

WEDNESDAY, 19 JULY 2006

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE F—JUSTICE AND ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Estimates Committee F Members

Mr M Choi (Chair)
Ms EA Clark
Mr HW Hobbs
Mr PA Hoolihan
Mr MF McArdle
Miss FS Simpson
Hon. DM Wells

In Attendance

Hon. LD Lavarch, Attorney-General and Minister for Justice

Department of Justice and Attorney-General

Ms R Hunter, Director-General

Mr D Mackie, Director, Corporate Governance Branch (Acting)

Independent Portfolio Bodies

Mr D Bevan, Ombudsman, Office of the Ombudsman

Mr R Needham, Chairperson, Crime and Misconduct Commission

Mr D Kerslake, Electoral Commissioner, Electoral Commission of Queensland

The committee met at 8.30 am.

CHAIR: Good morning. I declare this hearing of Estimates Committee F now open. On behalf of the committee, I welcome the Attorney, departmental officers and members of the public to the meeting. I would like to introduce the members of this committee. I am Michael Choi, the member for Capalaba and chair of the committee. Mr Howard Hobbs, on my left, the member for Warrego, is the deputy chair. The other committee members are Ms Liddy Clark, member for Clayfield; Mr Paul Hoolihan, member for Keppel; Mr Mark McArdle, member for Caloundra; Miss Fiona Simpson, member for Maroochydore; and, last but not least, the Hon. Dean Wells, member for Murrumba.

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 and amended on 10 May 2006. The committee will first examine the organisational units in the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. The committee will then examine units within the portfolio of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors and lastly Small Business, Information Technology Policy and Multicultural Affairs. The committee will suspend procedures for the following breaks: morning tea from 10.15 to 10.30; a break from 11.30 to 11.35 simply for a changeover; lunch from 12.35 to 1.30; afternoon tea from 3.15 to 3.30; and then a break from 4.30 to 4.45.

I remind all of those participating in the hearing today that these proceedings are similar to parliament to the extent that the public cannot participate in the proceedings. In this regard, I remind members of the public that under standing orders the public may be admitted to or be 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 each minister. I ask that any mobile phones or pagers be now turned off. I remind members of the committee and the Attorney that the time limit for questions is one minute. Answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a double chime will sound at the end of each of these time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will sound two minutes after an extension of time has been given.

The sessional orders require that at least half of the time available for questions and answers be allocated to non-government members. Any time expended when the committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between government and non-government members. The committee has given leave for non-committee members to ask ministers questions. The following members will be participating today on this basis: Mr Michael Caltabiano, member for Chatsworth; Mr Kev Lingard, member for Beaudesert; and Mrs Rosemary Menkens, member for Burdekin. I ask departmental officers to identify themselves when they first come forward to answer a question if the Attorney refers a question to them so that Hansard can record their name.

I declare the proposed expenditure for the Department of Justice and Attorney-General now open for examination. The time allocated is two hours and 45 minutes. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Attorney, if you wish to, you may make an opening statement. I remind you that you have a time limit of five minutes for such a statement.

Mr McARDLE: Mr Chair, may I raise a point of order?

CHAIR: Yes. What is the point of order?

Mr McARDLE: Mr Chair, I note that the Attorney-General has failed to comply with standing order 181(3) in that she did not provide the answers to questions on notice asked by the member for Caloundra—myself—within the time period required under the standing orders. I received a series of answers throughout the day, the last at six minutes past five. Every answer that I received was in fact in breach of the standing order. I ask the record to show that the Attorney is in breach of standing order 181(3).

CHAIR: The record shall reflect that statement.

Mrs LAVARCH: Mr Chairman, may I respond to that?

CHAIR: Yes, you can respond to that, Minister.

Mrs LAVARCH: Mr Chairman, can I advise the committee that the questions from non-government members of the committee—the member for Caloundra—were due to be tabled by 10 am on Monday, 10 July. These were not received until 4.49 pm on Monday, 10 July. I also want to point out to the committee that many of the questions asked by the member for Caloundra were very, very detailed questions. To give an example, one of the questions required many, many, many hours of departmental officers' time to be able to answer it. Given that we have had less than a week to compile those answers, then I would ask for the indulgence of the committee. I could have taken objection and had the questions ruled out of order. But because I respect the committee and I respect parliament, I have used every endeavour to have those very detailed questions answered and we have gone to great lengths to find the answers for them.

Can I also seek leave of the committee to table an amended answer to one of the questions from the member for Caloundra. The member asked the question with reference to the staffing of each department and agency covered by Justice and Attorney-General and wanted us to advise the total number of staff employed by region, provide details of the position description and the classification of each position and provide a breakdown of full-time staff and part-time staff by region. As you can appreciate, that is a voluminous exercise. It is an exercise to go through 2,500 people in a department and its statutory agencies, and to break it down by region and to break it down by who works full-time and who works part-time I think is a big ask for a department. I do wonder for what purpose the question is asked, but I will not go there.

What has occurred is that in the tally of the numbers of full-time equivalent employees an inadvertent mistake has been made in relation to the staffing of the CMC, and we have had to add two extra staff there who were left off. So I would seek the leave of the committee to table the amended answer and I would also ask that the committee understand the need for the extra time yesterday to be able to fully give answers to the questions asked by the member for Caloundra. I would ask that the member for Caloundra in future be very cognisant of the detail of the information he requires in answers and the time frame in which it is given. I could have just said that in the time permitted it was impossible to answer the questions. So I would ask that you accept that.

Mr McARDLE: Mr Chair, can I reply to the minister's comments?

CHAIR: I will allow a short reply.

Mr McARDLE: Thank you, Mr Chair. Mr Chair, the Attorney made a determination that she was going to answer the questions. Whether she did so out of the goodness of her heart is simply beside the point. The Attorney made the determination. She failed to comply with the requirements of 181(3) and any excuse is simply that—an excuse. The Department of Justice and Attorney-General has thousands of employees able to undertake the task requested by me, as have had earlier Attorneys and earlier directors-general. It is simply inexcusable that these questions have not been able to be answered in

the appropriate time and the fact that the Attorney has condescended to answer the questions is beside the point. The ruling has still been broken.

Mrs LAVARCH: Mr Chair, can I refute the member for Caloundra.

CHAIR: Attorney—

Mrs LAVARCH: It was not a matter of condescending; it was a matter of putting on the record that, with regard to questions on notice, this parliament and the committee process quite often rules out of order questions that go to great detail. Can I just point out that one of the questions asked by the member for Caloundra—

CHAIR: Attorney—

Mrs LAVARCH:—would have required—

CHAIR: Attorney. Order! Order!

Mrs LAVARCH:—looking at 10,000 transactions.

CHAIR: Order! Attorney, can I suggest that the comments made by the member for Caloundra as well as the minister will be recorded. Some of the issues raised by the minister will be deliberated within the committee. So I suggest that the minister move on to her introduction.

Mrs LAVARCH: Before I do that, for a point of clarification as well—

CHAIR: Before you do that, Minister, I need acceptance for the document to be tabled by the minister.

Leave granted.

CHAIR: It is accepted. Thank you, Minister.

Mrs LAVARCH: Just before we start the clock for my opening statement, can I just clarify one point. Mr Chair, can I just get you to clarify the order of this morning's proceedings. It was my understanding that prior to the break at 10.15 we would be examining the budgets of the statutory agencies over which I have portfolio responsibility.

CHAIR: That is correct; between 8.30 and 10.15 it will be the four statutory bodies under your management.

Mrs LAVARCH: I thought I had misheard you. My apologies. I want to introduce the officers at the table. Starting on my left I have David Bevan, the Queensland Ombudsman; Robert Needham, the chair of the CMC; Rachel Hunter, the Director-General of the Department of Justice and Attorney-General; and David Mackie, who is the Director of the Corporate Governance Branch in the Department of Justice and Attorney-General.

I am delighted to be here to attend my first estimates hearing as Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, and I thank you for the opportunity. I am proud of what my department has achieved in recent years, and the budget builds further on this very firm foundation. Before I outline some of the most important initiatives in the budget however, I want to advise the committee of a new measure to assist victims of crime. The Beattie government will be increasing funeral and ancillary payments to assist the families of murder and manslaughter victims. The compensation payable for funeral expenses will increase from \$4,000 to \$6,000 and for ancillary expenses from \$2,000 to \$3,000. Ancillary expenses include counselling for family members and accommodation and travel costs to attend the defendant's trial. These increases will ensure that grieving families do not have to deal with financial burdens while they are dealing with the sudden and violent death of a loved one. In making this announcement, I acknowledge the work done by the Homicide Victims' Support Group to highlight the need for the benefits of families of victims. I am also pleased to announce that the CMC and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions are putting new meaning into the expression 'crime does not pay'. Over \$11 million was frozen in 2005-06 and \$36.6 million since 2003. We are boosting crime fighters' ability to restrain and seize the profits of crime for major criminals by appointing an additional four staff to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. Fewer people will be involved in crime, particularly drug crime, if they see their profits disappearing.

Let me turn now specifically to the budget and provide the committee with an overview. The budget for my department this year includes significant expenditure on infrastructure, the rollout of new technology and additional resources to protect and support victims and witnesses. New courthouses are being built in Pine Rivers, Mareeba and Ipswich. This means that these growing areas will be provided with modern and accessible justice facilities. Prisoner security will be improved at the historic Maryborough Courthouse. The new facilities include a holding cell, prisoner lift and a secure vehicle lock for the transfer of prisoners to and from the courthouse. In a move that I am sure will be warmly welcomed by the judiciary, \$6.3 million will be spent on the planning and design of a new Supreme and District Court complex.

