADF program?

Mr WELFORD: We are happy to take that on notice and give you some information on that.

CHAIR: Member for Cunningham?

Mr COPELAND: MPS 4-4 refers to the quality measure for the Queensland Art Gallery of the percentage of the collection that is stored safely and securely to international museum standards. The target obviously was 100 per cent but the actual was 93 per cent. What is the estimated value of that portion of the collection that comprises the seven per cent that is not stored safely or securely?

Mr WELFORD: That is a great question.

CHAIR: You have about a minute to answer it.

Mr WELFORD: It will not take me a minute because I would not have a clue. I am not sure how they identify the proportion of artwork that is not stored to that standard.

Mr COPELAND: I am happy for it to be taken on notice.

Mr WELFORD: I am happy to take it on notice but common sense tells me that if there is art that is not stored in an environment that is of the highest standard, where 93 per cent of the art is stored, you can expect it will not include anything that is too valuable.

Mr COPELAND: The target is still 100 per cent.

Mr WELFORD: You cannot get a target higher than 100 per cent so we might as well as make the target 100 per cent. That is why it is a target. There is a distinction between targets and actuals.

Mr COPELAND: But it is all worth storing.

Mr WELFORD: It would be a pointless target if we had already achieved it. It would not be a target, would it? I will get that information for you. Frankly, I am not sure whether we can actually identify particular valuations of particular items.

Mr COPELAND: Surely there is an estimation.

Mr WELFORD: To the extent that any estimation can be given. I have walked in the store in the art gallery; if it is not stored at international standards it is stored at national standards at 100 per cent so I am not too concerned about the dollar amount.

Mr COPELAND: We will judge that when we see how much it is.

Mr WELFORD: Some of the things that are not stored at international standard would include things that are on tour, for example. While they are on tour and travelling around they are not necessarily stored, are they?

Mr COPELAND: If you could get it on notice for us, minister, that will be fine.

Mr WELFORD: No trouble. Always happy to help.

CHAIR: Every artist I have ever met always reckons their work is priceless.

Mr WELFORD: That is right. That is why we have trouble valuing it.

CHAIR: I note on page 1-46 of the MPS there is a reference to the Millennium Arts Project and the fact that the Gallery of Modern Art and the redeveloped State Library of Queensland are now in their final construction stages. What can we expect from these exciting new infrastructure developments?

Mr WELFORD: Later this year the new world-class Millennium Arts Project, the arts and cultural precinct at South Bank, will be unveiled to the public. This is Queensland's largest cultural infrastructure project in 30 years. It will position our state as a dynamic arts and cultural destination while increasing access and participation by the community in arts and cultural activities. This major state infrastructure project includes the new Gallery of Modern Art, the redeveloped State Library of Queensland and outdoor civic spaces facing the Brisbane River. It is in a spectacular position, I am sure everyone would agree, and it has been exciting over the last few months watching the buildings finally come together.

The exterior scaffolding has been removed so the public can now get a real sense of the size and appearance of the new Gallery of Modern Art and the new-look State Library. Over the coming months, finishing touches will be added to the external structures of the buildings, the interiors will be painted and fitted out and the new public spaces will be landscaped. I know many of us cannot wait to see the finished buildings later this year, when we will unveil them to the public.

I can assure you that the public will have every opportunity to see these new buildings when they host a range of public celebrations when they open. Our government has invested \$280 million in these new buildings at the Queensland Cultural Centre and an additional \$14 million allocated this year for furniture, fittings and equipment to complete the buildings. This is the beginning of a new era for our arts in Queensland, with the Queensland Cultural Centre on the other side of the river becoming a real hub for the arts.

In recognising the importance of our flagship institutions, I was pleased that last week the Treasurer also announced that the foundations of the Queensland Museum, Queensland Art Gallery and State Library will also receive matching funding from the government for donations they receive.

The Queensland Art Gallery, of course, has had this arrangement with the government for a number of years. Now our other major institutions will get the same benefits. After strong lobbying by these institutions and by me, all three will now receive dollar-for-dollar—up to \$250,000 in any one year—matching funding from the government for every dollar that their foundations raise in any one year. Our peak arts and cultural organisations are thoroughly deserving of this assistance from the government, and these new arrangements provide greater equity between the arts foundations.

Mr PEARCE: Minister, it is just amazing what information you can find out if you go through the MPS and actually read it. I was blown away by some of the things that I found out by reading that document. I note with some interest on pages 1-45 and 1-46 of the MPS that Queensland artists are being showcased at national markets such as the Australian Performing Arts Market. There is also mention that Arts Queensland is working closely with other agencies to develop the 'export readiness' of our arts and cultural enterprises. I would be interested if you could share with us some of the success stories of our local artists and companies.

Mr WELFORD: Our government supports enterprises to develop export readiness skills and international opportunities in the arts. We help Queensland artists and arts organisations to attend events that enable them to increase their profile and progress business opportunities. Earlier this year Arts Queensland supported 15 Queensland performing artists and companies to perform at or attend the Australian Performing Arts Market in Adelaide. APAM is a significant biennial event which promotes Australia's foremost performing arts companies and their products. National and international festival producers, agents and promoters attend APAM to scout for talent. I was hoping to attend myself, but parliament was sitting.

Since APAM, much of the Queensland contingent has successfully secured national and international touring opportunities. For example, the comedy act the Kransky Sisters secured tours to Melbourne, Sydney, Montreal, London, Edinburgh, Auckland and Singapore over the next 12 months. Circus performers Circa successfully performed at Romania's Sibiu International Theatre Festival in May and in the UK in June. Queensland musician Megan Shorey was invited to perform at festivals in Holland, Edinburgh and Berlin. Queensland choreographer Clare Dyson is in discussion with the Singapore Dance Festival to be involved in its 2007 festival. The Elision Ensemble is negotiating tours to Liverpool and Bristol in 2006 and the USA and Canada in 2007.

Arts Queensland also provided support to 19 Queensland musicians and arts workers to take part in a trade mission to MUSEXPO 2006 in Los Angeles in late April and early May. I wish I could have gone to that one. Four Queensland bands—Soma Rasa, The Boat People, Dead Day Sun and Troy n Trevelyn—were selected by promoters A and R Worldwide to do showcase performances at the event. All of the bands have received further business development opportunities as a direct result of their participation.

Our dance companies, too, have experienced great success internationally in the past year. Dance North, Queensland Ballet and Expressions Dance Co. all took up international opportunities and toured overseas in the last financial year, 2005-06. Arts Queensland has been working closely with Austrade and the department of state development to develop the export capacity of our arts and cultural sector. We provide training workshops and seminars to prepare artists who enter overseas markets so that our artists can take their skills to the world stage. I am sure we will have many more of our artists making it big overseas as we channel them in that direction.

Mr PEARCE: That was a good question, wasn't it?

Mr WELFORD: It was a great question.

Ms JARRATT: It is very exciting stuff, Minister. I have to inform you that, in addition to their exciting international performances, the Kransky Sisters are in Mackay this week for the Mackay arts festival, so that is a great coup for my local area.

Mr WELFORD: Mackay is now on the international stage.

Ms JARRATT: Absolutely. There are some great artists there this week. Minister, I refer you to page 1-45 of the MPS and the reference to increased resources and new services to support Indigenous art centres in Cape York, the gulf and Torres Strait. How are these resources helping Indigenous artists reach broader markets? And how are they benefiting local communities?

Mr WELFORD: I just answered in relation to the potential and impact of our artists internationally. Our Indigenous art centres also have fantastic potential not only to create employment amongst Indigenous communities but also to provide cultural tourism in remote communities. We are supporting the development of these arts centres to deliver programs to retain culture, develop their artforms and achieve commercial independence for Indigenous artists and communities.

Investment in these art centres provides opportunities for artists to produce art and develop technical artform skills; diversify artform production, for example into other mediums; support programs for culture and language retention; develop and implement knowledge on commercialising their products; protect the economic interest of individual artists in the intellectual property of their products;

develop and promote cultural leaders and role models; and extend the supply and reach to meet market demand.

Many communities are already benefiting from these Indigenous art centres. For example, the Pormpuraaw community worked with master carvers and weavers to document traditional practices and knowledge in fish trapping, canoe making and weaving to create a range of saleable artworks. In Aurukun, the community is working through the arts centre to promote its art by developing a range of marketing tools such as pamphlets, business cards, artist profiles, portfolios, a business plan and a web site. The Darnley Island community has developed a range of jewellery from traditional dance items as a value-added item to their range of handmade pottery. These are just some examples of the difference that these art centres can make.

On top of this, we have established Queensland's first dedicated Indigenous arts service organisation, UMI Arts, to service 11 Indigenous art centres in far-north Queensland. UMI Arts was set up with assistance from the visual arts and craft strategy of Arts Queensland, an arts funding partnership between our government and the Commonwealth. UMI Arts can provide information and advice to many Indigenous art centres and can play a role in sharing information between the centres. It has received great support from the communities, and another 50 communities have expressed an interest in becoming members of UMI Arts as a collective organisation.

Arts Queensland will continue to work with the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, the Department of State Development, Trade and Innovation, and the Queensland Indigenous Arts Marketing and Export Agency to support Indigenous art centres and our Indigenous artists. Arts Queensland is also developing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts development strategy in consultation with Indigenous communities and key stakeholders to ensure we service this burgeoning arts market.

CHAIR: Minister, cultural festivals bring both economic and social benefits to our communities. Page 1-44 of the MPS refers to an investment of over \$12.1 million in 2005-06 to festivals in Queensland. Could you tell us what our major festivals are and what is being done to provide access to these festivals for all Queenslanders?

Mr WELFORD: As Mr Pearce said, it is interesting what you find out when you go through these materials and identify how much is happening in the arts and cultural sector in Queensland. I have opened and closed a number of festivals, but until I saw them all listed I did not realise just how vibrant arts and culture is in Queensland, so let me tell you about it.

Our cultural festivals play a major part in the development of arts audiences and in the development of our artists themselves. They bring significant economic and social benefits, especially to rural and regional communities, through cultural tourism, job creation, cultural exchange and sometimes export opportunities.

In 2005 and 2006 we provided \$12.1 million to support arts and cultural festivals in Queensland. A number of festivals received additional funding as part of this investment to expand their festivals and provide more opportunities for the public to access their festivals. For example, the 2005 Queensland Music Festival received an additional \$1 million on top of its normal funding, allowing it to take its programs to more regional areas than ever before and making it a truly statewide festival. The Brisbane Festival receives funding which gives people greater access through lower ticket prices. Some 280 events at the music festival involving local and international performers were staged at more than 20 locations across Queensland including Childers, Cherbourg, Charters Towers, Mount Isa, Roma and Cunnamulla.

This is the punch line. I have mentioned the Queensland Music Festival, but the other festivals our government supports include the upcoming Brisbane International Film Festival, in the next couple of weeks, which has free events starting from this Friday for the public while the ticketed program starts early next month; Riverfestival; the Brisbane Writers Festival; the Ideas Festival; the Asia-Pacific triennial at the Gallery of Modern Art at its opening later in the year; the Woodford Folk Festival; the Queensland Poetry Festival; the Australian Festival of Chamber Music in Townsville, only a couple of weeks ago, which I understand was a huge success; the Dreaming Festival; the Laura dance festival; and the Torres Strait Cultural Festival. These are just some of the festivals that receive government support. There are many more smaller, local community festivals which provide communities and interested groups with access to the arts and cultural events.

Our government continues to provide funding for the administration of our festivals as well as seed funding for the development of new work for both free and ticketed events. To ensure our investment in our major festivals is of greatest benefit to the arts and cultural sector, we are conducting a review of that investment currently. A consultant has been engaged to consult with the festivals and key stakeholders to gather their views. We want to develop a strategic framework to ensure we continue to promote and develop new and innovative arts and cultural events for the benefit of artists and also for the community at large.

Mr PEARCE: Still on the subject of festivals, I notice on page 1-44 of the MPS that this year's Brisbane Festival includes a global forum called Earth Dialogues Brisbane 2006. Could you explain the expanded program of this year's Brisbane Festival including this forum?

Mr WELFORD: The Brisbane Festival, which began last Friday, includes an expanded program which is new and innovative. Setting itself apart from other Australian arts and cultural festivals, this year's Brisbane Festival includes the global forum Earth Dialogues Brisbane 2006. This forum will be held over four days from this Friday at the Brisbane City Hall. It brings together some of the world's greatest minds to debate and discuss the issues of resource management and sustainable development.

I am very proud that we have been able to host this forum, which will be co-chaired by former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, who has spearheaded the establishment of the Green Cross International foundation, an international environmental organisation. He will co-chair the opening of the Brisbane dialogues with the Queensland Premier, the Hon. Peter Beattie. Forum sessions are open free to the public. But, of course, tickets have been extremely popular, so only a limited number of tickets are still available for some of the sessions while others are booked out.

About 70 international and nationally recognised commentators on social, cultural and environmental issues are confirmed to participate in the forum, including several Nobel Peace Laureates. This is an exciting addition to the Brisbane Festival and this year's program challenges the notion of what a festival is. It offers the public a diversity of events that entertain, educate and engage.

The expanded program of the Brisbane Festival also includes the free community program Energex Positive Energy Across Brisbane to be held at 10 suburban centres around Brisbane; the *Courier-Mail's* Spiegelent for music, cabaret and dancing in King George Square where I saw James Morrison, the acclaimed jazz musician, perform on Sunday night—which was spectacular—the Brisbane Festival Theatre Fringe at Metro Arts for new and emerging Brisbane artists and performers; as well as presenting leading Queensland and international productions at the Queensland Performing Arts Complex across the river and other major venues around the city. There really is something for everyone at this year's Brisbane Festival.

I looked on the net the other day at the Biennale of Sydney, which is minuscule by comparison. There are 470 events at the Brisbane Festival. The Sydney biennial either had 79 or 97 events. So the Brisbane Festival is probably one of the largest festivals of its kind anywhere in Australia. In the past the festival has tended to centre around high-end arts events. That is why this year we have made a special effort over hundreds of events to make the festival more accessible to everyone in the community. It will become a true festival of the people and something of which we as a community can be very proud.

Ms MOLLOY: Minister, I understand there was a tremendous response to the Out of the Box Festival, which was held last month and which, according to page 1-44 of the MPS, received an increased investment of \$200,000. What other arts events and initiatives are targeted specifically for young Queenslanders?

Mr WELFORD: Thank you, Ms Molloy. I acknowledge your keen interest in Queensland youth. Our government supports a range of events and initiatives specifically designed to encourage children and young people in the arts, and the Out of the Box Festival of Early Childhood that you mentioned is probably the outstanding example. It is unique. There is no other festival of its kind in Australia. That is something else that we are doing that stands us apart from the rest of the country. Gee, we are doing some good stuff, are we not, Mr Copeland?

Mr COPELAND: That was the question that was asked in parliament last sitting.

Mr WELFORD: Was that the one?

Mr COPELAND: That was the one.

Mr WELFORD: I am glad you are awake. Last month some 60,000 children, parents, carers and teachers attended one or more of the 237 events on offer at the children's Out of the Box Festival. Next month Cine Sparks, the Australian film festival for young people, returns as part of the Brisbane International Film Festival. That program includes an even wider range of films for those aged three to 18 which they can see free of charge when they attend the festival as part of a school group. Later this year the kids Asia-Pacific Triennial will be held as part of the wider Asia-Pacific Triennial at the new Gallery of Modern Art. It will be the first exhibition in the new Children's Art Centre which is an exciting component of the new Gallery of Modern Art. We see it as having great potential as more than one million people have visited the Queensland Art Gallery's children's exhibitions and dedicated kids' spaces since 1998. For children living outside Brisbane the new Children's Arts Centre in the Gallery of Modern Art will provide touring exhibitions, interactive artworks and programs to regional Queensland as well.

For older youths, we have the Transit Lounge Creative Industries Resource Centre and the Young Artists Mentoring Program, both delivered through Youth Arts Queensland. The programs provide young people with industry bridging and professional development opportunities and have been

a successful starting point for several of our young artists. I am pleased to announce today that Youth Arts will receive a \$150,000 boost to expand youth arts services across the state in this financial year. This will include \$45,000 to expand the Transit Lounge space and Youth Arts Queensland office at the Judith Wright Contemporary Art Centre; \$50,000 to fund a scoping study for a youth program in the Brisbane Festival in 2008; \$30,000 for Backbone Youth Arts, a youth arts organisation, so that 10 of their young artists from regional areas can exhibit their artwork at the 2High Festival at QPAC in September; \$15,000 to help 10 young art workers at the Pacific Edge Regional Arts Conference in Mackay in September; and \$10,000 to provide formal mentoring opportunities for 12 young Indigenous art workers with an interest in the film and television industry. There is plenty all round for youth and children in our arts initiatives.

CHAIR: Thanks very much, Minister. The time allocated for the consideration of the estimates of expenditure in the portfolio of Education and the Arts has expired.

Mr WELFORD: I am now in a position to provide, without taking on further notice, the information sought by Mr Wellington in relation to the Regional Arts Development Fund grants amounts for the three local government areas he mentioned. In 2005-06 Noosa was allocated \$35,000, Caloundra \$40,000 and Maroochydore \$50,000. So the Sunshine Coast collectively got \$125,000 in state arts funding for local arts initiatives on the Sunshine Coast. Thank you, Mr Chair, I appreciate your tolerance.