Total spending in this budget on infrastructure is \$32.3 million. Significant funding has been spent on programs to reduce crime and divert people away from the criminal justice system. This includes

continuing funding for a Homeless Persons Court Diversion Program in Brisbane and \$2.8 million over four years for a pilot of the Queensland Indigenous Alcohol Diversion Program in Cairns. The Cairns program aims to reduce alcohol abuse and associated crime among Indigenous Queenslanders. A total of \$5.2 million over four years has been provided to Queensland's innovative Murri Court for extra staff, community education and training. Protecting and supporting children remains a top priority for the Beattie government. In this regard, I am pleased to announce that \$2.9 million in funding over four years will continue for the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions to provide specialised prosecution services to support children who are witnesses or victims of sexual or physical abuse.

The budget provides an additional \$22.4 million over two years to boost smart technology for the criminal justice system. This includes an additional \$20.9 million over two years to fund new technology projects for the Integrated Justice Information Strategy, which improves information sharing and collaboration across criminal justice agencies. That \$22.4 million also includes \$1.5 million over two years on videoconferencing. Videoconferencing enables magistrates at circuit court locations to deal with minor criminal matters quickly. The technology will also be used by witnesses and dispute resolution services.

Finally, I want to pass on my thanks to Rachel Hunter, the director-general of my department, as well as her executive team and the 2,300 staff who work with her. The state budget further strengthens the Beattie government's efforts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our court system and our justice system and ensures equitable and accessible justice for all Queenslanders.

CHAIR: Thank you. We will commence the hearings with the areas of the Ombudsman's office, the Information Commissioner, the Electoral Commissioner and the CMC. The first period for questioning is allocated to non-government members. I call the member for Caloundra.

Mr McARDLE: Attorney, I want to talk to you about your process for appointing judicial officers. In the appointment of the latest justice to the Supreme Court, can you advise who you spoke to from the Bar Association about the individual justice you appointed? Who did you consult about the actual appointee at the Bar Association, because it could not have been the Bar's president and it could not have been the vice-president.

Mrs LAVARCH: Mr Chair, the purpose of this committee is to examine the appropriations in relation to the matters under which I have portfolio responsibility. Can I ask the member to—

Mr McARDLE: Absolutely.

Mrs LAVARCH: —point to which portfolio responsibility statement—

Mr McARDLE: I go to the MPS document, page 1-2, 'Improving and maintaining public confidence in our legal system in an environment of increasing public scrutiny.' No doubt the appointment of judicial officers falls clearly within the confines of that statement. The process under which they are appointed equally falls within the confines of that statement.

Mrs LAVARCH: Mr Chair, it was my understanding that the first part of the examination of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement for the Department of Justice and Attorney-General was dedicated to the statutory authorities of the Ombudsman, the CMC, the Electoral Commissioner and the Information Commissioner. Can I ask how that question relates to those statutory authorities?

Mr McARDLE: This issue goes to the very heart of our judicial system. The process under which the Attorney acts is clearly within the confines of this estimates committee. What I am simply asking the Attorney to do is to answer the question that I asked—or is it the case that the Attorney is not prepared to answer any questions on the judicial process before this committee?

CHAIR: Order! Member for Caloundra, I have made it very clear that the first session of this hearing is allocated to the four statutory bodies under the management of the Attorney-General. I suggest that you defer that question to the second part of this morning's hearing.

Mr McARDLE: May I seek clarification from the Attorney? Is the Attorney prepared in the second part of this hearing session to answer questions in regard to the judicial appointment process that she followed of recent times?

Mrs LAVARCH: Mr Chair, I am more than happy to talk about the judicial appointment process and I am delighted to talk about the three most recent appointments.

Mr McARDLE: Let us do it now.

Mrs LAVARCH: I am more than happy—

CHAIR: Order!

Mr McARDLE: Mr Chairman, if the Attorney is prepared to deal with the issue, I seek a ruling that we do so now. If she is prepared to enter into—

CHAIR: I have allocated the time for those questions in the second part of this morning's hearing. I will stick to my agenda. Another question, please.

Mr McARDLE: Attorney, in your ministerial statement of 8 June you made this—

Mr WELLS: Point of order, Mr Chair. The question should not be addressed to the Attorney; it should be addressed to the Attorney through you.

Mr McARDLE: I thank the member for the guidance. Mr Chair, through you to the Attorney, in your ministerial statement of 8 June you made this comment—

The CCTV enables children and sexual assault victims to give their evidence from a separate room, and video links allow evidence to be given from remote locations.

Attorney, I table a series of letters that I have written to you in relation to the Caloundra Courthouse and your letter dated 20 April 2006 which reads as follows—

I have referred your facsimile to officers of the department for further investigation so that a full response can be forwarded to you in the near future.

Attorney, to date there has been no reply to my letter despite the fact that I again contacted you on 19 May 2006. Given your assurance that you would contact me in relation to this matter, could you explain why your department has not done so?

CHAIR: Before you answer that question—

Mr McARDLE: I table that document.

CHAIR: Can I ask the member for Caloundra whether this question again is—

Mr McARDLE: The Attorney in her opening comments raised very clearly the issues of the provision of services—the CCTV link—to enable witnesses to better produce and give evidence in trials.

Mrs LAVARCH: I am more than happy to answer the question and I think the answer to the question—

CHAIR: Before you answer the question, I believe this question is not directly related to the four statutory bodies. Again, I ask the member to defer this question to the second part of this morning's hearing.

Mr McARDLE: Mr Chair, the Attorney raised the question of the CCTV issues in her opening comments. She is agreeable to answering the question. I seek your leave to allow her to do so.

Mrs LAVARCH: Mr Chair, can I answer the question? The work commenced on the CCTV in the Caloundra Courthouse on Monday, 17 July—

CHAIR: Before you answer the question, can I make it very clear that, even if the minister is happy to answer the question, I will allow it only for this time. I suggest to all committee members that the first session of this morning is for questions relating to the four statutory bodies. If you wish to answer this question only, you can.

Mrs LAVARCH: My apologies, Mr Chair. As I was saying, the answer to the member's question lies in the fact that the work was scheduled to commence on Monday, 17 July, in the Caloundra Courthouse in relation to some of the issues that have arisen with the video link between the vulnerable witnesses' room and the courtroom. Can I also say to the member for Caloundra: I thank you for your attention to this matter and bringing it to my attention. I understand that you toured the Caloundra Courthouse and that you have a good working relationship with the staff and also with the magistrate at Caloundra. Through that you have been able to highlight or bring to my attention, or bring to the department's attention, some of the issues which will improve the operations in the Caloundra Courthouse.

The Caloundra Courthouse was opened by me not long after I was appointed Attorney-General. I was very honoured to be able to attend and open the Caloundra Courthouse. It is a modern, state-of-the-art courthouse. It really shows that justice has been brought into the 21st century. The courthouse will well serve the community of Caloundra and does well serve the community of Caloundra.

As the member would know from his days of practice on the Sunshine Coast, the old Caloundra Courthouse I think would be described at best as sad. It was a sad building. It was a building built in the 1960s, as with many, many of our courthouses. I know the member for Keppel has presided in courthouses that, from past experience, he would say need upgrading. So I think we can all be very proud of the work that was done in designing and building the Caloundra Courthouse.

The Caloundra Courthouse definitely serves the community. Once again, can I say to the member for Caloundra: I thank you for bringing it to my attention, which I then brought to the department's attention. The work is scheduled to start on Monday, 17 July. I am more than happy to keep you fully updated on the work. If there are any other issues, please bring them to my attention. I am more than happy to pass them on to the department. We only want the best for our courthouses and the best for our communities.

Mr McARDLE: Mr Chair, through you to the Attorney, I refer you to the item titled 'Proportion of formal decisions that are overturned in judicial review proceedings' which is listed under the non-departmental output statement. A note to that statement indicates that the item will be discontinued this

financial year. Please advise why that performance measure will not be continued. It appears on page 8-3 of the MPS.

Mrs LAVARCH: That is in relation to the CMC?

Mr McARDLE: The Information Commissioner.

Mrs LAVARCH: The Office of the Information Commissioner. Which point are we looking at here?

Mr McARDLE: Proportion of formal decisions that are overturned in judicial review proceedings.

Mrs LAVARCH: Can I say before we go into that detail that I want to congratulate the Office of the Information Commissioner. We have seen the strategic review—the report that I tabled in parliament in May of this year—and the work that has been done with LCARC. The strategic review, as required by legislation, has been referred to LCARC. I understand that LCAC will undertake some public inquiry in relation to that report and then report back to parliament in relation to that strategic review.

I also understand that LCARC, of which the member for Caloundra is a member, has had a meeting with the Ombudsman and the Information Commissioner to explore some of these issues as well. I understand that that was a very fruitful committee meeting and that there was certainly some robust discussion.

I also draw to the committee's attention that the Office of the Information Commissioner is committed to improving its timeliness in resolving external reviews. The performance measures for the office have been changed to provide a heightened focus on improved timeliness in resolving external reviews. New performance measures for the office are median days to finalise the review, the number of open reviews at the end of the reporting period that are older than 12 months, the percentage of agencies that are satisfied with the information and assistance provided by the office and the percentage of applicants who are satisfied with the conduct of their review. These new performance measures are consistent with the recommendations from the recent strategic review of the office and will enhance the rigour in performance reporting by the office.