CHAIR: Minister, can I say how thrilled I am that the state government is supporting the International Film Festival. In fact, I have with me the program. I was looking through it this morning working out which films I was going to see and I noted that the Irish Business Association has organised a reception prior to Ken Loach's *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, which I will be attending. On behalf of the committee, Minister, I thank you and your departmental officers for their attendance today. The transcript of the hearing will be available on the Hansard page of the parliament's web site in about two hours. The committee will now break for lunch and the hearing will resume at 1.45 pm with the Minister for the Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women.

Mr WELFORD: I also thank the committee for the opportunity to present this information today at the hearing. I place on record my special thanks to all departmental staff, who have worked very hard over recent weeks to ensure we are well prepared to provide as much information as possible to the committee both from Arts Queensland and the Department of Education.

CHAIR: Thanks, Minister.

Proceedings suspended from 1.00 pm to 1.48 pm.

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

In Attendance

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

Environmental Protection Agency

Mr J Purtill, Director-General

Mr A Feely, Executive Director, Parks

Mr N O'Sullivan, Director, Financial Services Unit

Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation

Mr M Kinnane, Director-General

Mr P Clarke, Deputy Director-General, Strategy and Policy

Mr P Cook, Director, Business and Financial Management

Ms K Finsterle, Director, Office for Women

Mr C Cassidy, Executive Director, Sustainable Planning (Acting)

CHAIR: The hearings of Estimates Committee E are now resumed. The next item for consideration is the proposed expenditure of the portfolio of the Minister for Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women. I remind members of the committee and the minister that under the standing orders the time limit for questions is one minute and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a double chime will sound at the end of each of these time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will 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 is to be allocated to non-government members. Any time expended when the committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between government and non-government members. I would ask departmental officers to identify themselves when they first come forward to answer a question if the minister refers a question to them so that Hansard can record their name. I also ask that all mobile phones and pagers be switched off or switched to silent mode.

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women open for examination. The time allocated is four hours. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you, Mr Chair, I would like to.

CHAIR: You have five minutes for your statement. The floor is yours.

Ms BOYLE: Thank you, Mr Chair. I am pleased to provide some overview remarks before we start the formal questions. I must admit to you that I am a little nervous this afternoon but at the same time very proud of the fine and hard work that has gone on through my departmental officers in the Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation, with the Office for Women and through the Environmental Protection Agency.

It is indeed a privilege to be the minister for local government and planning and minister for the environment at the same time. That has provided some particular opportunities that may not have occurred were those portfolios held, as they generally have been, by separate ministers. It has been put to me on occasions that it is a conflict of interest to have planning and environment in the same portfolio. I say to you that exactly the opposite is true. It is how it should be. Planning and the environment go together and should be on all our minds—whether those in private industry, development or building, those considering matters in councils or those of us looking at the growth and future of our own areas around Queensland.

In particular, I would like to give as an example the advantage we have seen in having the local government and planning portfolio and the environment portfolio together as far as the finalisation, which is imminent, of the Douglas shire planning scheme is concerned. Members would be well aware of just how precious the Daintree area of the Douglas shire is and yet it has been very difficult for the people who live in the shire as well as for the council representatives, so elected, to sort out the planning

scheme. That we are very close to finalising the planning scheme, with the necessary environmental protection in mind, is a good example of the two going together.

So, too, have they gone together in terms of the parts of my portfolio relevant to the water story. Water demand management and water quality are matters of some interest for both the Environmental Protection Agency and the department of local government and planning in terms of the various subsidy programs and the other work that department does with the other 157 councils of Queensland. Our various initiatives towards more sustainable housing and, in particular, towards energy and water saving devices in residences, both new and existing, are to be commended.

I would like to also let members know that another of the important initiatives underway in the department of local government and planning is a review of the Integrated Planning Act and the integrated development assessment system to see how they are working or, in some cases, not working. The majority of planning schemes under the Integrated Planning Act are now in place. As they have been put in place we have found some things with the system that can be rejigged and improved for clarity, speed, efficiency and effectiveness. That is what that IPA review is about.

I am particularly proud as environment minister to let members know, if they do not already know, that in Queensland we have nearly five per cent of our land mass in the national park estate. The Beattie government started well behind the eight ball in terms of the proportion of Queensland in national parks. We have over our nearly three terms of government significantly lifted the proportion in the protected area estate. I am particularly pleased that we have transferred nearly half of the promised South East Queensland Forests Agreement lands into national park.

I should say of the Office for Women that there has been tremendous reform over the last 12 to 18 months. We have been keen to broaden the service to make sure that the services provided to women, not only directly through the Office for Women but also through other state agencies, are equally available to all the women of Queensland and most especially those women of Queensland in our rural and remote areas. They have benefited from the changes to our telephone service and the information service outlining other government services for women and also by the delivery of services through the Office for Women.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. We will commence with the area of women. I call the honourable member for Maroochydore.

Miss SIMPSON: Good afternoon, Minister and staff. I wish to move to the issue of women's policy and in particular page 2-24 of the portfolio statement. Minister, in the MPS on this page it says that the Office for Women will coordinate strategies to enhance the government's engagement of women. As you know, this month marks the 10th anniversary of the coalition government introducing paid maternity leave to the Queensland Public Service. I note that the state government says it now will build on the coalition's track record by providing 12 weeks paid maternity leave. What is the estimated cost to the state government for the forthcoming year of increasing paid maternity leave from six weeks to 12 weeks?

Ms BOYLE: This is a matter for the minister for industrial relations. These are not figures represented in my portfolio statement or, in general, the business of my portfolio.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, you are the responsible minister for the Office for Women. The MPS states that you coordinate, monitor and review and report on the implementation of strategies under the government's five-year plan for women and also with regard to policy areas for women across government. Were you consulted and did you provide any advice with regard to the cost of rolling out this initiative?

Ms BOYLE: I am pleased to inform the member that I have provided various advice in relation to that issue since I have been the minister for women but not advice about the cost of it. I advised of the need for it and the strong wish for it and the equity in having such an arrangement. I absolutely applaud the decision of the government, led by the minister, to extend the maternity leave provisions to 12 weeks. Women are now, in much higher rates than ever before, participating in the workforce. Young women are as well. In those years where women may have one, two or more children it makes it easier for women to balance life and work. That is an important issue canvassed and managed by the Office for Women. This has been recognised through a number of initiatives that are represented in the Women in the Smart State directions statement that was published in 2003. The extension of the maternity leave provisions and its costs are matters for the minister for industrial relations.

Miss SIMPSON: I hear you saying that you cannot answer as to the cost of whole-of-government implementation of this policy, so I ask you: what is your department budgeting for itself? How much did your department pay for paid maternity last year and what is it budgeting for in the forthcoming year?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for that question. I will ask the directors-general present whether either has any information to hand.

Mr Kinnane: We do not have the information readily to hand. During the process of this sitting we will attempt to find that information and report back, if you wish.

Mr Purtill: That information is not specifically budgeted. We have a salary allocation across-the-board. It makes provision for all types of leave liability across the board. It is factored into our salary calculations.

Miss SIMPSON: To further clarify, your department will seek to bring that information forward—that is, if we could know what it cost in the last 12 months for the minister's department. There must surely be some notional idea as to what the cost of doubling that leave entitlement would be.

Mr Kinnane: We do not have the figures separated out in the way in which you are looking for. We have complete salaries and staffing arrangements. Through the enterprise bargaining arrangements through the EB deal across the public sector, we have an allocation provided by Treasury for all aspects of EB and workforce improvements. But it is not separated out in terms of our cost codes.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, does this mean that this was a laudable but an uncosted policy?

Ms BOYLE: It is definitely laudable; we agree about that. But I do ask you to address your questions to the appropriate minister in terms of the costs.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, with regard to your department, you are the responsible minister and surely would be able to advise us what advice your department has provided to the cabinet process of signing off on this policy. Could you please give us a commitment to providing us with what those costings were that were provided as part of agreeing to this policy?

Ms BOYLE: It is a laudable policy decision by my government. I was absolutely pleased to advocate for it and pleased to support it as the decision was made. That is a policy decision that was made by executive government. The direction then goes to our directors-general to make arrangements for that in terms of the budgeting. They have today explained to you that their leave costings for all staff are identified in their budget and they can provide further information on that but that it is not separately allocated in our departments in terms of that specific issue.

Miss SIMPSON: So just to be quite clear, that specific policy announcement while widely welcomed did not in fact have a specific cost allocation to it when it was agreed to?

Ms BOYLE: That is not at all the information I have given you this afternoon. I have encouraged you to ask that question of the minister responsible, and that is the minister for industrial relations. I have no knowledge of what his answer would be this afternoon and encourage you not to presume it either.

Miss SIMPSON: With regard to your department, you are the responsible minister. Surely you could advise us as to what the cost impact was because your department would in fact advise the industrial relations minister with regard to your own staff.

Ms BOYLE: Not at all. In fact, this is a matter I am advised by the director-general would be further negotiated through Treasury and obviously the budget process at that level given that it reflected a change in arrangements for public sector staff. My directors-general are already on the record as offering you the information they have in their budgets about the leave arrangements—the leave budget. We have no basis for being concerned about that at this stage.

Mr Kinnane: Perhaps for the assistance of Miss Simpson, the process for funding the maternity leave initiative is very similar to the enterprise bargaining arrangements provided by government. Individual agencies do not negotiate as separate agencies with Treasury. Rather, it is a whole-of-government decision that is made by the Cabinet Budget Review Committee. So the decision to which you refer this afternoon is, as the minister has mentioned, an executive government decision of the whole of government. Treasury then allocates the funding based on the FTE base across the public sector—that is, the number of staff that we employ—and then that funding is allocated to agencies based on their FTE base. It is exactly the same principle as is the case with enterprise bargaining. Individual agencies do not negotiate with Treasury on what figure we get. Rather, the figure is determined centrally by Treasury, approved by the Cabinet Budget Review Committee and the funding is then allocated. It just goes into our salaries and wages budget, and that is the reason why we cannot tell you there is a separate figure allocated. But those allocations are provided by Treasury.

Miss SIMPSON: So you just take whatever salaries and wages as a global figure they give you and whether or not it is correct as far as your agency is concerned you do not query?

Mr Kinnane: It is on the basis that Treasury is fully aware, because we report through the MPS basis and the forward estimates to Treasury on an annual basis as well as quarterly on our FTEs employed by each state government agency. So it is not as if there is a surprise coming around the corner with Treasury. It knows exactly our salaries budget. It knows our staffing level. It can calculate exactly the funding that each agency requires to actually deliver on the initiative, and that is exactly what has happened in this case.

Miss SIMPSON: So just to clarify, the departments are going to bring advice back to this committee as to what the cost of that policy was last year operating with the six-week leave entitlement.

Mr Purtil: My understanding is that we will provide back to you the cost of maternity leave under our HR payroll system from the last financial year. We can do that. I am sure Michael can as well.

Miss SIMPSON: It goes some way to answering a question that has not been answered, which is whether the government has actually costed on an agency basis and the agencies know what the full cost implications are of doubling the leave entitlements.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, the time allocated for that period of questioning has expired. I call the honourable member for Whitsunday.

Ms JARRATT: Minister, page 2-24 of the MPS refers to the Economy Wise + Budget Smart financial training package for women. Could you give us an overview of the content of this package and inform the committee how many Queensland women took advantage of this training?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you indeed for the question. I am looking for some extra statistics to back up my answer. As it happens, it is one of the initiatives that I am familiar with because some of this training in Economy Wise + Budget Smart took place in Cairns and I attended for a portion of the time and spoke with some of those who were eager to do the course and received it very well.

What we have been concerned about is that too often the financial management training available to women is for those who have some—that is, finances. It is most often through the private sector, financial managers, banks and the like directed at women who are in full-time work, who have superannuation and who have some considerations to make as to how they might invest any spare funds. Instead, the Office for Women was concerned about women who are often on benefits of some kind, have casual or intermittent work, have tremendous drain, such as single parents would, on their every week funds, who have credit cards and who may get into some difficulty. This particular course was devised for women of very limited means and rolled out in various locations around the state.

It was very popular. To date I am able to tell you that some 250 women across Queensland have taken advantage of it. The kind of feedback that we got was at two levels. First of all, it had been individually beneficial in terms of their immediate financial circumstances and then making some change to how they manage their limited finances week in, week out. The second kind of feedback we got from them is that it is the first time anybody has ever really talked to them about getting a perspective on their finances for the longer term, starting to think a bit more deliberately about the long term rather than living week by week and just leaving the future to be worried about at another time. That is a particular concern for two particular groups of women who attended in large numbers—that is, young ones, as I said, with limited income through being single parents or casual workers or whatever it might be and also some older ladies who did not have superannuation, have not worked for many of their adult years, have not had money put aside, often do not have husbands or other providers to take care of them in their old age and who now often at an age approaching retirement need to consider their future financially.

Ms MOLLOY: Can the minister please explain and outline some of the topics that the Office for Women has given policy coordination and advice to government on as mentioned at page 2-24 of the MPS?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. The Office for Women has lead responsibility for driving, monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the government's five-year plan for women—that is, Women in the Smart State Directions Statement which was released in the year 2003. It is a plan for a whole-of-government policy framework outlining the government's goals for women in Queensland. It includes key policy initiatives aimed at improving women's health and wellbeing; work, family and life balance; economic security; women's safety; and participation in leadership and community building. The Office for Women leads and chairs an interdepartmental committee which meets quarterly to collaboratively monitor progress made on the plan's initiatives. It is the Office for Women's responsibility to report on the implementation progress to cabinet on an annual basis on an agreed set of indicators and targets. The last report was noted by cabinet in November 2005.

During 2005-06 the Office for Women has provided me with extensive and comprehensive advice and analysis on existing and emerging issues impacting on women. For example, the Office for Women has provided advice on a range of complex policy and legislative matters involving women's workforce participation, including the WorkChoices legislation. We have considered work and family balance involving flexible working policies, along with education and skills development touching on women's participation in new and emerging industries such as science, engineering and technology. Women's economic security is of concern, as is the safety and active participation in society of older women. Leadership and decision-making roles for women are dear to my heart. So many women have held themselves back through lack of confidence rather than maybe putting their hand up and taking an opportunity that may come their way.

We have spoken and worked on health and safety issues, maternity services issues, and domestic violence and family violence in Indigenous communities and in mainstream communities. Despite the best efforts of governments over some good number of years, domestic violence in too many homes remains a scourge and a very negative reflection on Queenslanders. A major practical

policy outcome the Office for Women has delivered is the cabinet approved Women on Board strategy that actively seeks to increase the number of women on Queensland boards. This strategy is based on research into women's current participation on Queensland boards. A departmental survey identified barriers and gaps to achieving gender equity. We are presently at about one-third of the membership of government boards.

Ms JARRATT: Thank you, Minister. Minister, on page the 2-24 of the MPS we read that Queensland has a five-year plan for women. What has been achieved so far under this plan?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for that question. The government is committed to supporting and advancing issues for women in Queensland. The Women in the Smart State Directions Statement, the government's five-year plan, outlines the government's goals for women and the key policy initiatives which, as I have said, relate to improving women's health and wellbeing; work, family and life balance; economic security; women's safety; and women's participation in leadership and community building.

Some of the key achievements in the plan include, under the heading 'Improving women's health and wellbeing', a project around young women and alcohol. A statewide social marketing and media campaign has begun to encourage the responsible consumption of alcohol by young women, particularly those between the ages of 18 and 22. There is the establishment of a health contact centre, which provides a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week triage information and referral service over the telephone for all Queenslanders. It is anticipated that women will be high users of that centre.

Another of our projects comes under the heading 'Promoting opportunities to help women balance their work, family and lifestyle' and that is through the development of a guide titled *Work, Family and Life: Finding the Balance*, which is a guide for employees and managers of the Queensland Public Service. Another of the projects on which we have worked is under the heading 'Improving women's capacity to achieve economic security'. The Breaking the Unemployment Cycle continues to target women as participants in the program. I am pleased to inform members that it has exceeded its targets in assisting women. The Smart Women Smart State set task force has developed an action plan consisting of 12 major strategies to enhance girls' and women's participation in science, engineering and technology. Unfortunately, our girls in their later years of high school have not been examining the tremendous careers that are available these days to women in those fields. So an expert committee has provided advice and a report to the Office for Women on how we might optimise women's participation in these well-paid careers.

Other initiatives under the heading 'Enhancing women's safety' are Queensland Transport's Citytrain After Dark Security and Safe Mobility for All for Life initiatives. These are obviously cooperative initiatives, as are many others, between the Office for Women other departments, in this case Queensland Transport.

CHAIR: Before handing over to the member for Burnett, I want to confirm with committee members that there are no further questions that relate to the Office for Women.

Mr COPELAND: There were, but we do not have the time.