Replacing performance measures that use wording such as 'proportion', which is impacted by other variables, with precise measures using exact numbers will enhance the transparency and accountability of the office. I want to point out to the committee as well that the office is already achieving a significant improvement in its timeliness in resolving external reviews. As reported in the 2006-07 MPS, the office finalised 38 reviews that were older than 12 months in the period to 1 July.

Mr McARDLE: Mr Chair, through you to the Attorney, concerning the Office of the Information Commissioner, what criteria, policies and guidelines does the Department of Justice and Attorney-General enforce to ensure the independence of the commissioner and of persons employed in that office?

Mrs LAVARCH: I welcome the question. As the committee would be aware, up until last year the Office of the Information Commissioner and the Office of the Ombudsman were combined offices. The decision was made to separate those offices. There were some matters where it was desirable for transparency and accountability to separate the offices. The offices were separated, and the separate independent Office of the Information Commissioner was established, I believe, early last year. The offices of the Ombudsman and the Information Commissioner share the same floor in the same building in the CBD. A decision has been made that the Information Commissioner's office will be relocated so that the office is separated from that of the Ombudsman.

The independent Information Commissioner's office had a budget of \$2 million for the 2005-06 financial year, which included an additional one-off injection of \$350,000 that was approved by CBRC for the relocation of the office in separate and independent premises. The new premises provide enhanced value for money, because the office previously paid rent based on floor space of 360 square metres. The configuration of the space did not allow the most efficient use of the space and was therefore larger than the office required. The rent at the new premises is based on 255 square metres of floor space, delivering substantial ongoing savings of rent, cleaning and energy costs.

Recommendation No. 34 of the report of the 2005-06 strategic review of the Office of the Information Commissioner advocates the relocation of the office to secure, self-contained premises that are not shared with any agency that is subject to the FOI Act. I think this answers the member's question. That is how we ensure the independence of the office. It is now separately located from the Ombudsman. It upholds recommendation No. 34 of the report of the 2005-06 strategic review.

Mr McARDLE: Can the Attorney advise how many decisions the Information Commissioner has made under the FOI Act since her appointment and how many decisions have been made by other staff employed in the office under the FOI Act?

Mrs LAVARCH: I want to take this opportunity to commend both the Ombudsman and the Information Commissioner. I believe that the strategic review gave a glowing report of both offices. As I reported in parliament in tabling that report and tabling other reports, there has certainly been an improvement in the timeliness of finalising the reviews. The first stand-alone Information Commissioner for Queensland, Ms Taylor, inherited a backlog of unresolved FOI disputes spanning over a decade.

Since her appointment in February 2005, Ms Taylor and her team have achieved significant success in resolving these very old cases. At the same time, in 2005-06 the Office of the Information Commissioner resolved over 300 reviews compared with 265 reviews finalised in the previous year. At the Treasury estimates hearing last year, the former Treasurer noted that the Office of the Information Commissioner had in May 2005 resolved an FOI review application lodged by a journalist in 1993, 12 years later.

As at 30 June 2005, 18.8 per cent of unresolved review applications of the Office of the Information Commissioner were more than 12 months old and some of these were very old. Consistent with the recommendations from the recent strategic review of the Office of the Information Commissioner, the Information Commissioner is on track to reach a situation where no case is older than 12 months. Moreover, the office has set itself a new performance measure that tracks a median number of days to close a review. The target for 2006-07 is 91 days, approximately three months. Focusing on the specific number of days to finalise each review, the office will ensure that each review is resolved in a timely way.

The Information Commissioner made five formal decisions on topics not previously considered. The assistant commissioner has made decisions under the delegation of the Information Commissioner and her guidance. I draw to the committee's attention that the Office of the Information Commissioner, whilst it has its central focus on external review under the FOI Act, also undertakes an educative role. It provides information sessions to government agencies. It is best that the agencies under the FOI Act have the ability to resolve matters for review of FOIs internally and that they have good decision making, and I think that is what we all want to achieve.

Mr McARDLE: Is the Attorney saying that of 300 reviews the Information Commissioner has only made five herself?

Mrs LAVARCH: I am advised that there were five formal decisions made by the Information Commissioner on topics not previously considered. In 2005-06 the office finalised 38 reviews that were older than 12 months, compared with eight old reviews in the period 1 July 2004 to 30 April 2005. The Information Commissioner or delegate made 59 decisions in the period 1 July 2005 to 30 April 2006. I advise the committee that 70 decisions were made in 2005-06 compared with 32 decisions made in 2004-05.

In relation to the five formal decisions made by the Information Commissioner, these are formal decisions. There are also many decisions that are resolved informally. I want to stress to the committee and also to the member for Caloundra that no conclusions or inferences can be drawn from my advising the committee that there were five formal decisions made by the Information Commissioner. You must remember that over 78 per cent of reviews are resolved informally. Of the 300 reviews that I mentioned earlier, they are reviews of which only a small part are formal reviews. The majority of external reviews are resolved informally between the parties.

CHAIR: We now move to questions from government members. I call the member for Clayfield.

Ms LIDDY CLARK: Mr Chairman, I refer the Attorney-General to pages 1-4 and 6-3 of the MPS and the references to confiscating the proceeds of criminal activity. Could the Attorney-General provide some details of how the Crime and Misconduct Commission and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions are helping to fight crime by confiscating its proceeds?

Mrs LAVARCH: I thank the honourable member for her question. I advise the committee that the Criminal Proceeds Confiscation Act 2002 provides a powerful weapon in the fight against crime in Queensland. Queensland has some of the toughest laws in relation to the confiscation of the proceeds of crime. The act strikes at the heart of the criminal asset base because it deprives criminal elements of their illegally acquired assets, even when it is not possible to directly link the asset with the illegal activity. The Criminal Proceeds Confiscation Act operates not only to decrease the financial gain associated with major crime but also to decrease the financial capacity of criminals to continue with the illegal enterprise.

In Queensland there are now two ways to recover the proceeds of crime: firstly, through criminal confiscation after a person is convicted of a criminal offence administered by the Director of Public Prosecutions; and, secondly, civil confiscation, which does not require a conviction. The CMC has responsibility for civil confiscation. This means that its officers are able to restrain property on the basis of reasonable suspicion of serious crime related activity. In 2005-06, 38 proceeds of crime restraining orders in a total of 28 matters have been obtained, restraining assets valued at \$10.9 million. Since 1 January 2003, \$36.6 million in assets has been restrained as a result of civil confiscation procedures. These restraining orders arose from investigations carried out by the CMC or were the result of matters referred to the CMC by the Queensland Police Service and other law enforcement agencies operating within Queensland including Commonwealth agencies.

In 2005-06, approximately \$2 million has been forfeited under the civil confiscation scheme. A further estimated \$700,000 is expected to be forfeited to the state in the near future. With the additional resources which will now be made available to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, we can expect to see a significant increase in forfeiture levels. Since civil confiscation was introduced in

Queensland in 2003, the CMC has had considerable success in removing the monetary gain and increasing the financial loss associated with illegal activity. Much of this success is due to the efforts of the partner agencies including the Director of Public Prosecutions, who acts as the CMC's solicitor for civil confiscation matters, and the Queensland Police Service, which is responsible for many of the investigations that result in confiscation actions. As you can see, the CMC and its partner agencies work hard using the Criminal Proceeds Confiscation Act 2002 to ensure that crime does not pay. Literally, crime does not pay.

Mr HOOLIHAN: I refer the Attorney-General to page 2-6 of the MPS. Can the Attorney provide an update of how the Queensland Electoral Commission is preparing for the next Queensland state election?

Mrs LAVARCH: I know that this is a question which every member of the committee has a keen interest in. I think all of us would want to know when the election will be held. Of course, as you know, there is only one person who knows that, and I am not sure that he knows when it will be held. But we all want to be satisfied or confident that the Electoral Commission is well prepared to hold an election at any time that the Premier may choose to call the election.

I take this opportunity to introduce our new Electoral Commissioner to committee members. David Kerslake was recently appointed as the Electoral Commissioner. I congratulate him on his appointment as our new Electoral Commissioner. As members would be aware, Bob Longland, our previous Electoral Commissioner, retired at the end of January and, of course, we all congratulated Bob on the tremendous job he did as Electoral Commissioner and wish him very well in his retirement. I understand that his golf form has improved greatly in the past few months.

CHAIR: Let the record show that the committee welcomes the appointment of David Kerslake as the new Electoral Commissioner.

Mrs LAVARCH: Thank you. I can advise the committee and you can be confident that the Queensland Electoral Commission is in an advanced state of readiness to conduct the state general election for the 52nd Queensland Parliament. The Electoral Commission places great importance on planning, so much so that preparations for the next election began immediately following the 2004 ballot.

Key tasks undertaken by the commission include a review of all electoral forms and handbooks, which have been updated in readiness for the next election. New ballot papers have also been designed, with storage facilities stocked with these and the necessary stationery products that will be distributed to returning officers when an election is called. I should add that this is standard practice and should not be seen to indicate that an election is in any way imminent. It simply reflects the fact that the sheer volume of material required for a state election means printing and storing it months, if not years, in advance.

Irrespective of the timing of the election, Queenslanders will benefit from improved procedures at polling booths to ensure the process proceeds in a smooth, timely manner. All polling booth venues used in 2004 have been reviewed and staffing levels have been determined based on previous use, performance and growth patterns. Additionally, all returning officers have received training and have benefited from a new training package featuring a video and election simulations. Further training will be provided to returning officers to enable them to further enhance their election knowledge and skills.