CHAIR: In practical terms, if it relieves the burden upon the department's staff, there will be no further questions in that area. We are going to the portfolio area of Environment now. I call the honourable member for Burnett.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, I would like to start off by congratulating your staff on the great briefings and the timeliness of those briefings throughout the year. I very much appreciate their support and assistance. I refer you to page 1-6 of the MPS where it says that the EPA's primary client group is the community of Queensland but also includes industry, public sector bodies and local government. As you know, there has been a lot of controversy surrounding the very much ad hoc and rushed decision by your government to look at siting a dam at Traveston Crossing. To ensure that this committee is fully informed of what advice your department—the EPA—has provided public sector bodies, will you give an undertaking to this committee that you will furnish it with all reports and all information that the EPA has provided government bodies and consultants in relation to the environmental impacts of the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam? I think you would agree that it is information that is vital to assessing whether or not the EPA has the necessary teeth to do its job.

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question about probably the most important topic available to us to talk about at the moment and that is water and, as you mentioned, the specific initiative announced by the Beattie government of the two dams, Traveston Dam being one. So far as the advice that we have provided to the portfolio with responsibility, which is the portfolio of Natural Resources, Mines and Water, or other working groups, I will refer that matter to the director-general shortly.

Might I make some general remarks to you, however, to ensure that my position as environment minister in regard to the Traveston Dam is really clear to you or other members of the committee. There is no doubt that we have a water crisis in south-east Queensland—a worse than 100-year drought event. We have done the sums on the megalitres of water that are available presently for the existing

population and the megalitres of water that are going to be required for the growing population in the years to come. Presently, our water supply capacity in south-east Queensland is 450,000 megalitres. That, however, is nowhere near the need that we will have. The projection is that by 2050 we will need 750,000 megalitres. That is a huge gap. It is responsible of my government to have faced the very hard questions then and come up with answers as to how that additional 300,000 megalitres is to be provided.

As environment minister, I do indeed wish that we could simply provide it by better water demand strategies: by tanks on our houses, by greywater, by being much more sensible as a society than we have been about the use of potable water, and by those wonderful greywater initiatives that are gathering standing in the broader community. I wish by improving pipeline connections between our existing dams that that would be sufficient. But the hard fact is that those initiatives are not, and neither is the recycling initiative, particularly recycling for industrial or agricultural use. The hard facts are that to supply those additional 300,000 megalitres to the growing population of south-east Queensland we need also the two dams that the Beattie government has announced and they are, of course, the Wyalong Dam and the Traveston Dam. So far as the documentation is concerned, Mr Purtill, would you like to comment?

CHAIR: Could I suggest, if it is agreeable to the member for Burnett, maybe another two minutes is appropriate to answer.

Mr MESSENGER: Yes, sure. That is fine.

Mr Purtill: The minister may have mentioned that the decisions on the suite of water development projects announced by the Premier on 4 and 5 July are matters for the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Water. But, of course, the Environmental Protection Agency has a key role in assessing and supporting the environmental impact assessment process for any major developments that may take a number of different impact assessment pathways.

Some of the preliminary work that the Environmental Protection Agency has already undertaken includes a preliminary desktop assessment of the biodiversity values potentially affected by the Traveston Crossing Dam. It was seen that most of the area to be inundated is cleared with low environmental values. However, there will be significant impacts from such a dam in the in-stream environment. That would be a significant focus of any impact assessment process into the future.

But I do want to assure the member for Burnett that the environmental impact assessment process is the work of the Environmental Protection Agency that is undertaken and, in the normal course of discovery of any material that is in the public domain and made available, any of that material which is to be part of an environmental impact assessment process would be typically part of a discoverable process. I do not anticipate there being any reason why material that would not normally be in the public domain would not be available for you and it would be through those normal processes. The environmental impact assessment process is all about allowing all of the impacts to be assessed to look at what modifications may be needed and also to allow public scrutiny.

Mr COPELAND: Mr Chairman, if I may, I note Mr Purtill said that everything is available in the public domain. The request was regarding all the reports and information the EPA has provided to all the other government bodies and consultants. I move—

That the minister be directed to provide all of this committee with all of those reports and any information that the department has provided to the government bodies and consultants in relation to the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam and that the minister do so by the normal time frame for information taken on notice.

Mr MESSENGER: I second that.

CHAIR: We will need to do that in the committee room. You are moving a motion. That is something that would require some discussion.

Mr Purtill: Mr Chairman, may I clarify?

CHAIR: Is it a statement that may assist?

Mr Purtill: There was an assertion made about what I said and I just want to clarify my understanding of what I said for the member for Cunningham, if I may.

CHAIR: Sure. If you are concerned that you have been misinterpreted, I will give you a very brief opportunity.

Mr Purtill: Just very quickly, what I was saying is that material that is in the public domain would be available via those channels. But I think what I heard—

Mr COPELAND: I suspect we are talking about freedom of information.

CHAIR: The committee is going to adjourn to our committee room. I would imagine that we will be back in five to 10 minutes. I might suggest that if the minister and others would like to just remain here, we will try to be back within five minutes.

Proceedings suspended from 2.25 pm to 2.58 pm.

CHAIR: The committee has deliberated somewhat. I have to inform this hearing that the committee passed the following motion—

The committee requests the minister to provide the committee with all the reports and information her department has provided government bodies and consultants in relation to the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam and that the minister do so by 4 pm Thursday, 20 July 2006.

That is the motion passed by the committee. For the information of members here today, I think it is appropriate to inform this hearing—and other chairs have done this on other occasions—that the committee under the parliamentary standing orders has no power to order or compel the minister or anyone else to table these documents. It is purely a matter for the minister whether these documents are tabled. However, that is the motion moved by the committee. I call the honourable member for Burnett.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, in reference to page 1-5 of the MPS under 'Staffing', I note that the estimated actual number of staff protecting our natural and cultural heritage in 2005-06 was 1,080. Minister, were any of your staff or former staff charged by the police with supplying, producing and possessing a dangerous drug? If so, what departmental investigations have you put in place to review issues such as possible fraudulent or illegal use of departmental credit cards and to review those ex-employees' work history, focusing on directions or fines that they may have handed out to the public?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. I will let the director of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service answer your specific question but indicate that I would like to make some general remarks after he does so.

Mr Feely: The person you refer to, I assume, is a person who used to be in our employ at Rainbow Beach and was arrested for allegedly growing marijuana on national park estate. He was summarily served a letter of termination the day that that occurred. Obviously that is not the sort of activity that we condone. He instantly left our employment, so to speak. At that stage we obviously did the normal things we do to get back the various equipment and so forth off him. We have in place other audit processes that check on corporate credit cards and so forth. That will have been followed with him, as it would with anybody else. In terms of his employment, as I say, that was terminated. It is a very clear breach of trust and we were unhappy. We would not have people like that working for us.

Mr MESSENGER: And that man was not referred to the CMC?

Ms BOYLE: Pardon me. The time has not finished and I had indicated that when Mr Feely had finished I wished to make some further remarks. The remarks I would like to make recognise that, while there may be some in life who work for all kinds of organisations, including the QPWS, who either make some mistakes or fall foul of the law, the great majority of rangers—despite the impression given to many of them as well as Queensland in general by the opposition shadow spokesperson for the environment—are absolutely magnificent, hardworking people who do a very difficult job most days of the week.

During the Recreation Areas Management Act debate in the parliament, which went on over three separate occasions late into the evening, supported only by the shadow spokesperson for the environment in the end—his own National Party colleagues did not turn up for the vote—he on that occasion and many others made disparaging remarks in general about rangers. He has referred to rangers as 'little dictators' and said that they have become 'hated and distrusted'. In fact, the Queensland Rangers Association has at least once written to Mr Messenger demanding an apology which he has been obliged to give. The rangers of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service do tremendous duties in many remote and difficult locations as well as in busy locations. I pay my compliments to them.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, you should not shoot the messenger. You should have learnt that lesson by now.

CHAIR: Thanks, member for Burnett. I call the honourable member for Nicklin.

Mr WELLINGTON: Minister, at page 1-1 of your portfolio statement, you state—

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the Queensland Government's lead agency for environmental protection and conservation management ...

I also refer you to your answer to question on notice No. 2 in relation to the proposed Traveston Dam. Will you assure this committee and the parliament that your department will provide the maximum resources available to ensure that your department fulfils the government's legislative responsibilities of environmental protection and conservation management of the existing threatened species in the Mary River and also your department's identified endangered species in the Mary River? If so, what work is your department currently doing in relation to these species and do you have a project officer and support staff?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. The answer is yes. I will expand on that. Of course we are concerned about the effect on the flora and fauna in the area and particularly on those species that are already listed as endangered or vulnerable. The three that people have expressed most concern about are the lungfish, which is listed under the EPBC Act as vulnerable, the Mary River cod

and the Mary River turtle, both of which are listed as endangered. There is another turtle that concerns us also and it has been said that it may well be listed shortly.

We have done some further assessment of species in the area that may be impacted, although this is at a preliminary stage. The serious business of assessing the potential impacts on the species and, most importantly, the mitigation and the recovery or provision of alternative habitats is work that will continue over the years ahead during the planning of the dam, and it will be informed, of course, by the environmental impact statement. That will be a statement made on the basis of very many studies and including studies about those particular species that we have already identified as being at risk.

There are various concerns that we have not only about the lungfish in its actual numbers, for example, but also about whether the dam could interfere with riffle areas where the lungfish is known to breed. According to scientists in the EPA, insofar as they are aware of studies of the lungfish's breeding habitats, it has been a habitual breeder in the same place and therefore its flexibility should the breeding areas be disrupted by the dam is a matter of some concern.

The Mary River cod is in a different state. It has been, as I think the local elders said in their cultural heritage letter to us, an economic fish. It has been widely fished by very many in the area for a long time. In fact, that is why some of these species have come to be listed as endangered or vulnerable—because of the behaviours of those who lived in the area either through the denuding of the river banks or other activities. Yes, I do affirm to the member and to all members that the EPA's role in terms of the species diversity, risk to habitat and consequent actions that will be taken as the dam is designed is, indeed, a matter that will be on our continuing agenda.

Mr WELLINGTON: Minister, at page 1-2 of your portfolio statement under the heading 'Protecting Our Natural and Cultural Heritage', you state—

The EPA will continue to refine and update conservation legislation to ensure that Queensland law remains effective and reflects contemporary world's best practice in nature conservation and community standards and expectations.

Are you currently investigating amending any Queensland legislation so that it can be refined and updated to world's best practice in nature conservation to better protect your department's already identified endangered species and threatened species in the Mary River which may be impacted upon by the proposed Traveston Dam?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much. I will ask the director-general to address that both at the general level of species conservation and the Nature Conservation Act and specifically with regard to Traveston.

Mr Purtill: The major initiative of the Environmental Protection Agency at the moment with respect to threatened species recovery and management is a project called Back on Track. It is a project that we have pioneered—and it is now being looked at very carefully by the Commonwealth, which is supporting us in the project—to be able to identify priorities for threatened species recovery, priorities for looking at a systems based approach. In the past, if you like, the conventional wisdom has been to identify a single species and then to implement various strategies to make that species population increase. We are now understanding that a systems based approach can be a much better way to do that. If you have a look at the advances we are making with the koala population in south-east Queensland, you will see that that is a systems based approach, not specifically an individual animal based approach. That is the way you end up getting the habitat not only for that specific species but also for a suite of animals. That is not a legislative program. It is a program that is based upon resources for threatened species recovery projects of which we have many going on at the moment. Notable ones include the northern hairy-nosed wombat and so forth, again, based on understanding the habitat requirements.

In relation to the legislative program, we do have a continual program of legislative reform. You would be aware that we have recently updated our wildlife regulations and our marine park regulations. We also stay in touch with the new international union for the conservation of nature classification systems for rare and threatened species. We are moving over to that program, as is, I believe, the Commonwealth and other state jurisdictions, so that the conservation status of species in Australia, if you like, can be benchmarked against those things across-the-board.

CHAIR: That is all the time we have for non-government members. We will now have some time for questions by government members. Minister, on page 1-2 of the MPS, I note a reference to ensuring the conservation status of Queensland native species is maintained or enhanced. I understand that the EPA budget for 2006-07 includes some funding for research into ways to disperse flying foxes. Can you tell the committee some more about this research?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. I am pleased to announce today—and I believe that many members of the parliament, in particular, the member for Charters Towers and the member for Burnett, will be interested to hear—that the EPA is planning to trial chemicals to disperse flying foxes from roosts near suburban homes and different chemicals to attract flying foxes to more suitable alternative roosting sites. If tests on the roosts of captive flying foxes succeed, then there will be

field trials in locations including places such as Charters Towers. The chemicals could, in theory, also be used by commercial fruit growers to protect their crops.

This is a far more positive response to a problem that occurs in many places around Queensland than that put forward by the opposition environment spokesperson. Mr Messenger has referred to flying foxes on very many occasions as vermin. They are not vermin; they are our native animals. They have been in Australia for millions of years and provide—

Mr MESSENGER: Chair, on a point of order, the minister is misleading the estimates committee. I have never, ever referred to flying foxes as vermin.

CHAIR: There is no point of order, member for Burnett. The minister is free to answer the question in the manner she sees fit.

Ms BOYLE: Thank you. The flying fox is an important part of our natural wildlife and the balance of our biodiversity referred to often by people as nature's tree planters. Last month, in fact, the member for Burnett put out a media release saying that flying foxes should be—he used the 'c' word—culled or killed and he was using as his justification an outrageous scare campaign. He put out a media release saying that flying foxes carry deadly diseases, that children and pregnant women are at threat and that unless tests could guarantee flying fox colonies were disease free, then 'swift, strong and decisive action' was required—that is, the 'c' word and that is culling or killing. There is no evidence that the Hendra virus is passed from bats to human beings. Lyssavirus is only a risk for those who are scratched or bitten by bats, and they are generally handlers, and there are vaccinations.

In fact, the member for Burnett has been written to by some eminent scientists. Dr Petra Buettner, for example, expresses that she is 'appalled by your statements as you are the Shadow Environment Minister'. She states—

I would expect you to develop policies to conserve flying foxes rather than suggest culling them for the short-sighted interests of some farmers and potential voters.

Mr PEARCE: In a budget reply speech to the parliament a member claimed that he had done a calculation comparing the 2006-07 environment budget to the 2003-04 environment budget. The member said that he had worked it out to be about \$72 per Queenslander now and about \$100 per Queenslander three years ago. He used those figures to attack government spending on the environment. Can you correct that record?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question, because I do want to set the record straight. It is one of a number of basic errors that the member for Burnett has made. I will put them down to ignorance rather than any deliberate intention to mislead. In fact, he is not alone—*Channel 7 News* made a similar mistake recently—so I correct the record for all who care about the extent of funding by the Beattie government for the environment.

The budget of the EPA has not dropped. Some years ago the Queensland government introduced a capital charge on all agencies. To ensure that they were no worse off, Treasury gave agencies the money in their budgets to pay the capital charge. This was never money that we could actually spend; Treasury gave it and took it back. In some years the EPA received and gave back to Treasury in excess of \$100 million.

In 2004-05 the government removed the capital charge. That gave the false impression that the EPA budget had dropped. For the comparison to be valid you would need to remove money given to the EPA for the capital charge. The accurate picture of the EPA budget is that it has been increasing every year. The bucket of money we had to spend in 2004-05 was \$255.7 million, in 2005-06 it was \$271.9 million and in 2006-07 it is \$294.4 million.

To return to the member for Burnett's comparison of environmental dollars per Queenslander, he is right that in 2006-07 it works out to about \$72 per Queenslander, but in 2003-04 it was about \$69 per Queenslander. It is interesting then to compare the figures for the last time the coalition was in power. To be fair, since then there has been a move from cash accounting to accrual accounting. Having said that, the comparison is that in 1996-97 it was about \$50 per Queenslander and in 1997-98 about \$47 per Queenslander. So, \$47 per Queenslander under the coalition, \$72 per Queenslander now under the Beattie government at a time when our population is rapidly expanding.

The member for Burnett made another basic error in his budget reply speech in relation to staff numbers. He took the June 2005 head count of 2,331 employees and compared it to the FTE—the full-time equivalent—figure for June 2006 which was 2,111 and then attacked us for reducing staff. The true comparison is that at June 2005 there were full-time equivalents of 2,101.8 and as at June 2006, 2,111—an increase, in fact.

Ms MOLLOY: Minister, I do not really have a question, I would just like to restate my position on this government's decision to dam the Traveston dam.

CHAIR: Member for Noosa—

Ms MOLLOY: The last person to be expelled from this government was a criminal. I am not a criminal. I would just like to restate it is nothing short of environmental, social and economic vandalism.

CHAIR: Member for Noosa, I warn you under 184.

Ms MOLLOY: I have finished, thank you.

CHAIR: I am going to warn you anyway under standing order 184. I think it is appropriate to do that. The committee here is for the asking of questions. The parliament is where statements can be made. I call the member for Whitsunday.

Ms JARRATT: I refer the minister to page 1-20 of the MPS and note that capital expenditure includes provision of new visitor facilities in areas covered by the Recreation Areas Management Act such as the Great Sandy and Bribie Island National Parks. Based on experiences earlier this year, are you able to indicate whether this expenditure will improve the enjoyment of visitors to the areas covered by the RAM act?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. We are really proud to have a policy that is proclaimed loudly and that is that our parks are for people. Despite those who are opposed to lands going into national park claiming that we are locking these areas up and that we are actively seeking to discourage visitation, I am pleased to have the opportunity to give some fine examples of where our staff are working well with the local community as well as with visitors to our protected area estate and particularly to some areas that are covered by the Recreation Areas Management Act.