Mr WELLS: I refer the honourable Attorney to page 2-6 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement. Can the Attorney detail the steps the Queensland Electoral Commission has taken to encourage Queenslanders to register as voters and to keep their enrolment details current?

Mrs LAVARCH: I thank the honourable member for the question. I am pleased to advise the committee that the Queensland Electoral Commission is committed to increasing awareness of the electoral process and improving participation by all eligible Queenslanders. As part of its community awareness program, the commission developed two phases of an enrolment campaign during 2005-06. The campaign, which comprised statewide advertising and media relations, was based on research that identified perceptions about the drivers for enrolling and voting among traditionally low participating groups in the community. Specifically, the campaign aimed to reduce the number of electors who delay enrolment or updating their enrolment until an election is called, and of course it was conceived with the intention of maximising voter turnout at the next election.

The creative concept was designed to challenge benefits about the inconvenience of enrolment and general apathy among these groups towards the political process. Evaluation of the first two phases of the campaign indicates that the advertising has effectively reached targeted audiences. The commission will continue the media campaign to encourage all Queenslanders to ensure that they are correctly enrolled on the Queensland electoral roll in the lead-up to the next state general election. The production of another advertising campaign will be completed this month in readiness for a future state general election.

The Queensland government remains committed to delivering responsive government and ensuring all eligible Queenslanders have the opportunity to exercise their democratic right by

participating in the electoral process. A total of \$960,000 was provided for the Electoral Commission to conduct its community awareness program in 2005-06. The program will, as I have noted, continue throughout 2006 and 2007, and I am confident that it will play a key role in encouraging more eligible Queenslanders to register for the electoral roll.

As members would be aware, about 2.4 million people were on the electoral rolls at the 2004 election. I understand that just over 2.5 million people have enrolled to vote at this time. Any awareness campaign to encourage people to enrol can only strengthen our democracy. In the little time I have remaining, I wonder whether the Electoral Commissioner, David Kerlake, wants to add anything on the community awareness program and where we are up to.

Mr Kerlake: We are putting a lot of emphasis on a number of different target groups, but our awareness activity is particularly putting emphasis on, firstly, young people to try to make sure they enrol to vote and, secondly, the Indigenous community. We have plans in place where we want to go out and engage with those groups to ask them what is the best way for us to get our message across to involve them.

CHAIR: Before you continue, I ask the member for Murrumba to allow time to be extended.

Mr WELLS: Agreed.

Mr Kerlake: That is essentially what I wanted to say. The main thing we want to do, as I said, is find out from the groups we are targeting the best way to engage and get the message through to them, rather than us assuming that we know the best way to do it. We want to engage with those groups. We are planning to have focus group meetings with Indigenous communities and with young people for that purpose.

CHAIR: Thank you. Attorney, for my first question to you today, I refer to page 3-6 of the MPS. Can you please advise this committee of the outcomes of the strategic review of the Ombudsman's office as well as the strategic management review of the Office of the Information Commissioner? Can you provide an update on the operations of these two offices?

Mrs LAVARCH: Thank you for this very, very important question. At the outset, I wish to congratulate the Ombudsman, the Office of the Ombudsman, the Information Commissioner and the Office of the Information Commissioner for their participation in that review. We can see from the report itself and from the recommendations—which mainly go to operational matters—that this was actually a very positive report for both offices.

I can advise the committee that on 13 September 2005 the Governor in Council appointed Mr Henry Smerdon to conduct a review of the Office of the Information Commissioner and the Office of the Queensland Ombudsman. These reviews were required under the terms of the Ombudsman Act 2001 and the Freedom of Information Act 1992. A review mechanism is incredibly important to the function of both these offices, as our society and the technology available can change so quickly in five years.

I am pleased to be able to comment on the strategic reviews of the Office of the Ombudsman and the Office of the Information Commissioner. The reports present a very comprehensive examination of the issues that these offices are currently managing. The report of the review of the Ombudsman's office notes the office has made significant progress since the Forster review in 2000, particularly in its responsiveness to complaints and its broader role in improving administrative decision making by agencies. It is overall a very positive assessment of the office's strategic direction and performance since the last review.

The report on the review of the Office of the Information Commissioner reflects favourably on the government's decision to separate that office from the Ombudsman's office and on progress made by the Information Commissioner in reducing the backlog in the office. As required by the relevant legislation, the review reports have been referred to the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee. LCARC will consider the review reports and then report on them to the Legislative Assembly. I am pleased with the outcome of the independent reviews for these two offices that serve an important role in our democratic system of government.

Ms LIDDY CLARK: I refer the Attorney to page 3-1 of the MPS. Can the Attorney detail the steps the Office of the Ombudsman has taken to promote its services to Queensland's diverse multicultural population?

Mrs LAVARCH: I thank the member for her question. I can advise the committee, through you, Mr Chair, that the mission of the Office of the Ombudsman is to promote high standards of administrative practice and decision making in Queensland's public agencies for the benefit of the community. A key issue is promoting the services of the office to people from diverse backgrounds, particularly those from non-English speaking backgrounds. The Office of the Ombudsman is carrying out a program to facilitate awareness of and access to the office's services for people from multicultural communities.

In 2005-06 the focus has been on improving awareness among members of the Vietnamese community. The office has conducted an awareness campaign for the Vietnamese community in conjunction with the independent complaints commissions, including the Crime and Misconduct Commission, the Health Rights Commission, the Anti-Discrimination Commission and the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian.

This campaign followed a similar format to a campaign conducted in 2004-05 targeting the Chinese community. The campaign involved providing posters and brochures in Vietnamese language to 149 community centres servicing the Vietnamese community, as well as community service announcements in Vietnamese language on ethnic radio station 4EB. A Vietnamese language media campaign was also developed and distributed to national Vietnamese newspapers and publications.

The Ombudsman will continue to target specific multicultural communities in conjunction with the independent complaints commissions to ensure that these communities are aware that it is okay to complain and so they know how to obtain ready access to the various complaints investigation processes that they may not have been aware of previously. The office will also continue to participate in activities associated with NAIDOC Week, which was held during the first week of July, and also Multicultural Week. The Ombudsman's office is working in partnership with other independent complaint agencies to ensure that all Queenslanders are aware of and have equal access to complaint review options.

As part of the Ombudsman's Regional Visits Program, officers have distributed information kits to the Local Area Multicultural Partnership program—they are the LAMP workers—during visits to local councils. The kit includes multilanguage brochures about the services offered by the Office of the Ombudsman. I am pleased to provide the committee with this information, demonstrating the Ombudsman's commitment to reaching out to the many ethnic communities in Queensland. I thought I might have had a little time left if the Ombudsman wanted to add anything to that at all.

Mr Bevan: As the Attorney has indicated, one of the things we are doing is working closely with the other independent complaint agencies.

CHAIR: Before you continue, I will ask the member for Clayfield to extend the time, if she so wishes.

Ms LIDDY CLARK: Yes.

Mr Bevan: One of the things we have achieved there is to produce a joint brochure with the other complaint agencies, titled *It's OK to complain: Your rights are our concern*. That brochure, which was launched in 2004-05, has been translated into 11 languages, including Vietnamese, which was the ethnic community we were targeting in the last financial year. All of those translations are also available on our web site. Our web site is a resource available to people with information about our services and the services provided by other agencies, so we have links on our web site to those other agencies.

CHAIR: I will call the member for Caloundra, as there are less than two minutes each for government members. I will move over to non-government members.

Mr McARDLE: Thank you for that, Mr Chair, and through you to the Attorney. Attorney, prior to the Information Commissioner taking up her current position, she had to undergo a number of training sessions to come up to scratch for the job. Can you outline what those sessions were and, in addition to those sessions, what other training sessions she has now undertaken to equip her to undertake her role of Information Commissioner?

Mrs LAVARCH: Can I say to the member for Caloundra, through you, Mr Chair, that that is a very, very mischievous and very misleading question. I do not know what it is about the opposition that makes you pick a person, attack a person, and year after year in estimates go on about them. I can only imagine that this question has some inferences in it which, can I say, once again sees the opposition attack a person in an independent office. Last year, the former Attorney-General had a number of questions in relation to the Information Commissioner; I believe there were a number of such questions in the estimates process.

The appointment process of the Information Commissioner has been reviewed and reviewed and there has been nothing untoward found at all. The Information Commissioner has my full support. In relation to the question that the member has asked and why I have said it is misleading and mischievous, it was not a matter of the Information Commissioner herself undergoing training programs; she was appointed to the job on merit. It was a merit selection panel; it was not a matter of her going in under training programs.

The training relates to the fact that the Information Commissioner observed one small part of an FOI training program, and the training program provider confirmed this in her letter provided to the opposition at that time. It was not a matter of the Information Commissioner having to undergo training; she participated in training in FOI. She observed a session, one small part of FOI training, because part of her role as Information Commissioner is to provide training to agencies in relation to carrying out their duties under the Freedom of Information Act.

CHAIR: Before the member for Caloundra asks his next question, I remind committee members that standing order 155 of the parliament also applies to estimates committees. The question must not contain arguments, inferences, imputations, hypothetical matters or the name of a person.

Mr McARDLE: Attorney, you referred to the word 'participated' in training. Can you explain what the Information Commissioner participated in? What was the training the Information Commissioner actually underwent?