Over the Easter long weekend this year more than 16,000 campers stayed in over 300 national parks or other areas managed by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. Fraser and Moreton Islands, Cooloola, Inskip Point, Kenilworth and Capricornia Cays have continued to be the most popular. In fact, you might recall that last Christmas a small group of campers caused problems at Inskip Point with unruly behaviour. But by Easter at the same location it was a much different story. We had upgraded the loos, we had more rangers available and police worked with us to ensure that about 2,100 campers had a relatively peaceful and enjoyable camping experience.

But there are always some yahoos who threaten to spoil the experience for others. Six people were issued with infringements and three groups were evicted for causing damage to native vegetation or disturbing other campers. You might well guess that for those who were evicted there was alcohol frequently involved. This is not a large number when you consider that 2,100 people camped in the area and yet it could well have spoilt the weekend for many of those campers if our rangers had not had the powers given to them under the Recreation Areas Management Act and that they have had for some years, powers that the shadow spokesperson for the environment argued about long and loud in the parliament and yet powers that, in fact, the Inskip community particularly have welcomed and, indeed, applauded.

After Easter the headline in their local paper read 'Happy campers at Inskip: thank rangers, thank police'. The mayor of Cooloola is on the record, as is community local camping advocate Reg Lawler, complimenting our rangers on their wide use of the powers available to them in order to ensure that our parks are for the good people who want to enjoy themselves, enjoy the natural environment and yet are not going to, of course, cause harm to others or unnecessary disruption.

Mr PEARCE: I want to raise a question with regard to the resourcing of national park management. I know from my own electorate that resourcing national park management is always a challenge for government. What steps have you taken to ensure our national parks are adequately resourced and do you receive assistance from the Commonwealth in any substantive way?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you indeed for the question. The short answer is no. Queensland does not receive any substantial assistance from the Commonwealth government. This is despite the fact that Queensland has five World Heritage areas, more than any other state in Australia. The state has contributed \$105 million over the past five years excluding the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority which is substantially under the control of the Commonwealth government. During that same period the Commonwealth has contributed only \$16.6 million for management.

In addition, Commonwealth funding for terrestrial World Heritage areas has decreased by 30 per cent in the past five years from \$4.5 million in 2001-02 to \$3.2 million in 2005-06. A useful job for the shadow spokesperson for the environment would be to set politics aside for a moment and to join with me in talking to his colleagues in Canberra about Queensland not being given a fair shake.

These parks are not only important for the environment and are not only World Heritage areas but also they are major economic drivers for Queensland as prime tourism infrastructure. The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service manages approximately 12 million hectares of land in more than 1,200 individual land parcels and that, in total, comprises nearly seven per cent of Queensland. There are around 16 million people who visit our parks and forests each year. In addition, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service is responsible for 68,000 square kilometres of state marine parks and 345,000 square kilometres of Great Barrier Reef Marine Park jointly managed with the Commonwealth.

We are raising our budget every year, expanding our estate, increasing our staff numbers and all we get is criticism from an opposition that did a whole lot less than we are doing now while their mates in Canberra refuse to provide any assistance, even when they know that these are not just an

environmental resource, but also an economic driver for the community. Before he spends a lot more time criticising for being imperfect the fine rollout of the work of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service I suggest to the opposition spokesperson that he have a word to his mates and say that this is a shameful state of affairs.

Additionally, we have an unresolved issue in terms of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. A review has been sitting on the federal minister's desk for months. There are reports that the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is to be disbanded and become a section of a department in Canberra. Speak up about that, please. Join with me beyond politics in looking after Queensland's natural assets and asking for a fair shake from the Commonwealth to supplement the fine and increasing resources that the state is putting into their parks.

CHAIR: The committee will now break for afternoon tea and resume at 3.35. That will give people an opportunity to have a cup of tea. I know I could certainly do with a cuppa. We will then examine the areas of Local Government and Planning.

Proceedings suspended from 3.26 pm to 3.39 pm.

CHAIR: The committee will now continue its examination of the portfolio of the Minister for Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women. We turn now to the areas of local government and planning. I call the honourable member for Nicklin.

Mr WELLINGTON: Minister, I refer you to page 2-2 of your Ministerial Portfolio Statement where you refer to one of your department's immediate priorities of achieving better planned, vibrant communities and improved access to sport and active recreational places and facilities which support participation from the grassroots to elite levels. In relation to the recreational horse riders who in the future will be prohibited from riding many of their current safe horse-riding trails, I ask: how much money is available in this year's budget to construct new, safe alternative horse-riding trails on the Sunshine Coast? And what are the proposed funding guidelines for these proposed works?

Ms BOYLE: I thank the member for the question. It is a project on which he and I have worked long and hard. So far as the funding is concerned, I am pleased to inform him that the initial funding that has been allocated is \$650,000 and that that will, in part, be allocated to the consultant who has substantially done the work of finalising the trails but is not yet quite finished. We are within, we think, a short period of time from having that trails network finalised, and then the full contribution that will be payable to the consultant out of that \$650,000 can be confirmed.

The horse riders have previously been advised that, once all trail alignments are known, works will be prioritised across the networks and where additional funding is required it will be sought from government. So I confirm to the member for Nicklin today that where that \$650,000 is inadequate—should it prove not to be sufficient—when that money runs out I will be at the appropriate Treasury committee table seeking further money for those works. Of those sections requiring works to be completed, the majority are minor works consisting of slashing, low branch removal, erection of signage and construction of safety barriers, and these are not in themselves very substantial or very costly items. So we would hope that \$650,000 will go quite a long way.

I would, however, also like to bring to the committee's attention that despite the good efforts of the member for Nicklin, despite the good efforts of very many horse riders who might be disappointed with the government's firm policy of no non-native animals in national parks but who have accepted that so long as there are other trails their enjoyment of horse riding can continue, there remain a couple of extremists who refuse to accept the government's position and intend to campaign at the next election about it. In fact, this small group of people do not represent the vast majority of riders. Some have resorted to scare tactics and untruths. They have circulated a photograph. Mr Chair, with your permission, may I provide a copy of that photograph to members of the committee? It is a photocopy of the photograph to which I am referring.

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms BOYLE: This photograph, which will be circulated to you, purports to show the result of horse riders being forced to ride on busy roads. What they fail to say is that the photo is from a newspaper in Germany where four horses that were not appropriately fenced off escaped from their paddock on to a busy road, where one was hit by a car, almost killing the driver. The horse was riderless and the accident happened at night in rural Germany. It is mischief, Mr Chair. The project that we have worked long and hard on to provide thousands of kilometres of safe trails in the south-east Queensland hinterland is close to its successful conclusion.

Mr WELLINGTON: Minister, I refer you to page 2-2 of your Ministerial Portfolio Statement, where you refer to one of your department's immediate priorities of enhancing the quality of published performance indicators concerning local governments to assist councils and the community to better understand local government performance, and I ask: how do you propose to monitor that the local councils do publish clearly understandable information to better assist their respective communities to understand their respective local government performances? Further, if councils do not provide this

important information to their communities through either normal supply of information or under the Freedom of Information Act, what coercive powers do you have for the information to be released?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for that complex question. I will make some very brief preliminary remarks and then hand to the director-general to address the bigger parts of your question. The world of local government is very aware that their communities are demanding of them, as they are of other levels of government, higher levels of accountability and higher levels of service than ever before. The great majority, in my perspective as local government minister, is facing that directly and locally and is happy also to provide the kind of information that might be requested from government agencies including my department. So far as those who might either not be aware of their poor performance or be tardy about providing it, I will ask the director-general to address that further.

Mr Kinnane: The minister, as she has mentioned, proposes to release the report late this month or early August. The inaugural 2006 local government performance report will compare councils across a number of key result areas. In fact, the minister has shown the drive for this document. We have fast-tracked the work within the department to actually achieve the minister's goal.

We are also having a look at other precedents in other jurisdictions, particularly in Tasmania and overseas, as to how local government performance is actually recorded. It will not be a surprise to the committee that we are working very closely with the Local Government Association as well as the Local Government Managers Association in the compilation of the report.

The inaugural 2006 local government performance report will compare councils across a number of key result areas including council income and spending, financial position, employees, infrastructure, services and the environment. The type of information the report will provide to citizens includes how much their council is spending on different categories of expenditure, how that compares with other councils and also whether the council has a healthy amount of funds at hand to cover the unexpected should it occur. Other information will be included on council employees, the state of infrastructure and the level of other services provided, such as libraries, waste, recycling, parks and gardens et cetera. For comparative purposes, councils have been categorised as metropolitan, provincial, rural small-medium, rural large, rural very large or rural remote. Indicators for Indigenous councils are not included at this stage for the inaugural 2006 report. It will provide a very good benchmark for comparisons on performance.

Ms BOYLE: As to the issue of requiring the information and what powers I or the director-general have, I will let him have a think about that for a moment. My understanding is, however, that the department does have the power to investigate a council and to require information to be presented. That would not, of course, be our preferred position. The quality of the information will be much better and the information better used if it is voluntarily given.

Mr WELLINGTON: Minister, at page 2-3 of your portfolio statement you refer to the role your department plays in administering local government infrastructure grants and subsidy programs of more than \$669 million in combined state and Commonwealth government funding to assist local governments to achieve quality environmental outcomes, improved water security and enhanced social amenities to their communities, and I ask: have you investigated whether any efficiencies can be delivered by having these administrative duties funded and handled directly by the federal government?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. There was a report known as the Hawker report several years ago that purported to investigate cost shifting between state governments and local government. In the research for that report that was done by various states and local government sectors around Australia, the issue was canvassed as to whether, in fact, it would be more cost effective for the federal government to hand out grants directly rather than through the state. The bottom line decision to that some years later, all the politics notwithstanding, was no. The reason for that is straightforward, and that is that, in relation to the grants for local government that come through my department of local government and planning that we administer for them and pass to local government, we take absolutely no cut at all. No administrative fees are deducted from that. Every cent is passed on to local government and we subsume the cost of its administration in the cost that we already have in administering the state's much larger own grants and subsidies system. Would you care to add to that, Director-General?

Mr Kinnane: The department administers a significant amount of funding which has increased from \$616 million in the 2005-06 financial year to \$669 million in the 2006-07 financial year. We are currently working with both the Local Government Association of Queensland and the Australian Local Government Association on the ALGA's policy push for achieving one per cent of taxation revenue for local government. We are providing information to the LGAQ in that respect and Greg Hallam, the executive director of the LGAQ, chairs the working group on behalf of Councillor Paul Bell, the president of the ALGA. The issues of funding from the Commonwealth and any transfer of funding programs are matters currently being considered by that working group, particularly with the ALGA, and we are collaborating with them.

Ms BOYLE: I might complete the answer by saying that we as a state government have taken the policy position that we do not mind what the Commonwealth's decision is. This way, if they wish to manage the funds directly themselves and distribute them directly to local governments, that is quite fine

with us. If anything, it would relieve us of a small burden. But equally so, we are quite comfortable with our ability to do that and to do it well for the 157 councils of Queensland.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, I refer to the CMC report on the Gold Coast City Council. Could you advise this committee what information you have sent to the DPP in relation to that report and what further communications you have had with the DPP on that issue?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. It is a really good question. There have been expressions of frustration from members of the Gold Coast community and, I have been told, from some of the councillors involved in the allegations at how long this is taking, and I absolutely share their frustration. When the report was presented to the parliament on that morning by the Speaker and a copy was presented to me, the CMC also presented the information relevant to their recommendations for prosecution straight to the department of local government and planning. I did not myself look at that information. That is a matter, of course, for those with legal expertise, not a matter for politics. I am aware that my department passed that information on to crown law very quickly, and the director-general might talk about how quickly that was in a moment. Crown law has had that information direct from the CMC through my department now for the best part of two months and still has not reached a conclusion as to whether there will be prosecutions or not.

I have, for proper and appropriate behaviour, not approached it directly myself but through the director-general have asked anxiously and irritably, 'How much longer?' It is not fair to people whose reputations are being held in abeyance that this take an extraordinarily long time. Nonetheless, there are those others who would be present who have had experience with the law and how it does take its own sweet time. The bottom line is that for the people of the Gold Coast we have to be sure that the CMC's evidence as it has been gathered is properly considered and that if a prosecution is likely to be successful that prosecution go ahead, as unpleasant as that circumstance might be. Director-General, would you care to add anything about the process from the department?

Mr Kinnane: To confirm what the minister said, on the morning of the presentation to the Speaker of the parliament by the head of the CMC, Robert Needham, we were provided with a copy of the report and we immediately—that morning—provided all of the briefs of evidence produced by the CMC to the Crown Solicitor's office. I had a further discussion with the Crown Solicitor, Conrad Lohe, about the need to expedite the summary of the briefs and the deliberation over the briefs as soon as possible. He informed me that they would commission Mr Ralph Devlin QC, whom you would know very well and who is a renowned silk within Queensland, to undertake the review of briefs.

CHAIR: Do you want to grant an extension?

Mr HOBBS: No, I will ask another question. Thank you, Minister and Director-General. Minister, I refer to the accusations by Councillor Young that were sent to you that councillors had a voting bloc and were corruptly doing the bidding of developers on the Gold Coast. Minister, in view of the CMC report and your subsequent meetings with the Gold Coast City Council, do you consider that this accusation was correct and, putting aside the 2004 election period of the Gold Coast City Council, did you find any evidence that the council was not functioning effectively?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. For all the phrase 'voting bloc' sounds unpleasant, there is nothing wrong with a voting bloc. You may well say that the National Party is a voting bloc, as is the Liberal Party and the Labor Party. Any group or team generally at any level of government is a voting bloc. So in itself there is nothing wrong with a voting bloc.

I have not personally studied the voting patterns of those on the Gold Coast City Council to know whether Councillor Young's allegations in that regard are absolutely correct, generally correct or, in fact, all over the place. It is not a matter that has preoccupied me.

So far as the second part of your question is concerned—and that is whether or not the council is performing its duties capably—I have to say that on most of the matters that I have monitored I think the council is doing a good job. This is not a popular statement for me to make on the Gold Coast in many ways because those who were concerned, quite properly, about the matters that were raised with the CMC cannot quite manage that, on the one hand, the work that the Gold Coast City Council, for example, has done on the Water Futures Program is excellent; it is leading Queensland's local government sphere and has been very beneficial to the state government in informing us on policy matters. So in many ways, on purely content issues of administration and management of the council, the Gold Coast City Council has performed well.

Mr HOBBS: Would it be correct to say in the case of the Gold Coast elections that the nondisclosure of election gifts within the prescribed period may have been technical in nature? If you decide to prosecute these councillors, are you confident that all councillors who have similarly breached these provisions will be treated in the same way?

Ms BOYLE: That is a matter that bears on the charges that could well be laid following from the CMC's recommendations. I will regard it, therefore, as a sub judice question and not address it further.

Mr HOBBS: I refer to the CMC inquiry into the Gold Coast City Council and your reported enthusiasm to quickly bring in reforms. Did you have contact with the member for Southport, Mr Lawlor, in relation to the running of the 2004 Gold Coast City Council elections?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. I am not sure what is intended by it. With all of the members of this parliament who come from the Gold Coast I have several times—and sometimes merely in passing in the corridor—discussed Gold Coast matters, as I do of course with local members from all over the state who might stop me to mention something of importance in their electorate. There was during the period of the CMC investigation one day when the Gold Coast members on the Labor team got together with me for us to talk about how things were going down there and what people on the Gold Coast were saying to them, and Mr Lawlor was present at that meeting. Beyond that I do not have any specific recollection of discussing these matters with him.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, are you aware that Mr Lawlor contributed a significant amount, possibly up to \$20,000, to at least two candidates in that election? Did Mr Lawlor talk to you about those contributions?

Ms BOYLE: No, Mr Lawlor has not addressed that with me.

Mr HOBBS: Would it strike you as unusual that Mr Lawlor contributed to a Liberal member—

CHAIR: Member for Warrego, I might suggest that you refer your questions to the MPS that we are here to discuss today. We are to question the minister about the appropriations for which she is responsible. Other matters are more properly dealt with, I would suggest, in question time in parliament or elsewhere.

Mr HOBBS: I refer to pages 2-1 and 2-8. Does it strike you as unusual that Mr Lawlor contributed to Liberal candidate Roxanne Scott's campaign to the tune of \$4,800 and from \$5,000 to \$15,000 for another candidate Mr Peter Keech, the husband of the Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development and member for Albert?

Ms BOYLE: It is not a matter that I have ever considered or is in my ministerial portfolio statement or will bear on the very many good projects that my departments will work on over the next year.

Mr HOBBS: So you were not aware of these contributions that were made to candidates down there?

CHAIR: The time for this block of questions has expired. We will move to questions from government members. Minister, in light of recent events at the Narangba Industrial Estate can you tell the committee what your department has done to ensure that this will not happen again and what you intend to do to make sure these events do not occur at any other industrial estates in Queensland. For the benefit of members this question relates to the MPS at 2-1.