Mrs LAVARCH: Sorry, I will correct the record. The Information Commissioner has not participated in training. Can I correct the record, because I might have not made that absolutely clear. Can I make it clear that she has not participated in training; she only observed the training. The point I was making was that, if there was participation, it was not participation in the sense that you are inferring; it was that she observed one small part of an FOI training program, and the training provider confirmed this. Her letter was provided to the opposition at the time. I just want to clarify that it was observing one small part of an FOI training program. 'Involvement' perhaps is a better word that we could use here. There was involvement by way of an observation of one small part of the training.

If the committee would like a copy of the letter in relation to this question and the information provided back to the opposition, then I can get a copy of that letter and I am happy to table it for the committee.

CHAIR: Minister, are you tabling that letter?

Mrs LAVARCH: As I said, I am happy to obtain a copy of the letter.

CHAIR: You need to seek leave to table the letter.

Mrs LAVARCH: My apologies, could I table it before the end of the session? I will endeavour to have it available to the committee before the end of the session.

Mr McARDLE: Mr Chair, a point of order: could we have a definite time line, either Thursday or Friday of this week that it will be with the committee? Simply saying 'I will endeavour' is not really a commitment by the Attorney to table the document.

CHAIR: It is at the discretion of the minister.

Mrs LAVARCH: I will give a commitment to have it to the committee by the end of today.

Mr McARDLE: Attorney, you again used a word there that the Information Commissioner 'observed' training. Can you give us some idea as to what this training was and why the commissioner was observing the training? What was the purpose of her being there as Information Commissioner?

CHAIR: Attorney, before you answer the question, I just want to clarify whether this question from the member for Caloundra is related to the Appropriation Bill.

Mr McARDLE: It relates certainly to the appointment of the Information Commissioner and the processes put in place by the Attorney in regard to the appointment of the current Information Commissioner.

CHAIR: It has to be related to expenditure within the Appropriation Bill.

Mr McARDLE: Certainly the people of Queensland pay the salaries of the employees of the government including the Information Commissioner, and certainly the people of Queensland are entitled to understand what processes were put in place in regard to the appointment and, if the Information Commissioner is drawing a salary from the people of Queensland, what training or observations she did. So it certainly relates to the estimates committee.

Mrs LAVARCH: In answer to the question of the member for Caloundra, any leader of any organisation will observe how their employees or their staff are trained and would observe and would want to know what is excellence in training. If the position here in relation to the Information Commissioner is leadership of her organisation—an organisation which provides training to departments and agencies which have responsibility under the Freedom of Information Act—then I would hope and I would believe that it would be incumbent on the leader or the head of that organisation to observe what is excellence in training, to understand and to inform herself about how that training is carried out.

There is a standard day of training for FOI decision makers that is conducted by the office, and the Office of the Information Commissioner provides educative material on FOI and the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act, especially guidelines on the web site.

I am concerned that you are in some way making inferences about the performance of the Office of the Information Commissioner. Can I once again bring to the attention of the committee the strategic review that was undertaken by Henry Smerdon in relation to the Office of the Information Commissioner and the office of the Ombudsman. You can see in that review that the office is achieving significant improvements, especially in timeliness. We had a situation where we had a backlog in relation to external reviews. On all accounts and all measures, I can confidently say that the Information Commissioner—and I can say to all the people of Queensland—has carried out her duties in an

exemplary manner. She has been exemplary in carrying out her duties. We now have an external review office, the Office of the Information Commissioner, that has had a 375 per cent increase in the timeliness of dealing with old reviews. The performance measures are there on the record.

Mr McARDLE: Attorney, I have been advised by the Parliamentary Library that I cannot obtain a copy of the Ombudsman's report into the tragic death of Lorraine Neville's young child who passed away at Caloundra Hospital. That report goes into some detail based upon newspaper reports as to what took place. It goes, in essence, in part to the heart of the health crisis situation gripping the state. Is there any reason why such a critical report is not going to be made public?

CHAIR: Minister, before you answer the question, I am having a problem with this question, member for Caloundra, regarding relevance to the Appropriation Bill.

Mr McARDLE: If I can explain the relevance to you, it is simply this: again, the Information Commissioner has undertaken a task with respect to the use of public funds. That is, taxpayers of this state pay the employees' wages of all government departments. If moneys were expended in relation to the preparation of the report—and they had to be—the taxpayers would ordinarily require and insist upon the report being made public. If the government is going to say that the report—and it may well be for very good reasons—is not going to be made public, I think the people of Queensland have a right to know why the funds were expended but they are not going to be informed as to the content of the documentation that they are paying for.

CHAIR: I will allow that, Minister.

Mrs LAVARCH: Thank you, Mr Chair. I advise the committee that the question the member for Caloundra has asked goes to operational matters within the office of the Ombudsman. I might invite David Bevan, the Queensland Ombudsman, to respond to the member's question.

Mr Bevan: It is difficult for me to comment on operational matters because of section 92 of the Ombudsman Act, which prevents the Ombudsman from releasing information about operational matters except in certain ways which are specifically set out in the Ombudsman Act. Some of those ways are by reporting to the person who has made the complaint. Under the act we are required to report to the person who makes a complaint on the action which we have taken. We also report to the agency or agencies the subject of investigation, and we can also report in some instances to the Premier, to the minister concerned and to parliament.

In determining whether or not to report to parliament, various issues are taken into account. As I say, it is difficult for me to comment on those issues in this instance without revealing information which I would see would be contrary to the spirit of section 92 of the Ombudsman Act, but suffice to say that there were reasons for doing so.

Mr McARDLE: Attorney, I refer to the Freedom of Information Act 1992 and to the so-called cabinet exemption contained in section 36 of the act. We have seen here in Queensland increasingly cartloads of documents being trundled through cabinet to obtain the exemption, but the publication by Lane and Young, Administrative Law in Queensland makes this comment—

... the original rationale of the Cabinet documents exemption was to protect the system of Cabinet decision-making against possible prejudice by ensuring the secrecy of Cabinet discussions and deliberations. It was never meant as a convenient catch-all method for government agencies and Ministers to protect documents from FOI disclosure which would not be protected under other FOI exemptions and the importance of maintaining a purposive element in the Cabinet documents exemption has been emphasised by law reform bodies.

CHAIR: Member for Caloundra, can you ask your question, please?

Mr McARDLE: In light of this passage and the increasingly loose reliance by this government of the departments' and agencies' ability to seek exemption, why have you not taken steps to tighten up this exemption and to ensure it does not continue to be abused as a convenient catch-all exemption?

Mrs LAVARCH: There are a few points I want to make in relation to the member's question. Firstly, this is a policy statement. Am I taking it from the member for Caloundra that he is using this committee to make a statement on behalf of the opposition on what policy the opposition will put to the electorate for the next election? I am a little bemused about how—

Mr McARDLE: A point of order, Mr Chair: if the Attorney is asking me a question, do I have a right to answer the question?

Mrs LAVARCH: It was a rhetorical question, Mr Chair. I also wonder whether the member for Caloundra would want to point to the page in the Ministerial Portfolio Statement that this question relates to.

Having said that, I refute some of the inferences and allegations made by the member for Caloundra. I refute that the cabinet exemption under the Freedom of Information Act is in any way overused or abused by this government. As the member would be aware, under the Westminster system of government and under our democracies, governments have to be able to govern. Cabinets have to be able to make decisions, and there are very good and very strong public policy reasons why our Freedom of Information Act has an exemption in relation to documents that go to cabinet. Cabinet

has to be able to freely look at all the information. It cannot be fettered. Cabinet has to be able to review all the information and that information cannot be tempered in any way.

I would also say to the member for Caloundra that I think he is on fairly dangerous ground if he is making accusations about the overuse of cabinet documents. We have seen through debates in parliament and certainly on the public record the number of times that the Leader of the Opposition used the cabinet exemption under the Freedom of Information Act when he was a minister in the former Borbidge-Sheldon government.

I also refute that there was any abuse suggested in relation to the use of the cabinet documents. There are very good policy reasons why we have the exemptions in relation to the free and available access to cabinet documents, and it is no different to the Commonwealth. Queensland follows the Commonwealth in many ways on our Freedom of Information Act.

Mr McARDLE: Attorney, I refer you to MPS page 8-1 where you state that one of the goals of the Office of the Information Commissioner is the 'independent review of disputes under FOI information'. In light of media releases, which I table, published since the appointment of the current Information Commissioner which claim that she lacks the ability to independently assess applications made to the Office of the Information Commissioner, what measures have you put in place to ensure that all applications to the Office of the Information Commissioner are decided independently, impartially and through a consideration of the act and nothing else?

Mrs LAVARCH: The Office of the Information Commissioner is an independent statutory office. It is a stand-alone office. The role of ministers with statutory authorities under their portfolio responsibility is such that they are responsible for the administration and the budget of that authority. The authority operates pursuant to its legislative underpinnings. The Information Commissioner's office is underpinned by the Freedom of Information Act. If you are asking a question in relation to the quality of internal reviews within departments, then we certainly have put in place improvements. I have portfolio responsibility for the Freedom of Information Act. As you are aware, each department has its own freedom of information officer and if an applicant under an FOI application is dissatisfied with an FOI officer's—

Mr McARDLE: Mr Chair, I am concerned that time is moving on. We have limited time for the session which is cutting into available time elsewhere.

CHAIR: Minister, your time is up. I call the member for Keppel.

Mr HOOLIHAN: I refer the Attorney to page 3-1 of the MPS. Can the Attorney detail the steps that the Office of the Ombudsman has taken to promote its services to Queensland's regions?