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for this question. This is an important issue not only so far as the Narangba Industrial Estate is concerned but also in terms of whether there could be other incidents like the Binary fire in years to come. While I am very pleased to say that, as environment minister, I can compliment the EPA on their excellent work in the clean-up following the Binary fire, it is just as important for the department of local government and planning through the planning side of the department to have a look at how these industrial estates are developed and how they are managed—particularly so far as residential encroachment issues are concerned—through a local council's planning scheme.

The Binary Industries incident at Narangba was a clear warning of the potential risks associated with residential development encroaching on state industrial estates. I have acted on that warning by directing the Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation to carry out a review of state industrial estates in Queensland. This will determine whether there are estates with potentially similar problems to Narangba.

Two state development areas, established under the State Development and Public Works Organisation Act 1971, at Townsville and Gladstone are specifically designed for large scale industrial development. These have also been investigated by the department along with 46 fully and partially state developed industrial estates in Queensland. Another five state industrial estates are still undergoing a preliminary review. So that demonstrates to members the seriousness but also the extent of the review.

Many of the uses of these industrial estates, I should let you know, are ordinary uses where the potential for any damage to the environment or any risk to those in the area is quite small. We are checking whether or not we need a changed system that better designates the level of potential hazard and then how we ensure that these estates are appropriately protected within the planning scheme so that councils under growth pressures, as are all the SEQ councils, are not accidentally urged to allow residential development or other activities in areas that should be properly buffered in order to protect residents and that they are properly managed. I am pleased to say that we have cooperation in the early

stages of this review from local government. I would expect that that would continue over the months ahead.

CHAIR: Could you tell the committee about your intentions for the amalgamation of Queensland's councils?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much. That is a question I believe I was asked last year by the opposition spokesperson for local government and which may have been on his list this year too. He might be crossing it out as we speak or he might ask it again. It is a matter of very great importance in the world of local government.

The Beattie government has, through funding programs, established the size, shape and sustainability review and backed that up with \$25 million over the next five years. That comes about because we know that the boundaries that have served local government well for 100 years are not necessarily the boundaries that will serve them well for the next 100 years. The demands upon local government are distinctly different now to what they were even 20 years ago, let alone 50 or more years ago.

In other states of Australia state governments have moved on local government, you might say, and determined boundary changes and amalgamations with limited consultation and using power. It is my great preference that in Queensland we should be able to make the changes that are necessary while focused on the future with the state government supporting rather than directing. That is what we are about at this time. Local governments are gathering into groups and applying for funding to do the preliminary feasibility studies under the size, shape and sustainability program.

We already have some 90 councils that have joined together in about 15 different groupings. They are talking to us about examining, in the first instance, their financial standing—their benchmarks and their performance—and the threats for the future. They are prepared then to talk about the options for the future, including boundary changes and potential amalgamations. There are some who have already signalled that they know an amalgamation may well be the best way forward. A local government that is larger in financial resources, in rate base and in omph when it comes to advocacy with the state or federal government may well be a better way of serving their area, particularly where a lot of growth has occurred and so the community of interest is distinctly different to what it was at the time that the boundaries were set.

Already we have a Tablelands review group at work. We already have the following groups at work: Gulf-Savannah, Southern Downs, central highlands, Maranoa and district regional organisation of councils, north Queensland, western Queensland, Rockhampton, Sunshine Coast and Moreton. So the committee can be aware that in all directions in the state of Queensland local governments are taking their futures into their own hands. I and the Beattie government are supporting them.

Mr PEARCE: Could you tell the committee why the state finds it necessary to get involved in call-ins, especially those that councils have approved for residential development within the regions?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the questions. There are two circumstances in which a planning minister can call in a development. Both circumstances relate to state interests. The first state interest is to ensure a transparent and accountable planning and development assessment system. An example of this circumstance is where the decision made by the council is clearly inconsistent with a planning scheme and so undermines the planning process. The second circumstance where a minister may call in a development is where the application is inconsistent with state interests, either environmental or economic.

For the record, I have called in eight development applications. That, some people would say, is a lot. In fact, I think it is a tiny number when you consider the tens of thousands of planning decisions that have been made by local authorities in that same period of time. A good estimation is that 15,000 decisions have been made. Of those I have called in eight. That is hardly excessive. Of those eight call-ins I have made seven decisions and one is pending. Of those seven decisions made, I have approved three and refused four. Roughly, you might say, half and half. Councils have been happy with three of those decisions, unhappy with two of them and neutral on two.

What this surely demonstrates is that these are matters that are sufficiently significant in themselves in terms of the risk to proper governance and proper planning decisions or of such interest to the world of local government planning that they have warranted this attention from my department and from me. They bear on issues that the member for Fitzroy would be well aware of.

For example, I called in a development application lodged with the Belyando Shire Council for a 350 lot residential subdivision as it would have sterilised 1.9 million saleable tonnes of premium coking metallurgical coal worth approximately \$274 million. That is a dreadfully difficult decision for the council. It was queried whether it was the right decision and whether it had been properly made.

I thank the member for Fitzroy who, since my decision to turn down the application for residential development on that land, has been chairing a continuing working party with the key stakeholders, including industry representatives, to determine how Belyando shire, Moranbah and other such mining

towns can have both—that is, have communities with amenities free from emissions, air pollution and dirt on the clothes on their washing lines and, at the same time, have a burgeoning mining industry that provides the jobs that lead them to those communities in the first place.

Mr PEARCE: Can you outline what councils are eligible to receive SCAP funding and what councils have received funding in the last financial year?

Ms BOYLE: The Smaller Communities Assistance Program, which is known as SCAP, aims to assist councils to provide water and sewerage services in small communities where the cost of providing such services is significantly higher than elsewhere in the state. The program recognises that these communities face additional costs, primarily because they do not have the economies of scale due to their small size. The cost of providing this infrastructure for small communities is often out of a council's reach so SCAP provides councils with funding of up to 80 per cent of the total project costs. This is to the credit of the state government. Local governments are pleased about it. They are particularly pleased that there has been a further announcement that in the funding arrangements for the next five years for local government grants and subsidies SCAP will continue.

All councils with communities of less than 5,000 people are eligible to apply for SCAP. It truly is a program for the smaller councils. SCAP funding has been fully expended on the last round of approvals and that was back in October 2002. However, as part of the new funding suite, \$75 million has now been set aside for SCAP. To be eligible to receive SCAP a council must go through a submissions process and provide certain information.

I have written to mayors inviting them to apply for funding. Priority will be given, I have said to them, to projects with the highest need because of the hiatus that there has been in SCAP funding. We have already received four subsidy applications from councils under the latest round of SCAP, though I am not in a position yet to give any details. The amount that may be allocated will vary according to the projects. The projects most likely to be successful will include new water and sewerage services where none presently exist, upgrading infrastructure to improve water quality or quantity, upgrading sewerage services to improve environmental or health outcomes and planning studies to scope such projects.

I will give you a couple of examples from the last funding round. For example, Ilfracombe Shire Council received \$35,600 to expand town water dams. Mornington Shire Council received \$639,000 to extend the island's reticulated sewerage system. Woorabinda Aboriginal Shire Council received \$161,159 for water supply improvements.

Ms JARRATT: Minister, thank you for your response earlier in relation to the Gold Coast City Council in response to a question raised by a non-government member. It seems that it is not the only council enduring some disharmony. I understand that events at the Johnstone Shire Council are reported as creating a low morale. On top of the effects of Cyclone Larry, this is placing an undue burden on the community. What is your department doing to address these issues?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. It is a matter of great importance at the moment in the Innisfail area to all residents of the Johnstone shire and certainly to the staff of the council and, I am pleased to inform members, to the elected members of the council. Serious concerns have been raised regarding the events leading up to the sacking of Mr Peter Roberts, the council's chief executive officer. There are allegations of poor behaviour by some councillors including bullying and intimidation of council staff and even of community members. These recent events, when added to ongoing concerns about the financial position of Johnstone Shire Council, raise questions about the ability and capacity of council to meet its responsibilities.

There is no doubt that the uncertainty caused by the dismissal of the chief executive officer in this stressful time after Cyclone Larry has resulted in low morale in council and in the community. As a result of the serious nature of allegations raised about Johnstone councillors related to bullying, code of conduct breaches and inappropriate meeting procedures, the director-general has prepared terms of reference and appointed an independent investigator as the authorised person to conduct an investigation into the allegations. The investigator will report his findings by 24 July 2006. The department has allocated \$20,000 to this investigation. The terms of reference for the investigation cover the circumstances leading to the dismissal of the CEO, council processes in relation to councillor code of conduct breaches, allegations of bullying involving councillors, meeting procedures applied by the council and examination of the council's capacity to effectively discharge its responsibilities.

I inform members that I visited the council on Thursday of last week and met informally with all but one of the councillors who were available on that day, the other councillor being very well engaged in the preparation of the Innisfail Show. What I was impressed by was how worried everybody is—all of the councillors, including those who have been part of very negative allegations. All of them have, I believe, good hearts and mean well in terms of the service they are providing, but nonetheless it was apparent to me that they are having very considerable difficulty at the council with a problem that has been coming for years in terms of financial management and now with the management of staff with the preparation of budgets and with reaching decisions in a proper fashion and a united fashion. I expect to have the report from the investigator through the director-general with the recommendations within a matter of

weeks. We are aware that the Johnstone shire community would expect us to act as quickly as we can to resolve the situation.

Ms MOLLOY: Minister, in relation to the Miriam Vale Shire Council, can you outline the effectiveness of this council in relation to management and outcomes?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. There have been concerns raised with me regarding the operation of the Miriam Vale Shire Council, especially in relation to the appointment of the chief executive officer and the processing of development applications under the Integrated Planning Act 1997. The chief executive officer, Mr Greg Powell, was appointed by the Miriam Vale Shire Council despite previous convictions for fraud while the chief executive officer of a local government in Western Australia. Mr Powell made a full disclosure of his criminal history to council as part of the recruitment process and council decided to appoint him notwithstanding his past criminal history. The Crime and Misconduct Commission has investigated the recruitment process and found no misconduct on behalf of council or Mr Powell. It is reasonable for those who make a mistake in life to pay the penalty for that mistake, and particularly for those of us in public life to often have to pay our penalty in a very public manner. That penalty having been paid, however, it is reasonable also for people to be given a fair go—a second chance—to restore their reputations and to provide useful contribution to society.

I also say that at Miriam Vale Shire Council there are considerable growth pressures, and so there has been a strong impetus for development in the shire, particularly around Agnes Water. This has placed significant demands on council and its officers to meet their obligations under the Integrated Planning Act 1997. In particular, I have received a number of complaints relating to unreasonable delays and conditions relating to assessment of development applications, quality of planning advice provided by council officers, overreliance by council on the court system to resolve planning disputes, unreasonable levels of council development application fees, increased administrative expenditure by council, and unacceptable behaviour of council's planning staff.

The CMC referred the complaints about the problems with council's development assessment processes to the Queensland Ombudsman to investigate, and the Ombudsman's office is currently conducting an investigation into these complaints. I have written to the council offering the assistance of my department to run training programs for council staff on the processes and procedures applying to the Integrated Development Assessment System. My department has provided assistance to the Ombudsman's office on reviewing technical information about the IDAS process and has offered further assistance in the Ombudsman's review of council's development assessment files. My department continues to provide council planning staff with technical information and assistance.

CHAIR: I call the honourable member for Warrego.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, I refer to page 2-9, dot point 7, where you talk about enhancing local government accountability and transparency in local government elections. I ask you to carefully consider this question: have you been made aware of any covert payments from anyone including the ALP, its associate entities or on behalf of the ALP to any candidate in the Gold Coast City Council elections?

Ms BOYLE: No.

Mr HOBBS: Thank you, Minister. Minister, it would appear as if you have flicked this CMC report directly to crown law without careful examination of the act that you administer. It may be, for instance, that the terms of reference for the inquiry may have been broad enough; maybe they were not broad enough. Maybe there are some councillors guilty of offences. Some may be guilty and some may get off those offences. Have you asked your department to have a close look at the act that you administer in relation to these events that happened at the Gold Coast, or do you think there is a lynch mob mentality out there in relation to the Gold Coast City Council and perhaps the government or others may wish to pursue that line rather than what we have to administer under the act?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for what is really a very important question and a matter of probably daily concern for me and some members of the department. There were other recommendations, aside from the potential prosecutions, in the CMC report on the Gold Coast City Council. What those recommendations arose from in essence was a failure of transparency at the time of the last local government election on the Gold Coast. Residents quite rightly were concerned that they were not told who was running in what groups and who was being funded by what groups. That is the essence of the recommendations, which seek to provide stronger requirements to all candidates for local government around the state of Queensland to be more transparent and to be more transparent at the time of the next local government election, which will be held, of course, in March 2008.

It is therefore important not only that my department comes up with some suitable changes to address those concerns following from the CMC recommendations but also that we do so in time for those next local government elections, in time to reassure the people of the Gold Coast that things will be different next time, and we are working hard to do that. The important matter is about honesty and transparency, and that is surely an encouragement to us all—not only local government candidates but also state and federal government candidates—to be transparent about who you are with in terms of

your candidacy, to admit why it is that you are running, who you are running with and who is supporting you in your efforts to be elected. That is where the failures occurred on the Gold Coast.

I have to say that part of what is making it difficult for me is that, through the Local Government Association of Queensland, the Local Government Managers Association and direct representations to me from local governments around the state, the rest of the world of local government is feeling fairly resentful that they may have to put up with considerable difficulty and differences in the Local Government Act as a consequence of actions that occurred in one local government area. So I am attempting to find the way forward to make sure that there is more honest, open transparency from candidates at the time of the next local government elections while at the same time not make an unnecessarily burdensome set of legal changes to the Local Government Act. It is also important that we have a look at the parity between the state Electoral Act and the Local Government Act. We have generally had a similar set of standards and we would in general seek to continue to have a similar set of standards for candidates at all levels of government.

Mr HOBBS: Thank you. Minister, I table for your information, with the indulgence of the committee, information in relation to donations to the Gold Coast City Council. Minister, I refer to page 2-13, dot point 5. I refer to the \$20 million to reduce water usage in homes and businesses mentioned on page 2-13 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement. I understand that this is the \$20 million which the Premier initially promised would be spent last financial year which was to be broken into \$10 million for the residential retrofit program and \$10 million for a business water-saving program. Can you confirm that following the Premier's announcement on 11 July 2006 an extra \$5 million will now be added to the residential retrofit program and an extra \$30 million to the business water-saving program? The question is: can you explain where this extra \$35 million is coming from, given that it is not provided for in your department's 2006 budget papers? I also table some information in relation to that.

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. The director-general will be pleased to respond in a moment. I thank you for mentioning some of those programs that are absolutely important in terms of solving the water problems here in south-east Queensland. We know that there are those who are opponents of dams and that they have very genuine concerns. But in fact of course the government is undertaking a wide-ranging program to address the water shortage, including water efficiency and water demand management, and has allocated an extra \$67 million—the additional \$30 million that you mentioned, the additional \$5 million that you mentioned and also \$29 million for a residential water efficiency program which includes \$10 million in rebates for rainwater tanks, \$19 million for rebates for four-star or better washing machines, shower heads, dual-flush toilets, replacement of existing single-flush toilets and greywater recycling systems and, I am pleased to say, another \$3 million to install water efficient devices in government owned office buildings within south-east Queensland, that is, buildings managed through the Department of Public Works. So far as where the funds are allocated from, I will ask the director-general to address that.

Mr Kinnane: As the minister said, when the Premier announced the further \$67 million in June that brought the total figure to \$87 million. The key elements of the program are summarised as follows: a \$40 million state contribution; a focus on the top 1,200 priority water-saving opportunities; and local government funding and a resourcing commitment to be recognised as a contribution of the business water efficiency program with estimated water savings of 23 megalitres a day.

The Home WaterWise service consists of a home retrofit scheme which includes AAA shower heads and the other measures that the minister has mentioned. The government is providing \$15 million to Local Government Infrastructure Services to fund the Home WaterWise Service. This was an increase in funding and this was previously called the retrofit funding program. This will allow householders to pay just \$20 in return for services and goods worth \$150. The key elements of the south-east Queensland rebate scheme are up to a maximum of \$1,000 for the purchase and installation of rainwater tanks, including a combination of any of the following: rainwater tanks, pipes from roofs to tanks and connections from new or existing tanks to swimming pools. The additional funding for the industrial water initiative announced by the Premier is being funded by an equity injection by Treasury. So the department has been reimbursed for that expenditure.

Mr HOBBS: So that \$35 million has come in since to the department of local government? You will not be taking any of that money out of existing grant programs?

Mr Kinnane: No, we will not be. There will be no disadvantage to current programs. Treasury determined that the funding which would have previously been provided through grant programs would be used and replaced with an equity funding grant from Treasury. The net result is that no-one loses out in terms of the southern pipeline.

Mr HOBBS: I refer again to the \$20 million to reduce water usage in homes and businesses, mentioned on page 2-13 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement. I have tabled a copy of the page that appeared on the web set of the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Water on the morning of 30 June 2006, which stated that the residential retrofit service was not expected to start until late October 2006. On the same day the Premier issued a media release, which I tabled, stating that the residential retrofit program had been renamed the Home WaterWise Service and was to start the very

next day, 1 July. Can you explain how, within a matter of hours, this retrofit program that was announced in April and not due to start until October was suddenly up and running the next day, 1 July?

Ms BOYLE: I am pleased to say that whoever that was in the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Water was not keeping up with the Premier. The Premier has led the team in government to deal with all of the water matters and led it at a furious pace, may I say. When line departments along the way said, 'Yes, it will take us six months or so' he said, 'Nonsense. We'll have it by whatever date' and 1 July was the date for that particular program that he nominated. He did bring it forward as much as he has also decreed that we will spend very much more than had originally been intended on those projects.

When matters cross between the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Water with its water supply focus, the Environmental Protection Agency with its water demand management and water quality issues, the Department of Local Government who are often the providers of the subsidy and then others who were engaged in this—not only the Department of Premier and Cabinet themselves but also Local Government Infrastructure Services in Treasury which will be hosting this particular program and managing it with some other water programs that SEQWater is involved in—keeping the coordination and communication flowing well among all of those agencies is actually quite difficult and slips occasionally. So your question does relate to one of those such slips. I would encourage you, should you be uncertain in the future, to listen to what the Premier says. He is right.

Mr HOBBS: I refer again to the \$20 million to reduce water usage in homes and businesses mentioned on page 2-13. I table a copy of an announcement that UXC Ltd made to the Australian Stock Exchange on 4 July 2006. It stated that they had been awarded the \$22.5 million contract to deliver the Home WaterWise Service. Can you outline the process that was involved in awarding this contract to UXC? Is it not true that, just like the Aspen Caboolture Hospital contract, there was no competitive tender and a last-minute decision was made just to give the contract to UXC to save the government further political embarrassment on water?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much. That is a matter that the director-general is able to address.

Mr Kinnane: I was involved in some of the comprehensive discussions being held with the Coordinator-General around that time as well as the CEO of Local Government Infrastructure Services which, as you know, is a joint entity between QTC and the Local Government Association of Queensland. We were discussing the need to bring forward some of their proposed works, because you are right, the original program was due in October. I congratulate the officers of my department but particularly the officers of the LGIS who were able to fast-track the arrangements.

In those discussions with the CEO of the LGIS, Graham Matthew, it became clear that one of the stumbling blocks to fast-tracking the program was, in fact, the calling of tenders for the program. From my memory, that program was originally identified as taking at least four weeks. We discussed with the CEO of the LGIS moves to fast-track that. They advised us that it was within the powers of the LGIS to do a select tender or go to an arrangement without a full tender process. That matter went to the Cabinet Budget Review Committee. That was noted. It was not a requirement for the government to actually approve LGIS doing that. It was quite within the law and within the entitlements of the LGIS not to go to the tender program.

Mr HOBBS: Thank you.

Ms BOYLE: I might add to that, thank you—there is a little bit of time left yet—that in terms of the WaterWise program, the Premier has further announced this morning that there has been another change to that program. Previously, the councils involved were Toowoomba and the south-east Queensland councils. The mayor of Cooloola Shire, Mick Venardos, quite rightly made the point that it should be extended to the Cooloola Shire Council, that it was not fair that they were having the Traveston Dam difficulty and not getting the benefits of the WaterWise program. The Premier—and certainly I support him—saw the logic of that argument and he has further announced today that the Cooloola shire residents will all be eligible for subsidies and rebates under the Home WaterWise Scheme.

Mr HOBBS: Therefore, what you are saying today is that the \$22.5 million contract was a contract but there was no tender process. You just appointed this company to do this job, not dissimilar to the Aspen Caboolture Hospital situation. Were there other contractors? Were there other companies that would have—could have—delivered this project? Were people asked? Were other companies actually requested to put in an application? Were they contacted?

Ms BOYLE: I thank the member for asking me the question. None of the contract matters came across my desk or were broached with me. However, the director-general has some further information.

Mr Kinnane: The important point which I failed to mention earlier is that the reason LGIS chose—quite legitimately and quite legally—not to go to a full tender process was that the contract through which they would deliver the Home WaterWise program is simply an extension of the very successful program that is already in place in the Gold Coast with the Gold Coast City Council. In fact, we were very heartened, frankly, when we met with the LGIS and the statistics that they were able to produce

showing the effectiveness and the success of the program and the support of the Gold Coast City Council.

The company actually subcontracted, if you like, by the LGIS is called Fieldforce. They have been very successful in delivering the residential retrofit program, as I mentioned, with the Gold Coast. Therefore, while LG Infrastructure Services will not be going to the open market for the contract, there was a basis for their selection of Fieldforce—quite above the law, quite legitimate, quite legal.

Mr HOBBS: But this company has gone from a \$7 million company in 1998 to a \$170 million company today. It is no wonder; it would appear to me that they are getting a rails run. Surely, somebody could have rung another group. There must be other companies out there who do this sort of work. Surely, there must have been somebody out there who could have perhaps put in an expression of interest.

Ms BOYLE: Further questions in relation to that contract, which was managed by LGIS and which is part of the Treasury Department, should really more properly be addressed to the Treasurer.

Mr HOBBS: I refer to page 2-18 of the MPS, dot point 9 where you state that you introduced the first stage of a sustainable housing program designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote energy and water-efficient design in houses. How can this statement and this document be credible when you and your government refused the Montville Links development that was, in fact, a state-of-the-art energy and water-efficient design for housing and community living?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. For the record, it was not me and my department who refused the Montville Links development. That was a matter that was called in by the Premier as regional planning minister and was decided by the Premier with advice from the Office of Urban Management, which is not within the Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation. Nonetheless, I absolutely supported the decision that he made.

One important element of that decision was that it was in part outside the South East Queensland Regional Plan. It is really important for our South East Queensland Regional Plan that it be a serious statutory plan, that it not be a nice line on the map that can be changed at any time a developer comes in with a pretty good proposal and says, 'Here, let's move it and wiggle it around here so I can have my golf course, my resort, my new residential subdivision,' or whatever it might be. It is a very difficult thing to draw an urban boundary and to stick to it, but I support the Premier indeed in terms of his decision to do so.

I also would like to recognise the very considerable contribution that came from the local community, particularly through the member for Nicklin, who is well known in the parliament for taking up the issues of concern in his electorate and in adjacent electorates. He made it really plain that that development was not preferred by those in the area. In fact, Maleny and Montville are very precious communities and allowing the expansion of those communities beyond their present urban expansion areas would be quite unwise and quite risky in terms of changing the very character of those communities. I thank him for his contribution and stand by the decision that the Premier made.

CHAIR: The period of non-government members questions has now expired. Minister, will you tell the committee the total sum as well as the number of programs and packages paid by your department to local government?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. It is a huge sum. I just want to look at it again and make sure that I am not imagining it. I am not. It is \$700 million. The Beattie Labor government can be really proud. In fact, I must say that previous governments, too, in Queensland—certainly in the Labor years—have been very generous in grants and subsidies to local government, much more generous than the other states of Australia are to their systems of local government. We fund local government at some four times the rate per capita that the New South Wales state government funds local government in that fine state. Approximately half of our \$700 million budget will be spent in regions outside south-east Queensland. I am also proud to say that that is about \$350 for infrastructure of considerable importance to communities right around the state of Queensland.

There are five new programs that have commenced this 1 July. Fifty million dollars over five years has been allocated to assist councils to reduce water consumption and minimise water loss. In very many council areas, particularly older urban areas, a large amount of water is lost through leaking pipes and through pressure problems in ageing infrastructure. Nonetheless, councils need funds to assist them to get on with restoring and upgrading their water mains and to minimise such water loss. That is largely what this program is about. Another \$25 million has been allocated, as I mentioned earlier, to assist with regional collaboration—those councils that are prepared to work together in regional groupings to examine their size, their shape and their sustainability issues for the future.

Ten million dollars has been allocated over five years for an automatic recurrent grant to show societies, based on factors such as attendance numbers without the need for new applications each year. That change to the program conditions has been welcomed by show societies who were a bit sick—and quite rightly, in my view—of having to put in a submission each year for pretty much the same funding. That is their core funding and is sorely needed, particularly by the smaller show societies.

Another \$125 million has been allocated over the next five years to assist councils to provide and maintain roads and drainage infrastructure, and then there is the special program announced by the Premier—one of his favourites—of \$100 million for Queensland's 150th birthday legacy infrastructure program.

Mr PEARCE: Minister, there are several references in the MPS—at pages 2-2, 2-3, 2-9 and 2-11—to the size, shape and sustainability reform agenda. Will the minister tell the committee about this initiative?

Ms BOYLE: This is a really important initiative, as I have earlier briefly mentioned, in terms of providing for the future of local government. Local government used to be about roads, rates and rubbish. It is about very much more than that these days. It used to be about electing somebody who you knew would go into the council and stand up for your division. If there were potholes in the road in front of the school, you knew that your councillor would in there saying, 'I want those potholes fixed.' You knew that if a park needed upgrading in an area where there were a lot of retired people, for example, then those facilities would be put into the budget. They were the kinds of things that you could expect your local councillor to do. When budget time came, you could expect your local councillor to make sure that the rates burden was not going to be excessive and that it was going to be fairly divided across the shire, in recognition of particular economic difficulties that may be faced by one or other sector of residents at the time. All of those things are still important in the world of local government, but they are far from the total story these days.

These days we have corporate plans, we have regional plans and we have strategic plans. We have IT systems, capable of communication and monitoring, of major proportions that can provide feedback at a moment's notice. We have five-year forward programs as a minimum, for example, with roads and drainage projects. Some councils are moving to horizons of 10 years for planning major infrastructure upgrades such as in the area of water and sewerage. Communities these days demand much more in the way of social services from their council—information services, libraries, arts, culture, performing areas, community development groups and management of multiculturally diverse groups within the community.

All of these things have led the world of local government to need to review where it is going and how best it can get there in the years to come. How can councillors as well as council staff be more strategic? What kinds of arrangements do they need to make in regional groupings in terms of their boundaries, in terms of their financial viability and in terms of their ability to attract staff of professional standing, particularly for those councils in rural and remote areas of Queensland? That is what Size, Shape and Sustainability is addressing. It is giving the councils the time, the forum and the money to sit down and to face up to these difficult issues of how best to keep the level of government closest to the people really humming in the state of Queensland.

Ms MOLLOY: Minister, can you tell us what reductions in water usage have been achieved through demand management initiatives referred to in the MPS on page 2-9? And anything would be better than a dam at Traveston.

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for your question. The demand side initiatives are so important that they are those that have previously been mentioned through the rebate systems. I know that you are on the record as having supported some of these initiatives that have been earlier announced.

Let us talk, first of all, about the potential for savings of water in the commercial and industrial sector. For too long too many commercial users, industrial users—and some of them huge—have wasted potable water when they did not need to use potable water in their factories and the like. It is high time that was brought to an end, and the best way to do that is with an incentive. That is why we have set aside \$30 million for the commercial/industrial water efficiency program. SEQWater will lead that particular project.

In terms of encouraging residents in existing houses to retrofit their houses, we have added an additional \$5 million to the Queensland Home WaterWise Service to the existing \$10 million. Local Government Infrastructure Services will undertake this work, as was addressed in answer to previous questions.

In terms of residential water efficiency, \$10 million is now available in rebates for rainwater tanks. It is an expensive business to buy a sizeable rainwater tank and to have that plumbed in. In order for that to happen, we believe that a substantial subsidy would make that much more appealing. We have \$10 million for rainwater tanks and \$19 million available for rebates for four-star or better washing machines, shower heads, dual-flush toilets and so on. All of those things will lead to very considerable savings in terms of water use. There is also \$3 million, as previously mentioned, to assist with water efficiency in government owned buildings.

I would like to draw to the committee's attention the importance of rolling out this program as fast as we can, not only because we are still in drought and level 4 water restrictions seem to be on the horizon but also because the situation remains serious, despite the people of south-east Queensland voluntarily and cooperatively through water restrictions having dramatically cut their water usage and

yet still to no avail. Part of the mistakes of all governments to date has been that we have not had our major water resources connected, and that is why the building of the pipeline to connect our major water supplies will complement the water-saving actions taken.

Ms JARRATT: Minister, not all of us live in south-east Queensland. Pages 2-16 and 2-17 of the MPS refer to regional planning outside of south-east Queensland. Could you detail what is being progressed in this area?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. This is a huge state and, while south-east Queensland's water problems are probably the most serious issue for the great majority of the population, there are very many of us getting on with all kinds of exciting eventualities in the regions of Queensland. What is sometimes forgotten by those who live in south-east Queensland when they think about the 1,500 people who are streaming over the border from New South Wales and Victoria every week is that a good proportion of those 1,500 are driving right on through. They are heading north and they are heading west. They are moving out to other regions of Queensland and other regions therefore are facing considerable growth pressures.

Your own region, the Mackay-Whitsunday area, is one such region, not only with refugees looking for a slightly gentler climate in that beautiful area but also with those seeking employment opportunities in the mining and tourism industries. So in your region—as well as in regions such as the Wide Bay-Burnett, where the growth rate, particularly in Hervey Bay, is huge; or in the region of north Queensland around Townsville-Thuringowa, where its growth rates year in, year out are steady and large; or even in my own region of far-north Queensland, where Cairns has had substantial growth for some four years—we have various regional organisations of councils and regional planning bodies being progressed.

Most of these regions have plans that have been in place for some time. Our most recent achievements in regional planning are the expansion of the Wide Bay Regional Planning Advisory Committee to include the Burnett local governments, bringing the number of local governments participating in that region to 22. That gives the community a glimpse of just how important and yet how huge the imperative for regional planning in that area is. Another of our successes is the Whitsunday Hinterland and Mackay Bowen Regional Organisation of Councils, which is focused on finalising its regional plan. Another is the completion of the broadhectare study in the Townsville-Thuringowa region. It would appear that the land available, particularly in Townsville city, is too limited for the growth pressures faced by Townsville presently and therefore a revision of the sequence of development in Townsville-Thuringowa is warranted.

I am pleased to not to forget the gulf—a set of communities up in the north that are also facing some growth pressures. We have recently seen the signing of a memorandum of agreement between the Gulf Regional Planning Advisory Committee and Indigenous traditional owners and communities across that region.

CHAIR: Minister, what have been the results of the Community Governance Improvement Strategy?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. The results have been good in many ways, though not good enough in some other ways. In 2004, 15 Aboriginal councils began a four-year process of transitioning to full shire status under the Local Government Act. The Community Governance Improvement Strategy was developed by my department to assist councils to make this transition, and we are roughly halfway through the program. It has been implemented in 15 new Aboriginal shires, and components of it are also being offered to island councils and to Aurukun and Mornington shire councils in response to specific needs.

Early in the program each council adopted a performance development plan for the transition process. I will give you an example of the activity within my department insofar as the CGIS is concerned. Staff from my department made over 245 visits to Aboriginal shires and island councils to do the practical work in partnership with elected representatives and staff and to advance those performance development plans. There has been a high participation rate by councillors and by staff, and we are pleased with that success.

The initial nervousness in many Aboriginal councils appears to have settled considerably. We have provided organisational leadership, information and training, and that has proceeded well. My department has teamed up with Indigenous community volunteers for skills development and mentoring. All of those things are proceeding well. The Aboriginal councils are participating widely now in broader local government programs and initiatives with the LGAQ and its member councils and also for the councils in Cape York through the regional organisation of councils.

However, our worry that has particularly led to us reviewing with the Aboriginal councils their progress is in terms of financial management still, where it is not of the standard that we require of mainstream local governments. Progress has been good as a rough rule of thumb with half of the Aboriginal councils, but half are not yet meeting the standards that need to be met. We have discussed with them other models whereby we can better assist them and better find the staff they need to manage

their money in a proper fashion, with integrity and in accordance with financial management standards that are the standards expected of all councils in Queensland.

CHAIR: Minister, the newly announced residential retrofit program has caught some councils unawares, as councils have not budgeted for their share of these costs. Will you outline what you will do to assist councils?

Ms BOYLE: The state government has committed \$15 million to the Queensland Home WaterWise Service, compared to local governments' commitment of \$7.5 million. The service will run over three years, which allows councils additional time if they require it to include the funding commitment in future budgets. The service has been delivered through Local Government Infrastructure Services, a consortium of the Local Government Association of Queensland and the Queensland Treasury Corporation. That reminds me to correct a remark I made earlier to the committee when I said that Local Government Infrastructure Services was part of Treasury. It is not, in fact; it is part of the Queensland Treasury Corporation, for the record.

The state's contribution is expected to be fully paid by early August. This will allow the service to earn interest income to be applied to the Queensland Home WaterWise Service. It will reduce some of the early funding pressures that local governments may be facing if their 2006-07 budgets cannot accommodate their contribution.