Mrs LAVARCH: Certainly. That is a very important question for the member for Keppel who is one of the regional members in the Queensland parliament. The Ombudsman operates an extensive Regional Visits Program to ensure that people living outside the greater Brisbane area have ready access to the services of his office. The Ombudsman's staff visited regional centres 87 times throughout 2005-06, conducting 35 inquiry sessions to receive and/or investigate complaints and delivered 52 sessions on good decision making. Prior to visiting a region, the office advertises the proposed dates, times and venues for the visit in local news media to ensure that the community is aware of the visit to their community. In years past the main purpose of this Regional Visits Program was to conduct public sessions to receive new complaints. However, with increased web and email use by the public as well as widespread promotion of the office's free-call number, the need to receive complaints during public inquiry sessions has diminished.

Can I also take this opportunity to draw to members' attention the web site of the Ombudsman. We have a new and improved web site. People can lodge a complaint online. I might get the Ombudsman to talk a little bit about the online services in a minute. This means that the focus of the Ombudsman's Regional Visits Program has changed over the past few years from largely new complaints to investigation of complaints that have already been assessed as warranting investigation. Where possible, visits to correctional facilities located near Mareeba, Lotus Glen, Townsville, Rockhampton and Maryborough are also included in these regional visits.

These regional visits have also provided the opportunity for the Ombudsman's office to deliver training. During 2005-06 the Ombudsman's Good Decision Training Program was included in the Regional Visits Program and delivered to officers in regional centres. Approximately 1,050 officers from regional centres attended this training. The good decision training helps the Queensland Public Service build and improve its skills in making good, fair and accountable decisions. Would you like to add anything to the regional training or to the improvements with the web site?

Mr Bevan: Yes, thank you. Yes, the original program is an extremely important program for us. It is important that we provide our services right across the state and not just to the south-east corner, and that is reflected in the number of training sessions which we have provided to regional centres. We conducted 61 last financial year. Fifty-two of those were provided in centres outside of Brisbane. That is a way of helping officers on the front line to improve the decisions they make so that they provide a better service to Queenslanders.

Mr WELLS: I refer the honourable Attorney to pages 6-2 and 6-3 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement. Can she provide information on how the Crime and Misconduct Commission is combating organised crime, including drugs, in Queensland and any recent successes the CMC may have had?

Mrs LAVARCH: I thank the honourable member for his question. As he would know, the Beattie government is strongly committed to making Queensland communities safer places to live by fighting organised crime and paedophilia. The CMC has a key role to play in this regard and does much in monitoring and identifying changes to organised crime markets in Queensland. Since 1999 the changes identified by the CMC include a change to the relative significance of a number of illicit drug markets and the increasing prominence of identity crime in Queensland. As honourable members are aware, our government has recognised that identity theft is a real and growing problem and we have moved quickly to ensure that Queenslanders are protected from it. As the Premier and I have previously announced, this government will be creating a new offence of identity theft under the state's Criminal Code and, when passed by parliament, Queensland will be only the second Australian state to have an offence which specifically targets identity theft.

Between 1 July 2005 and 31 March 2006 in partnership with other law enforcement agencies, the CMC dismantled a complex crime network involving the manufacturing, supply and distribution of methylamphetamine. In the past financial year the CMC has also completed a total of 18 organised crime and criminal paedophilia investigations. Seventeen of these investigations resulted in arrests, charges or the seizure or restraint of property. This makes the CMC's effectiveness rate almost 95 per cent. That is astounding.

Across 2005-06 the CMC also commenced eight joint investigations with other law enforcement agencies including the Queensland Police Service, the Australian Federal Police, the Australian Crime Commission and the Australian Customs Service. As a result of these and other ongoing investigations in this financial year just gone, 29 individuals were charged with 226 offences including trafficking and supply of dangerous drugs. In this time the CMC has completed nine projects relating to organised crime including two strategic assessments. Importantly, in the past 12 months the CMC has restrained more than \$10 million of assets connected with organised crime in Queensland. In 2005-06, approximately \$2 million has been forfeited under the civil confiscation scheme. The CMC's efforts in combating organised crime, particularly in confiscations, is sending a clear message to those involved in organised crime that it does not pay.

CHAIR: I refer you to page 6-2 of the MPS and ask you to provide and update this committee on how the Crime and Misconduct Commission is working to combat paedophilia in Queensland.

Mrs LAVARCH: I thank the honourable member. I am sure that you, Chair, and all members of the committee would share the views about the sickening and dreadful crime of paedophilia. It is the scourge of our society and we all would want our children to be very safe. I am happy to provide the committee with an update on the CMC's important role with respect to combating paedophilia in Queensland.

Firstly, it is no secret that our government has made sure that this state has some of the toughest laws in the nation to deal with paedophiles, including laws relating to sexual offenders and serious violent offenders. In 2003 the Beattie government removed the principle of prison as a last resort for people who commit sexual offences against children. We also have the toughest penalties for those offences. The Criminal Code (Child Pornography and Abuse) Amendment Bill 2005, passed in March last year, also overhauled the state's child pornography laws and doubled the maximum penalties. We all want our children to be safe, and Queensland laws reflect the community's abhorrence of paedophiles. Our record stands as one of commitment to combating this dreadful, this awful, atrocious crime. I commend the CMC for the role it has played in protecting the children in our state.

In the 2005-06 period the CMC continued its focus on criminal paedophilia by maintaining its status as a national leader in detecting internet based child sex offenders and investigating child sex offender networks. I take this opportunity to give recognition to those officers who on a daily basis are at the front line—at the coalface—detecting the internet based child sex offenders and having to view—as you would imagine, their work would be very distressing. I think we should give recognition to their commitment to the work they do and that it is a very distressing job.

The CMC's work in this field has led to arrests and charges both in Australia and overseas. During 2005-06 CMC internet investigations resulted in 14 people being charged with a total of 70 offences. These investigations involved CMC police officers through approved control operations to pose as children on the internet and enable them to identify individual offenders and obtain evidence for prosecution. Offenders are identified and charged before any actual child is harmed.

A number of suspect child sex offender networks, including international groups, have recently been the subject of CMC investigations. The CMC's efforts in detecting suspected child sex offenders and sex offender networks is vital to preventing crimes against children in this state. I take this opportunity to put on the public record our thanks for the work that they do.

Ms LIDDY CLARK: I refer the Attorney to page 8-2 of the MPS. Can the Attorney please update the committee on the performance of the Office of the Information Commissioner and the clearance rates of the office?

Mrs LAVARCH: I thank the member for Clayfield for her question. As I have stressed this morning, the performance of the Office of the Information Commissioner and the clearance rates have been the subject of a strategic review by Henry Smerdon. The Office of the Information Commissioner is committed to improving its timeliness in resolving external reviews. The performance measures for the office have been refined to provide a heightened focus on improved timeliness in resolving external reviews and are reflective of those used by similar bodies such as the Victorian Civil and Administrative Appeals Tribunal. The new performance measures for the office are the median days to finalise the review, the number of open reviews at the end of the reporting period that are older than 12 months—these are called old reviews—the percentage of agencies who are satisfied with the information and assistance provided by the office, and the percentage of applicants who are satisfied with the conduct of the review. This is a holistic approach to the services provided by the Office of the Information Commissioner. These new performance measures are consistent with recommendations from the recent strategic review of the office and will enhance the rigour in performance reporting.

The office is already achieving a significant improvement in its timeliness in resolving external reviews. The office finalised 38 reviews that were older than 12 months—the old reviews—in the period 1 July 2005 to 30 April 2006 compared with eight old reviews finalised in the period 1 July 2004 to 30 April 2005, an increase of 375 per cent. The Information Commissioner or delegate made 59 decisions in the period 1 July 2005 to 30 April 2006 compared with 21 decisions made in the period 1 July 2004 to 30 April 2005, an increase of 185 per cent. The office finalised 285 reviews from 1 July 2005 to 30 April 2006 compared to 223 reviews finalised from 1 July 2004 to 30 April 2005, an increase of 28 per cent.

The office has experienced a 14.5 per cent increase in applications received compared with the previous year. Despite this increase in applications, in 2005-06 the office finalised over 300 reviews compared with 265 reviews finalised in the previous year. The new performance measures reflect the priority placed by the parliamentary Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee on timely resolutions of external reviews.

Mr HOOLIHAN: I refer the Attorney to page 8-2 of the MPS. Can the Attorney describe in more detail any future initiatives that will improve the performance of the Office of the Information Commissioner?

Mrs LAVARCH: I thank the member for his question. The Office of the Information Commissioner has three key priorities for 2006-07. These are: improving its timeliness in resolving external reviews; enhancing the capacity of professional officers to resolve external reviews efficiently and effectively; and enhancing the content and functionality of the office web site. As I detailed earlier, the office is already achieving a significant improvement in its timeliness in resolving external reviews.

In 2006-07 the office will invest at least two per cent of employee related expenses in professional development for office staff. This will further enhance their capacities in mediation and in decision writing, two essentials in resolving reviews effectively and efficiently. This will also implement one of the recommendations of the recent strategic review of the office.

Significant investments will also be made in further enhancing the content and functionality of the office web site. The web site is the key platform for delivery of the office's educational material for applicants and agencies. In 2006-07 the office will add to the repertoire of information sheets, practitioner guidelines and library of decisions structured under an index base on the relevant sections of the Freedom of Information Act 1992.

The office is committed to obtaining feedback from the applicants and agencies. To this end, the feedback and report generation mechanisms on the office web site will be improved. This will provide valuable data for the office to continually improve its services and information products. Consistent with the recommendation from the recent strategic review of the office, the office has redesigned its survey instruments to better capture feedback from applicants and agencies regarding the way the office conducts external reviews and provides information and guidance material.

This feedback will also inform the future development of office policies and practices and enable the office to continuously improve its service and timeliness. Improved timeliness in resolving external reviews and the provision of accessible information support the government's commitment to the effective implementation of FOI legislation, which is a key plank in the government's accountability and transparency framework. Improved timeliness in the resolution of external reviews of FOI decisions and empowering applicants with accessible information about the FOI Act will benefit those seeking an independent review of FOI decisions. It will also benefit the broader community by ensuring robust implementation of the FOI Act.

Mr WELLS: I refer the honourable Attorney to page 6-10 of the MPS. I have an interest in the CMC's witness protection program. Could the Attorney outline how the program and training for that program are working?

Mrs LAVARCH: I thank the honourable member for the question and for his interest in the witness protection program and the witness protection training. As he is a former Attorney-General, I am sure he would certainly endorse that it is an important part of the criminal justice system to have these mechanisms in place, especially when we are dealing with organised crime.

Witness protection means protecting someone whose life is in danger because they have helped a law enforcement body do its job. A witness does not only have to be a witness in a court of law to qualify for protection. Witness protection can involve relocating the person and relatives or associates and may include the creation of a new identity. The CMC offers Queensland's only witness protection service and the CMC's witness protection unit has operated since the days of the Fitzgerald inquiry.

I am delighted to inform the committee that the CMC has been 100 per cent effective in keeping witnesses safe. Since witness protection became a function of the former CJC, the CMC has successfully protected 1,400 people. Some 358 of these people have been protected since the formation of the CMC on 1 January 2002. The CMC protected 96 people during 2005-06, including 42 people who were admitted to the witness protection program in previous years. Court security was provided for 52 witnesses in 2005-06. All of these protectees fulfilled their court commitments.

The CMC's witness protection program has one of its functions focused on improving the safety and security of Queensland's communities. Witness protection is an essential component of the Queensland criminal justice system because it provides an environment that encourages people in danger to come forward and assist law enforcement agencies. I commend the CMC on its success rate in protecting witnesses.

CHAIR: There are only eight minutes left to 10.15 am. I will allocate four minutes to questions from opposition members and four minutes to questions from government members. I call the member for the Caloundra.

Mr McARDLE: The CMC undertakes some of the, if we can use this phrase, worst type of work in the state. You mentioned paedophilia. It also undertakes major investigations. One of the tools of a modern police force is the capacity for phone tapping. The CMC does not have that capacity. I would have thought that, when we are dealing with criminals that are very sophisticated and use the most modern types of equipment, phone tapping would be an essential tool for the CMC to have in dealing with paedophilia and other crimes that they deal with. Is there any reason your government does not see fit to provide this very important body with a very important tool?

Mrs LAVARCH: Can I correct the member for Caloundra once again this morning. The CMC does have access to telephone intercepts. As you would appreciate, under its organised crime function the CMC is involved in investigations that go across borders. It is a partner agency of the federal police agencies.

Mr McARDLE: That would be engagement with the Federal Police. The CMC does not have its own stand-alone power.

Mrs LAVARCH: You said that it did not have access to telephone intercepts. I was merely correcting the record, saying that the CMC—

Mr McARDLE: The CMC phone tap of their—

CHAIR: Order, member for Caloundra. You will allow the minister to answer the question.

Mrs LAVARCH: I was merely correcting the member for Caloundra's understanding in the area of access to telephone communication interception. As the member is aware, the ability to phone-tap is under federal legislation. At this point in time, the CMC does not have access to telephone interception for intrastate investigations. This is because the Beattie government has taken a position that we have in this state a Public Interest Monitor. As the member would agree with me, I am sure, telephone interception powers and telephone tapping are very intrusive powers. It is a gross invasion of one's privacy to have someone listening in on your telephone conversations, as are listening devices in houses. We have the Public Interest Monitor to protect people, because this is done without the person's knowledge that there is going to be a listening device in their house or alternatively, under federal legislation, a tap on their telephone.

The Public Interest Monitor plays a very important role in ensuring that there is no abuse of that gross invasion of privacy and that it is appropriate for the police enforcement agencies or the crime enforcement agencies to be given the ability to listen in on telephone calls. But the federal government has not to date accepted the role of the PIM in relation to the telephone intercept powers.

Ms LIDDY CLARK: I refer the Attorney to page 6-6 of the MPS. Can the Attorney provide information on how the Crime and Misconduct Commission is working to reduce misconduct and improve Public Service integrity?

Mrs LAVARCH: I thank the member for Clayfield for her question and for her interest in this area. In Queensland the CMC has a fundamental role to play in receiving and assessing complaints about misconduct and conducting investigations and monitoring how agencies deal with complaints of

misconduct. Just as importantly, however, the commission has a legislative responsibility to raise integrity and reduce the incidence of misconduct in the public sector.

An important aspect of this responsibility is helping agencies to build their capacity to prevent and deal with suspected misconduct. The CMC does this by visiting regional and rural areas to offer advice and listen to specific concerns by conducting liaison officer forums through surveying a range of government agencies on their capacity to deal with and prevent misconduct by developing guidelines for dealing with suspected official misconduct and by carrying out risk management reviews.

In the 2005-06 period the CMC undertook a range of activities which I am pleased to report on. CMC officers conducted rural and regional visits to a number of places throughout Queensland. The commission and the CMC liaison officer meetings were held to update public officials on its activities. The commission held a series of workshops on the Sunshine Coast last month. I will get the chair of the CMC to advise a little further in relation to the workshops that were held.

Commission staff developed and provided training material on codes of conduct for councillors. Training was also provided to staff of Indigenous councils in relation to codes of conduct. The CMC conducted workshops on fraud prevention and control for public sector agencies and participated in an Australian Research Council funded project to research best practice in whistleblower policy, practices and management in the public sector. All of these activities help entrench integrity as the first line of defence against misconduct. Did you want to add anything to that, Mr Needham?

Mr Needham: Yes, thank you, Attorney. The rural and regional visits are an ongoing role of the CMC. Every year there are visits to various regional areas throughout Queensland. For instance, in the last financial year the 2005-06 visits were conducted to Cairns, Kurumba, Inglewood and, as the Attorney said, the Sunshine Coast. When they go to a place like Cairns it means that they are not meeting just with the people in Cairns—the public servants and local governments in Cairns—but also with those from all the outlying regional areas around Cairns.

CHAIR: The committee will now break. On behalf of the committee, I thank the Ombudsman, the Information Commissioner, the Electoral Commissioner and the chair of the CMC for their attendance this morning.

Proceedings suspended from 10.14 am to 10.33 am.

CHAIR: The committee will now continue its examination of the portfolio of the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. I call the member for Caloundra.

Mr McARDLE: Attorney, I want to talk to you about your process for appointing officers to the various courts and tribunals. Attorney, your selection process has led to a bitter public schism between the President and Vice-President of the Bar Association, leading to the President in his letter of 18 July saying of Mr Daubney's speech—

I obviously think it was quite an inappropriate speech, an inexcusable act that discredited and disparaged the integrity of the courts and the judiciary.

CHAIR: Member for Caloundra, can I just caution you that your question must not reflect on a serving judicial officer. I just want to caution you; that is all.

Mr McARDLE: They are very strong words, Attorney. Do you accept that it was your judicial selection process that has led to this situation? Do you accept responsibility for the rift that exists in one of the most important bodies in Queensland's legal system? Will you apologise to both men?

Mrs LAVARCH: What a ludicrous question! Unbelievable! Can I—

Mr McARDLE: Attorney, there is no question about the fact that a massive schism has opened up surrounding your selection process.

CHAIR: Member for Caloundra, will you allow the minister to answer the question.

Mrs LAVARCH: I just find it gobsmacking, to say the least, that you are asking me about matters that relate to a professional body—the Bar Association of Queensland. What I can say is that I believe as Attorney-General that I should promote and ensure that the Attorney has a good working relationship with all professional bodies that pertain to the Justice portfolio. I ensure that I work with the Queensland Law Society and that I work with the Bar Association of Queensland. At Her Honour Judge Kingham's swearing in on Monday afternoon of this week I made the public statement that—

... the representative structures of the profession, particularly the Bar Association and the Queensland Law Society, have a valuable practical insight into the operations of the courts. Their perspective on possible appointments will add to the robust nature of the process.

Can I pick you up on an error that you made in your statement that went with your question. I as Attorney do not make the appointments. The appointments pursuant—

Mr McARDLE: I never raised that. I said your selection process, Attorney.

CHAIR: Order! Minister.

Mrs LAVARCH: No, you said the appointments that I make. Appointments are made by the Governor in Council. The Attorney-General can nominate a candidate for the appointment of a judge to Governor in Council. What I can tell the committee is that there is no legislative requirement for the Attorney-General to consult with anyone. It is a courtesy that I undertake with the Bar Association and the Queensland Law Society. At the end of the day, the nomination for an appointment as a judge is an executive decision.

Mr McARDLE: Attorney, in the appointment of the latest justice to the Supreme Court, can you advise who you spoke to from the Bar Association about the individual justice you appointed? Who did you consult about the actual appointee, because it could not have been the president and it was not the vice-president?

CHAIR: Member for Caloundra, I refer to relevancy to the Appropriation Bill.