Local Government Infrastructure Services is also the project manager for the SEQ leakage and pressure management project. Utilising the existing project office arrangements for the purposes of the Queensland Home WaterWise Service will produce cost savings and administrative efficiencies. On 20 April 2006, we announced that \$20 million would be made available before 30 June 2006 to assist local governments with the implementation of regional, residential and business water demand management programs; \$10 million of this was for the residential program, Queensland Home WaterWise Service. Recently, the state approved an additional \$5 million for the residential program.

The benefits to local governments include: firstly, streamlined access to state government funds of \$15 million for the implementation of water efficiencies through this service; secondly, centralised procurement leading to decreased investment costs; thirdly, economies of scale in procurement; and, fourthly, streamlined reporting to stakeholders. The performance of the residential retrofit water efficiency project, Queensland Home WaterWise Service, will be closely monitored and evaluated to determine its effectiveness, including any identified budget constraints that councils may have throughout the life of the project.

CHAIR: The committee will suspend its hearing for a short break.

Proceedings suspended from 5.01 pm to 5.15 pm.

CHAIR: The committee will now continue its examination of the areas of local government and planning within the portfolio of the Minister for Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, a while ago you mentioned that it was not your role in relation to the calling in of the Montville developments; you said it was the Premier's decision. Minister, you are the minister for local government and those powers come under your responsibility. In fact, I refer to your ministerial statement of 1 December 2005 when you announced the Montville Links call-in. You stated that the development would 'generate a need for additional infrastructure for which there is no plan'. Minister, can you advise the committee how you came to this conclusion?

Ms BOYLE: I am pleased to do that. So far as I remember, my conclusion was based certainly on advice from my department and on their matter of considering the existing plan before the council and the extent to which they had developed a priority infrastructure plan and for which area. Nonetheless, I correct again the situation that it is an assessment that was undertaken following the Premier's call-in. As regional planning minister, he has call-in powers, as does the minister for state development, I might say. Three ministers in the government have those powers, which are of course rarely used. The Premier called in that matter, and I supported his call-in. It was the Office of Urban Management that did the assessment in the end and determined their advice to the Premier, on which his announcement of refusing the development was made.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, you said you had advice from your department. Is there somebody within your department here who can advise me as to what that advice was?

Ms BOYLE: I will be prepared to ask the executive director of planning in my department to comment further, although I reiterate to you that our impression is, notwithstanding, that the decision was not in the end ours.

Mr Cassidy: Certainly, as the minister said, the call-in and the assessment of that application was undertaken by the Office of Urban Management. We work closely with the Office of Urban Management and provide support and assistance to them, so we did work with them in terms of the assessment of that application. We provided advice, particularly in terms of the relationship to the planning scheme for Maroochy Shire. But the decision, the assessment, was one for OUM.

Mr HOBBS: Quite clearly, there is no technical data there in relation to that additional infrastructure that was not required. Minister, I refer to freedom of information documents that I have, and I table some of those documents. The annual ministerial statement from the Maroochy Shire Council states, 'The voluntary infrastructure agreement contains requirements over and above the conditions of approval. For example, the applicant is required to pay for applicable headworks, contributions and, in addition, a further \$1.2 million towards major access road upgrades for the Nambour-Mapleton Road and the road connection to Palmwoods. Council is of a view that such targeted contributions will mitigate any significant traffic impacts on the local network. Current headworks policies applicable to Montville require contributions for roads, pedestrians and bikeway connections, open space and community facilities.' Minister, who is telling the truth here—the Maroochy Shire Council or who? Or who is not telling the truth?

Ms BOYLE: Everybody may well be telling the truth: that is, what price do your councillors charge in order to make a decision outside their planning scheme that provides expansion of urban development to suit a developer against the indications that have been given to the community by the planning scheme? While it may have been very attractive to some of those councillors that the developer was prepared to pay for a lot of the infrastructure costs, that does not necessarily mean, therefore, too bad for the planning scheme and too bad for the expectations of residents of Montville who reasonably understood from the planning scheme what the expansion of urban development would be in their area. It is a really big issue—and you would be well aware of it—in the world of local government when, in good faith, communities that are concerned about the rate and scale of development in an area within their local government rely on their councillors to at least make decisions in accord with the plan and not be, as it were, bought by offers of additional facilities and additional infrastructure by development applicants.

Those things are very nice, and the development applicant is entitled to offer them to the council and, yes, of course the councillors should consider them. But they should also consider the planning scheme and the balance of development that they have signalled to the broader community. They should also consider all of the submissions before them from community members when there are so many, as there were in the case of the Montville Links. They should consider the differing points of view from the business owners in Montville, some of whom saw an opportunity to expand their businesses and have more clients and many of whom supported the Montville Links proposal. They should also consider those others who bought in the area or have lived in the area for a long period of time and relied on the planning scheme as it is written to continue the very style and ambience of the countryside surrounding Montville. All of those matters were there for consideration by the council. The councillors in balance made the decision that they did and the Premier called it in.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, I refer again to your ministerial statement where you said the site is identified as 'good-quality agricultural land'. Minister, who advised you that this was good agricultural land? This is in your ministerial statement.

Ms BOYLE: I do not recall who specifically advised me so. That would be designated through the policy that is the State Planning Policy under the Department of Natural Resources and Mines for the protection of good-quality agricultural land and should be so indicated to the council through their planners and their planning scheme. I will ask Mr Colin Cassidy to comment further.

Mr Cassidy: I do not have the detail in terms of the extent of the land, but it is my understanding that at least part of the land does involve good-quality agricultural land as identified under the State Planning Policy.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, the Maroochy Shire Council states that the land is in a poor state in agricultural and scenic terms. This is also the view of an agricultural economist who inspected the site. So we are getting a bit of a pattern here. Someone is not telling the truth in relation to whether it is good agricultural land or not. Who is telling the truth? Who do we believe in this?

Ms BOYLE: The decision about whether or not it is good-quality agricultural land—and my understanding is that within the policy there are various classifications of land, more than 'simply good' or 'not so good'; I think there are five classifications, if my memory serves me correctly—is a matter for the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. Councils and development applicants, for that matter, are at liberty at any time to go in and argue the classification of the land in advance of putting in a development assessment.

If those councillors who wanted to vote in favour of this particular proposal had wanted to argue that, they could have done so. They could easily have taken the matter to the Department of Natural Resources and Mines and requested a review of that classification. Their actions should follow that good order, rather than them deciding on the spot or out of political motives that they would overrule that present designation.

There is a good order to these things. Rather than responding to an individual development application, if there is something wrong with your planning scheme, my message very clearly to all councils is to fix the planning scheme first. Do not make a decision to overrule your scheme. That is not how you amend your scheme. That is not the proper and good order. That can give the appearance

then of you being captive to a particular developer, rather than properly demonstrating that it is, in your view, a scheme that needs some amendment.

Similarly, with any of our state policies, for that matter, but particularly the 'G qual' policy, if councillors, staff of councils or others wish to question designation under that policy, they should do so in proper good order by dealing with the Department of Natural Resources and Mines up-front, rather than asking that it be overruled through a council process. So far as state planning policies that other departments control are concerned, would you like to comment further, Mr Cassidy?

Mr Cassidy: Yes, we rely upon the technical advice of the Department of Natural Resources and Mines in terms of the implementation of that State Planning Policy. There are guidelines and procedures for the classification of good-quality agricultural land, as the minister said. There are also processes for reviewing those decisions, and mapping does get updated and improved over time. But we rely upon that technical advice, as we do rely upon advice from a range of other agencies for state planning policies that we implement.

Mr HOBBS: Can we get a copy of that advice that was given to you then?

Ms BOYLE: I do not think it was a specific advice.

Mr HOBBS: Well, obviously it would have been an application. Is it just a simple advice?

Ms BOYLE: OUM is where the—

Mr HOBBS: No, this is from DNR. Mr Cassidy talked about a report from DNR in relation to whether it was good agricultural land—

Ms BOYLE: No. He said we rely on DNR's classification, which you have agreed was available obviously at the time and argued by the councillors.

Mr HOBBS: If we can get a copy of that, that would be great, Minister.

Ms BOYLE: I do not know that we have it. It is a matter that the council may have or the OUM may have or DNRM may have, and you are at liberty to go to those agencies that have it.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, you made a decision and you have said that—

Ms BOYLE: No, we accepted their advice is what we said. We did not determine that Natural Resources and Mines should list it as 'G qual'. They determined it and they told us that they had and we accepted that. I did not make the decision. I have told you about four times this afternoon that the Premier made the decision as the regional planning minister. I did not make the decision. I supported his decision and I stand by that.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, the letter I am referring to here—and you mentioned it a while ago—seemed to be blaming the councillors for making the decision. This letter I have here is from the planning office manager in fact to your department. In your ministerial statement, you stated that Montville should 'retain its character despite the pressure of development'. The Maroochy Shire Council report to you states that there is almost no impact on the existing town due to the hidden nature of much of the subject site. I have been there, Minister. I am asking you: how will this development have an impact when it can hardly be seen?

Ms BOYLE: It is good if indeed that is so—that the visual impact may not have been huge. But for the 500 people living over the hill, even though they have tree cover that stops them from being seen from the road, it does not mean that there will not be other kinds of impacts, such as impacts on infrastructure, the town and business of course. It was a development that included a considerable residential subdivision, but, again, I say through you, Mr Chair, it is not a decision that I made regardless of the matters that the Maroochy Shire Council might have put in their submission.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, I am still referring to your ministerial statement on this call-in. You state that the EPA did not give the overall project a green light and never indicated support. Minister, this is again contrary to the facts.

Ms BOYLE: No, it is not.

Mr HOBBS: The EPA had concerns about the golf course. However, it withdrew those objections and it had no further objections to the project. It is documented here. So who is telling the truth, Minister?

Ms BOYLE: There is no doubt that the EPA provided advice on the specific elements that it was able to provide advice on regarding the Montville development. It was never—

Mr HOBBS: It had no objections—

CHAIR: Member for Warrego, we have been going back and forth a little bit on this. You get to ask your question, and you get a minute to do that. Then the minister gets three minutes to answer as she sees fit. If you have things that you feel you need to interject with, perhaps you could write them down and make that your next question, but the minister gets to answer uninterrupted.

Ms BOYLE: Thank you. One of the problems for the EPA where it is misquoted, as it were, on this occasion and that has occurred elsewhere in Queensland about development is that the EPA's role as an advice agency or a concurrence agency in relation to a particular development application is likely to be about specific elements of that development only. Then it is asked for its advice, for example, about the sewage treatment plant or maybe in some circumstances about the impact of one element of a decision on a national park or some other element of that development application. It provides the advice, whether as advice or as a concurrence agency, and then if it does say that is subject to conditions—a sewage treatment plant, for example, might be okay—sometimes people misuse that to say, 'The EPA approved the development.' The EPA does not necessarily approve the whole development simply because it was asked for advice on one element of the development application. Would you care to further advise, Mr Cassidy?

Mr Cassidy: Under the Integrated Planning Act, the way that state interest in particular development applications is dealt with is through, as the minister said, concurrence and advice roles. In certain instances, including in this particular instance, the EPA, the Environmental Protection Agency, was a concurrence agency within a certain area of jurisdiction that related to that particular development, and I believe that related to the sewage treatment plant that was part of the development.

The EPA, as a concurrence agency, is required to provide either advice or recommendations back to the assessment manager within its area of jurisdiction which would relate to the sewage treatment plant. In this particular instance, Maroochy Shire Council was the assessment manager. It was responsible for assessing the entire application as a complete application based upon any advice that it might receive from advice and concurrent agencies. So Maroochy Shire Council was responsible for undertaking the full assessment of the application—the environmental, social and economic implications. The EPA had a certain role in terms of its particular area of jurisdiction, but Maroochy Shire Council was the assessment manager to make the final balanced decision across the whole application.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, it says here that the EPA raised no objection to the on-site sewage treatment plant. I refer to the on-site sewage scheme and greywater reuse for the existing township of Montville, along with a new development that would have prevented the existing sewage run-off into Kondalilla Falls National Park. Minister, considering that Maroochy Shire Council already approved this development that would have resolved this pollution issue, would you now provide the full funding for the sewage treatment of the existing Montville township that you have rejected?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much. To my knowledge, there has been no submission for funding under SCAP or under the local government capital works program for that sewage treatment project. Unless I am corrected by others present with me today, I simply say that I would look forward to receiving such a submission for funds by the council, and we would look favourably towards addressing any issues for the Kondalilla Falls National Park and the broader area. It is a beautiful part of Queensland. I am familiar with some parts of it through the EPA's good project of a Great Walk on the Sunshine Coast and a splendid day that I shared with the member for Nicklin at the time of opening that Great Walk. So, yes, you may take that message from me and from the department that we are not presently aware of the council putting together a submission but we do look forward to receiving one in the fullness of time.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, the council in fact would not have had to put a submission in because this whole sewage thing would have been fixed up. I refer to your previous comments that this development was contrary to the South East Queensland Regional Plan. I have here a letter from the Premier that states the application was made prior to the commencement of the draft plan and neither the draft nor final regulatory provisions of the South East Queensland Regional Plan are applicable to this application. There is the letter which I have tabled with other documentation. Minister, someone here is not telling the truth. Is it you or the Premier?

Ms BOYLE: It is not a matter of truth; it is a matter of the relative weight that was given to various factors. Once a plan comes into being, a new planning scheme with council—

Mr HOBBS: It is not applicable, Minister; it is clear.

CHAIR: Member for Warrego, you asked the question. The minister gets to answer.

Ms BOYLE: Once a planning scheme comes into law, and a regional planning scheme such as the SEQ Regional Plan, the provisions in those schemes may well be considered by a decision authority.

CHAIR: The time for that block of questions has expired. I call the honourable member for Fitzroy.

Mr PEARCE: Minister, page 2-1 of the MPS notes that your department is working with Aboriginal and Island councils. These councils may appear to struggle to manage their finances. Can you please comment on the financial difficulties of those councils?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much. It is a matter of great importance to these councils and to those of us who are wanting to see Aboriginal and Island councils as proudly capable as the other local governments in the state of Queensland.

Aboriginal shire councils, with the exception of Mornington and Aurukun, are halfway through a four-year transitioning period to full local government status. Island councils legislation and arrangements for the provision of local government in Island council communities is currently the subject of a green/white paper process that I expect to be finalised in the not-too-distant future.

In general terms, around 50 to 55 per cent of Indigenous councils consistently achieve unqualified audit reports. I congratulate them on their success. For the remaining councils there are a number of themes that continue to contribute to their failure to achieve unqualified audit reports in spite of significant levels of funding provided by both state and federal governments—funding that is intended to support improved community governance outcomes. There are generally these failures—the themes are generally around these—of inadequate records management and poor or inadequate control over assets.

Whenever a council has been adversely reported by the Auditor-General in a report to parliament, I write to the council to ascertain what caused the adverse finding, what action the council is taking to remedy the cause and how my department can assist the council to remedy the cause and to prevent the cause of the adverse finding recurring. Some high-risk councils such as Mornington Shire Council and Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire Council are considered to be 'in crisis' presently and are receiving high levels of on-the-ground support from departmental staff under the Community Governance Improvement Strategy as well as from councils' external service providers.

Might I say to honourable members that I am feeling a level of disappointment with the failure of almost half of the Aboriginal councils at this stage to really attain the kinds of financial standards to which we aspire for them and to which they, too, aspire. Recent discussions with some of the mayors and leaders of the councils suggest that maybe we need to look at a more regionally based system. Maybe we need to have based in the main urban area of a section of Queensland more higher order staff in terms of bookkeeping and accountancy skills to better run the finances for the councils. The preoccupation of many of the Aboriginal people who are elected to their councils is not with financial management; it is with representing their communities. So I am hopeful of reporting to the parliament soon on a better system that may address these financial failures.

Ms JARRATT: Minister, I take you now to a place close to your home and heart, and note that you have described the alternative planning scheme for the Daintree as fair and balanced. Could you please describe to the committee the role of the department in achieving this outcome?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. The World Heritage listed Daintree rainforest is one of Queensland's most significant and valuable environmental areas. The Daintree is one of the most ancient biodiverse places on earth. More species live in a square kilometre of the 150 million year old Daintree rainforest than anywhere else in Australia. The alternative planning strategy has been developed to ensure this part of Queensland is protected forever. The policy applies to freehold land in the area between the Alexander Range and Cape Tribulation, north of the Daintree River. The policy will protect the most environmentally sensitive or significant land from further development. In addition to this, it will require any development on the remaining land to be based on best practice environmental sustainability and planning standards.

To reflect the alternative planning strategy, Douglas Shire Council's proposed Integrated Planning Act 1997 planning scheme includes the entire area in an overarching conservation planning area. Within this planning area three management areas—northern, central and eastern—are created. Each management area is then further distilled into a number of precincts which, in effect, establish the preferred future development pattern for the area. Such precincts are the rainforest conservation precinct, the rainforest residential precinct, the rainforest commercial and community precinct, and the rainforest tourism precinct.

The most critical aspect of this strategy ensures that vacant freehold land included in the rainforest conservation precinct is not intended to be developed other than those lots which have already been lawfully cleared. There is an ongoing buyback program administered by the EPA to purchase affected property and add it to the national estate. Just last month the state government committed \$10 million to the buyback scheme on top of our previous \$5 million commitment. This commitment has not been matched by either the federal government or the Douglas Shire Council. The buyback program covers a 196-freehold property area. That is what I mean by saying that it is balanced. The determination on the lands that must for all time be put into conservation has been made on the basis of advice from scientists. That is not a political decision made either by the councillors of the Douglas shire or by me or other state government elected members. On the basis of that scientific advice, we have set aside those lands but fairly and equitably to those landholders, providing either the ability for them to swap those lands for other land in the area on which they can build or, alternatively, to accept a fair market price for compensation in order to provide that land for its conservation into the future.

CHAIR: Minister, could you tell the committee the extent to which the department provides services to councils outside south-east Queensland including what proportion of grants and subsidies are paid to councils outside south-east Queensland?

Ms BOYLE: The Queensland government provides more funding to local government than does any other state. The most recent data available from 2003-04 shows that the Queensland government provided almost 30 per cent of the total grants paid by Australian governments to local government. This was the equivalent of \$88 per person compared to the Australian average of \$58.90 per person. Councils outside of south-east Queensland have equal opportunity to apply for funding from the programs administered by my department. They do avail themselves of this opportunity, and I can tell the committee that, since 1 July 1998, \$2,468 million or 71 per cent of the total grant and subsidy expenditure of \$3,462 million has been spent outside of SEQ.

The more recent figures, from 1 July 2005 to 30 June 2006, show that \$326 million, or 70 per cent of total expenditure, of \$464 million has been spent on non-SEQ councils. This is a clear indication that this government does recognise the importance of regional Queensland. I have been pleased to find some figures that may interest some members of the committee in terms of department of local government funding outside of south-east Queensland. For example, the member for Cunningham may be interested to know that since 1998 local government grants to councils in his electorate totalled some \$34,261,047.

Mr Copeland interjected.

Ms BOYLE: There is never enough, is there? The member for Whitsunday may be interested to know that councils in her electorate have received over \$38 million since 1998. The member for Fitzroy may be interested to know that councils in his electorate have received over \$51 million in grants and subsidies since 1998. The member for Nicklin may be pleased to hear that the Maroochy Shire Council on its own has received over \$26 million since 1998, not to leave out the member for Burnett. He may be interested to hear that his councils have received over \$24 million—\$24,879,622 to be precise.

Mr PEARCE: Minister, can you provide information about the strategies and resources employed by your department to work with councils that are experiencing problems, including Mornington shire, Douglas shire and Gold Coast City Council?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. It is important that people know that the department of local government and planning does take action to assist councils and to understand what action they are able to take. In a moment I will ask the director-general to talk to this matter so far as the specific councils are concerned—matters of specific investigations that he or his officers may be undertaking. It is our responsibility to respond as quickly as we can to councils in trouble. Presently we have Mornington Shire Council, Douglas Shire Council and the Gold Coast City Council with, as it were, a cloud hanging over their reputations and questions about their ability to conduct themselves either financially or through proper governance. Director-General, would you further address that question?

Mr Kinnane: Throughout 2005-06 the department has been actively responding to concerns raised about the Mornington Shire Council to establish a strong and financially viable local government on Mornington Island. In September 2005 my predecessor as DG appointed an independent investigator who confirmed a serious breakdown in the governance and operational functions of the council across a range of areas. On 27 January this year the minister issued a show-cause notice requiring council to provide a written response addressing the minister's concerns. Council provided a final response to the minister on 28 March.

Since that time the Mornington Shire Council has entered into an agreed arrangement of voluntary administration and has agreed to meet performance targets set for review on 15 September. The minister actually approved the appointment of an acting CEO, who is the CEO of Aurukun shire and who is doing a very good job on the island working with the local council. The department has assisted council with the appointment of Gary Kleidon, who provides a very strong hands-on role. The department has provided and is providing ongoing on-the-ground assistance, and experts in local government, financial procedures, operational and administrative procedures and governance are spending time on the island.

The department is working very closely with Douglas shire to improve the functioning of the council and to enable the council to provide quality services to the community. I, the mayor and the deputy mayor of the Douglas shire, along with one of my senior officials, met in April this year to discuss the issues and develop a plan for the way forward. The department agreed to provide the services of an independent mediator to the Douglas shire to provide a report on the key issues and recommendations to resolve internal issues. We are continuing to work with the Douglas shire on those matters and keeping in very close contact with the Douglas Shire Council. With respect to the Gold Coast City Council—

CHAIR: If it is agreeable to the member, you can have another two minutes.

Ms JARRATT: Finish your sentence.

Mr Kinnane: In response to the CMC inquiry, we have met with the CEO of the Gold Coast City Council to determine the types of assistance that he will need. We have worked with a number of other government agencies in that respect. The department supported the minister when she visited the Gold

Coast City Council recently. The council has been provided with guidelines for good corporate governance.

Ms JARRATT: Minister, there has been some criticism of the Integrated Planning Act. Could you tell the committee how your department is responding to the criticism?

Ms BOYLE: The Integrated Planning Act was brought in in 1997. It is a dramatic change in the way planning is accomplished by councils. That dramatic change has been attested to, as it were, by the length of time it has taken so many councils to get their new planning schemes in place. Not only is it the change in system that has led to there being a tardiness on the part of some councils about getting their new schemes in place; during the same period Queensland has been going through a very rapid growth phase. The pressures on growth in numbers of centres, not just in south-east Queensland, have been huge. That has combined also with a limited number of planners available in both the private and public sectors to do the work.

Finally, however, nearly some 10 years later we are in a position where most of the councils now have their IPA schemes up and running and yet are discovering that things are not moving through smoothly. So the criticisms that there have been of the integrated planning system have come from wide quarters. Developers say that there is too much of a backlog, that the development applications are not dealt with in a timely fashion, that things take too long and that that costs them money and slows down development. Communities say there is not sufficient transparency of what their role is and when they get to have a say, that they do not know what is going on anymore, that they do not understand how developments that can be quite conflicted in the community can be, for example, code assessable and that sometimes some councils do not give them the opportunity to comment or to express their view. There are others saying that there is too much emphasis on process and not enough emphasis on good planning outcomes.

So we are responding to that criticism by viewing the function of the integrated planning system and improving it. We have taken submissions in person and at workshops through the key stakeholders and from others—individual community members and groups around Queensland. We have prepared some immediate-term actions that we can take to improve the system and have also identified some medium-term reforms and longer term reforms which will form part of a discussion paper which we expect to be released soon for comment right around Queensland. I do believe that we can improve our planning system to suit all of the issues raised in the criticism. It can be a timely system and yet still a system that is responsive and transparent in the eyes of the community.

Ms JARRATT: Page 2-4 of the MPS makes mention of Cyclone Larry. Can you please inform the committee about any direct assistance that the department may have provided to affected shires?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for that question. I did visit Innisfail again on Thursday of last week. While it is good to see the progress that has occurred over the past couple of months—the bananas are all standing up again and they are expecting their first crop of post Cyclone Larry bananas to be harvested in September—cane has not recovered so well. The national park areas in World Heritage areas on the mountains and hills surrounding the area are beginning to recover and there is some green about. Some of the houses have been repaired, though many with serious damage that require rebuilding have not been rebuilt yet.

I am pleased to say that my departments have variously assisted the people of the affected shires, particularly through local government. Through the Operation Recovery Management Group there have been a number of forms of assistance to all local government shires, not just the Johnstone shire based around Innisfail but also the other shires on the tablelands that were also affected. I will ask the director-general to comment because I know he and his officers have been particularly involved. Funding assistance totals so far have been \$14.1 million paid by my department to seven councils for expenditure incurred on emergency works and post disaster repairs. The amounts specifically may be mentioned by the director-general or any other comments that he would care to make about the assistance that has been provided to those shires.

Mr Kinnane: The department has stationed an officer in Innisfail to cover all of the local governments with the operation recovery group for at least a couple of months.

CHAIR: That is not only your question time that has expired; it is also the session time for this particular block of questions. Just before calling the honourable member for Cunningham, I want to confirm that the member for Nicklin does not have any further questions. No? I call the honourable member for Cunningham.

Mr COPELAND: Thank you to the member for Warrego for allowing me to jump in with a couple of brief questions. The WaterWise project has been canvassed previously. Toowoomba was added belatedly to the areas that are eligible—about four days after the announcement was made by the Premier. On the web site it also says that those shires connected to the city's water supply are also eligible, which includes Crows Nest, Jondaryan and Rosalie. Can I get you to confirm that Cambooya shire is also covered, even though it is not listed on the web site, because Cambooya accesses

Toowoomba water in parts as well, and that the entire shires of Crows Nest, Jondaryan, Rosalie and Cambooya are eligible for the rebate, not just the areas connected to the Toowoomba water supply?

Ms BOYLE: I am not sure of that and I will seek further information and be sure that I give you the correct answer as soon as I am able.

Mr COPELAND: If that is not today, can that be taken on notice in the normal process?

Ms BOYLE: For sure.

Mr COPELAND: Thank you, Minister. The second question relates to supporting the Queensland water efficiency task force on page 2-8 and drought-proofing urban and rural water supplies. Would you support the introduction of recycled sewage water into Wivenhoe, Somerset or any other of Brisbane's drinking water supplies, given that the western corridor pipeline goes almost adjacent to those supplies and it would be a very cost-effective way of delivering approximately 70,000 megalitres to Brisbane's water supply? That is based on the figures provided by the minister for natural resources and mines to the member for Toowoomba South in a question on notice that said that there is 70,000 unallocated megalitres of waste water.

Ms BOYLE: I am pleased to say that I do support a much stronger response from all of us involved in the water business in terms of recycling water not only, might I say, for industrial use or agricultural use, but I do personally support indirect potable reuse. I hope, indeed, that the people of Toowoomba will do so at the referendum that is looming. I think it is only some 10 days away. It will make a huge difference to Queensland as the years go on if Queenslanders do decide to come to terms with indirect potable reuse, particularly at the level that is suggested by the Toowoomba City Council's plan. Of course it has already come into common practice in many of the major cities of the world. I do confirm, however, that that is my personal view—the environment minister's view, if you like. It is not necessarily the view of the government. We have decided that we will take a step back until the Toowoomba poll is completed and before taking a government position on the introduction of recycled water into our reservoir.

The Toowoomba City Council poll is very important not only for your part of Queensland but also for many other areas because it will really signal the future in terms of indirect potable re-use around Queensland. The Commonwealth government has agreed to offer financial support of up to \$22.016 million, so I am told, contingent on the state and council contributing equal amounts. My department has provided council with detailed advice and assistance to hold the poll. In terms of environmental matters and the accuracy of the information to be provided it has been the EPA that has been of most assistance to council. The advice on the process of holding a referendum was provided by the department of local government and planning.

I understand that it is the policy of the coalition opposition in Queensland that industrial and agricultural recycling is supported but not indirect potable re-use. I let the member know that I have already approved \$13.3 million from the water and sewerage infrastructure funding program for Toowoomba City Council to undertake an upgrade to the Wetalla sewerage treatment plant as part of the first stage of the Water Futures Toowoomba project.

Mr HOBBS: I think it has been clearly established that the Montville call-in was based on misinformation, unsubstantiated positions and political decisions. I refer to the 10 call-ins that you have made in the bit over two years that you have been minister. That contrasts to the three call-ins for the previous three years. I refer to your call-in of a multiunit dwelling, aged-care accommodation and special needs accommodation project proposed by Blue Care and the Uniting Church where your government is going to receive \$6.5 million in revenue from the sale of the land. Can you confirm that the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing bullied you into this development? Can you also advise whether you are considering a further call-in from the same minister under similar conditions in Morningside?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. I need to correct a couple of your facts. Eight call-ins I am up to, not 10. I would be pleased to provide you with the list. You may have noted call-ins made by other ministers.

Mr HOBBS: In your question on notice No. 638 it says 10. Anyway, keep going.

Ms BOYLE: We should clarify that while I am talking to you about the particular ones that you have asked about. If you are right then I have forgotten a few. The particular call-in that I have not decided is the Blue Care nursing home call-in that you referred to. Because I have not decided it then it would not be appropriate for me to make statements at this stage and provide opinions. I have not yet firmed up on any of the content matters to do with that call-in other than to reassure you that the minister for public works and housing has not bullied me about the matter. I would like to think that he would not be game to try, but I also know that he is not a man who would think to do that.

You will be well aware that a call-in may be made by the local government and planning minister on the basis of improper process or improper decision making by a council or due to a state interest. There is no doubt with the Blue Care call-in that the state interest that you mentioned with regard to

public housing and their ownership of the land is one that should be considered in the circumstances and will be taken into account in firming my decision.

So far as the other matter that you referred to is concerned, if I know the one that you are referring to particularly then certainly there were questions raised with me as to whether a call-in would be proper or not and whether there were some parallels. My decision has been not to call that matter in. So it is no more a matter for my consideration.

In the response to the question on notice, I advised that from March 2004 to the present there have been 10 development applications called in by the state government. Only eight of those have been by me. The other two development applications called in, to my knowledge, are the one called in by the Premier, which we have discussed extensively this afternoon and that is Montville, and the other one, if my memory is correct, called in by the then minister for state development, Tony McGrady, and that related to a shopping centre development in Ipswich.

Mr HOBBS: Thank you, Minister. I thought you were sworn in on 12 February 2004. However, let us move on. I refer to the deadlines for council transitional planning schemes to be processed. How many council transitional planning schemes have lapsed as a result of your department not meeting its own deadlines?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. None have lapsed to the extent that we have extended their transitional schemes rather than allowing residents of an area to be exposed, as they would be, to uncontrolled development by there being no legal planning scheme in place. The general intent of your question is correct, that I have needed as minister to extend many transitional planning schemes well beyond the original target dates by which their IPA compliant schemes should have been in place.

This has been, in most instances, for very good reasons. It has been because the schemes were much more complex than was realised to develop and took longer than the department originally estimated they would take. It has been because the growth pressures have been huge. Along the way, during the development of schemes, councils have wanted to take account of development pressures of major development applications or proposals that have come before them and that has slowed down the process.

Another factor has been the limited supply of planners. The private sector has snapped up many planners from around Queensland with the offer of many inducements, financial and otherwise, in their remuneration packages. That has depleted the public sector, particularly small councils in regional and rural areas, of very good planners. They have been wooed elsewhere. Council is not able to compete with the big city offers.

There have been occasions, unfortunately, where they have not been good and that is due to tardiness or inaction on the part of some councils. They have been a minority of councils along the way. We have attempted to keep track and to use whatever muscle we have to keep them on time and working on their planning schemes, but a couple have been recalcitrant. I am told that two schemes actually lapsed due to council inaction, not due to my department's own inaction.

Things are very much better than they used to be. I am hoping that somebody may put in front of me the number of schemes that have been conferred. At my last count it was over the 60 per cent mark. I am pleased to tell honourable members that I should have looked more recently because the good news is that, as of 30 June 2006, 84 Integrated Planning Act schemes are now in force.

Mr HOBBS: It is my understanding that one of the planning schemes of one of the councils lapsed. I guess there were probably hold-ups in the beginning. In the end I believe it stayed with your department for several months before it was finally approved. I will not mention the name of the council because I do not think we should do that. Will you provide legislative support to those councils whose planning schemes in fact have lapsed because they have no planning scheme? Were there applications before them there could be enormous problems.

Ms BOYLE: I will ask Colin Cassidy to address the lapsing and the appropriate actions that I can take and the department can take to assist those couple of councils. Might I make the preliminary remark, though, that some of the reasons for the delays in my office with the schemes either prior to public notification or for the second state interest check were not necessarily the fault of my office. Sometimes that is because the schemes were very poorly done and needed to be considerably improved. Sometimes it was because consultants had started work and then deserted the council. Sometimes it was because the council, during the period of a first or second state interest check, came back and said that they wanted to change the scheme. There were all kinds of reasons, including, I would have to admit, some other state agencies were tardy in their response to my department. In terms of our ability to assist those councils where their transitional planning schemes did lapse, I will ask Colin Cassidy to make some further remarks.

Mr Cassidy: I am aware that there are two schemes that have lapsed without being replaced by an IPA planning scheme. In terms of responding to those issues it is my advice that there will be a gazettal in place within the next one to two weeks to put the new arrangements in place. Without naming

the two local governments, I am advised that they are very low-risk council areas. We are not aware that development applications have been lodged in the intervening period.

Mr HOBBS: We have to keep our fingers crossed.

CHAIR: Member for Warrego, that is the end of the time allocated for this block of non-government members' questions. There is now some time allocated for government members' questions; however, I understand that there are no further questions from the committee. That means that that concludes the examination of the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for the Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women.

Minister, can I thank you and your departmental officers for your joyful attendance here today. The transcript of this part of the hearing will be available on the Hansard page of the parliament's web site in about two hours from now. That completes the committee's hearings into the matters referred to it by the parliament on 21 April 2006.

Before we finish up, on behalf of the committee could I thank the Hansard staff, the time keepers, all those who have worked on the audiovisuals and the attendants. I especially thank those from the committee secretariat—Stephen Finnimore and Jodie Martin. I think it is appropriate that we thank them in the traditional way.

Ms BOYLE: I absolutely agree.

CHAIR: I declare this public hearing closed.

Committee adjourned at 6.13 pm.