Mr McARDLE: Yes, certainly. I will discuss that right now. Again, this is clearly within the confines of page 1-2 of the MPS—‘improving and maintaining public confidence in our legal system in an environment of increasing public scrutiny’. If we are going to have a judicial system in this state that is going to again draw wages from the public purse, the public has every right to understand the process. This process of selection has been the subject of much media debate of late. It clearly falls within the estimates profile.

Mr WELLS: I rise to a point of order. The issue before the committee is that the expenditure be approved. I do not think that the honourable member is questioning that issue at all. I do not think that this is budgetarily relevant. I do not want to press the point too hard, but I urge the honourable member to consider whether the question he is raising is indeed relevant to the budget—

Mr McARDLE: Mr Chair, I can certainly say—

Mr WELLS:—in particular—

Mr McARDLE:—I would not have raised the question if I did not think it was relevant.

CHAIR: Order! Member for Murrumba.

Mr WELLS: I am interested in what the honourable member says, but it would be good in response to hearing all of what I have to say, particularly in respect of section 177 of the standing rules and orders, that it is about the money which is proposed to be spent.

CHAIR: I again caution the member for Caloundra that a question to the minister has to be relevant to the Appropriation Bill. I will ask you to rephrase your question so that standing orders can be complied with.

Mr McARDLE: With great respect, Mr Chair, you have already ruled two questions that I have asked in on the basis that they affect the public purse—that is, salaries by public servants. The situation in relation to the question that I have asked now is that you are going to rule it out, even though I posed the same basis for the question being asked.

CHAIR: I have been very tolerant of your questioning in the past.

Mr McARDLE: Mr Chair, you have ruled two in on the same grounds. Surely there has to be consistency.

CHAIR: I have allowed them in—I did not rule them in—simply on the basis that the minister was prepared to answer those questions. I consider that they are questions not really regarding the Appropriation Bill. I would only allow them if the minister is prepared to answer them.

Mrs LAVARCH: Mr Chair, what I will say to the member for Caloundra is that both Justice Lyons and Her Honour Judge Kingham are very accomplished, outstanding lawyers. I have been overwhelmed by phone calls, emails and letters of people supporting the appointment of both these outstanding lawyers to their positions—Justice Lyons on the Supreme Court and Judge Kingham on the District Court. There is no-one—no-one—who has questioned their ability to carry out their judicial duties. What the question has been is in relation to how you interpret the Bar Association. The question has been about whether a person has had extensive trial experience before being appointed. It comes down to the question of how you define merit and excellence. Both of these lawyers are outstanding lawyers, and I have every confidence and can tell the people of Queensland that I have every confidence that they will be outstanding judges and very successful judges—one in the Supreme Court and the other in the District Court.

Now, there has been much debate over a lot of time about judicial appointments. There will always be people who have their, shall we say, noses out of joint who believe one thing or the other. But no-one—no-one—can criticise either of these two appointments on their ability as lawyers in being outstanding accomplished lawyers. Justice Lyons, for instance, sat as President of the Guardianship and Administration Tribunal for six years. She was also a member of the social securities tribunal, so since 1995 she has had extensive experience as a decision maker in both the federal jurisdiction and the state jurisdiction. Can I tell you that the jurisdiction of the guardianship tribunal was once the

jurisdiction of the Supreme Court. It is a jurisdiction that handles the most complex civil litigation matters. It has the most complex personal and financial matters before it.

Mr McARDLE: Attorney, in the letter I referred to of 18 July Mr Peter Lyons, President of the Bar Association, states that he was not consulted with regard to the most recent appointment to the District Court and to his knowledge no-one at the bar was. Is Mr Lyons correct in what he says in that you did not make any approach to the bar prior to the appointment? If you say that you did, then to whom did you talk? If you did not, why?

CHAIR: Member for Caloundra—

Mrs LAVARCH: Can I tell the member for Caloundra that these are highly confidential—

CHAIR: Attorney, before you respond, can I again remind the member for Caloundra that under standing order 177(f) a member may ask any question which is relevant to the examination of the appropriation being considered. I consider that that question is not relevant to the Appropriation Bill. If the member for Caloundra is not happy with that, I will seek advice from the Clerk.

Mr McARDLE: I seek a ruling on that question. This is an estimates hearing and these questions are absolutely relevant to a very critical situation in this state—the appointment of judicial officers to any court or tribunal—and to not allow these questions to be heard in this estimates hearing is an absolute disgrace.

CHAIR: In accordance with paragraph 9 of the rules relating to witnesses appearing before parliamentary committees, the committee will now withdraw to deliberate in private session. We will come back in about 10 minutes.

Proceedings suspended from 10.45 am to 11.02 am.

CHAIR: The hearing will now resume. The committee has decided that the question put forward by the member for Caloundra previously was out of order. I now call upon the member for Caloundra.

Mr McARDLE: Attorney, you wrote an article that appeared in the *Courier-Mail* last Friday on that exact issue—that is, the selection process that you go through. You also made the comment, 'I also consult the Women Lawyers' Association.' I have no doubt of that body's ability, but that was not an inclusive comment. Later in the article you referred to a non-exhaustive list with regard to the qualities of a judge. I take it from that that you do not consult with the Law Council of Australia, the Plaintiff Lawyers Association, the Australian Association of Crown Prosecutors, of which Ross Martin QC in Queensland is a member, or other bodies. Attorney, do you not believe that those groups are relevant or important enough to consult in the appointment of judicial officers?

CHAIR: Member for Caloundra, I again remind you that your question must not reflect on any particular judicial officer.

Mr McARDLE: It does not.

CHAIR: If it is a general question, I will allow it.

Mr McARDLE: It is a very general question. I am just after the advice to explain why the sentence appears standing alone when other groups are also eminent in their arena.

Mrs LAVARCH: It seems to me that the member for Caloundra wants to have a debate about what constitutes the selection or qualities an Attorney would look for in a person to nominate them for judicial office. He also seems to be taking exception to the fact that I consult with the Women Lawyers Association. Can I inform the member for Caloundra that he might want to have a talk to his federal counterpart, the federal Attorney-General—

Mr McARDLE: I have to take a point of order. I made it very clear that I held the Women Lawyers Association in great esteem, and I made that comment prior—

CHAIR: That is not a point of order. The minister can answer the question the way she sees fit.

Mrs LAVARCH: As I was saying, the member for Caloundra might want to have a conversation with the federal Attorney-General, Phillip Ruddock, who consults with the Australian Women Lawyers Association.

CHAIR: Attorney, before you answer—

Mrs LAVARCH: There is nothing wrong or nothing can be drawn from the consultation with Women Lawyers.

CHAIR: Attorney, before you continue to answer the question, can I also caution you not to talk about the process of the appointment of a particular judicial officer. You can answer the question in general terms because, from my understanding, the member for Caloundra has asked the question in a very general sense.

Mrs LAVARCH: The member for Caloundra raised another matter, which I wanted to correct the record on. I did not actually write that piece that appeared in the Perspectives column in the *Courier-Mail* last Friday specifically as an article for the *Courier-Mail*. I was asked by Des Houghton a series of

questions by email last Wednesday and Thursday. I answered his questions in full. The answers to those questions in relation to the appointment and selection process then appeared as a Perspectives column. But I have no problem with the fact that that was published. I was quite comfortable answering Mr Houghton's questions in full about what is the process that I go through in relation to nominating someone for appointment as a judge.

Let us talk about the issue of the qualities you would look for in relation to a judge. Can I say that it is not just about the judge but one has to also be mindful of the institution of the court. Not only does the individual appointee have to have merit and be an outstanding lawyer; the institution of the court should also be ensured that, through the appointment of judicial officers, it has merit. I thought I might bring to the committee's attention some points that were raised in a consultation paper by the English Bar Council in discussions about this very point.

CHAIR: Attorney, your time is up.

Mr McARDLE: The Queensland government's web site states that the Supreme Court is the highest court in Queensland's court system and hears serious criminal matters such as murder and certain serious drug offences together with civil disputes of amounts above \$250,000. Attorney, in the article of last Friday you list eight points or qualities, but nowhere in that list is there a quality of profound knowledge and understanding of the law and rules of procedure involved in the jurisdiction of the individuals entering. On a general basis, are you saying that that is not an important requirement—that is, an appointee need not have that knowledge and understanding to a profound sense of the jurisdiction they are entering?

Mrs LAVARCH: Of course. There are a number of matters that you would take into consideration in looking at nominees for appointment for judicial office. The starting point is merit and excellence. What the debate is about is what constitutes merit and excellence.

We have an outstanding legal profession here in Queensland. Our legal profession is made up of barristers—about 10 per cent of the legal profession is barristers—and I do not know the exact number, but there are probably close to 7,000 solicitors in this state. There are also our legal academics and government lawyers as well. The pool that is drawn from when looking for outstanding lawyers is a pool that incorporates all areas of the legal profession. The legal profession in Queensland is a broad church. What the member for Caloundra is suggesting is that if you are not a barrister then you should not be considered for judicial appointment.

Mr McARDLE: No, I am not.

Mrs LAVARCH: Not even the Bar Association—

CHAIR: Order.

Mrs LAVARCH: Not even the Bar Association suggests that.

Mr McARDLE: Do you rate those qualities relevant to the appointment?

CHAIR: Order! Member for Caloundra! Order, please!

Mrs LAVARCH: I just wanted to share with the committee some very forceful arguments made by the English Bar Council in relation to the need for greater diversity in the judiciary. I think you will find this very informative. The Bar Council's argument was made on four principal grounds: firstly, that diversity makes a contribution to justice itself and if more and wider experiences are channelled into the judicial system, the more it may be hoped that the quality of decision making will be improved; and, secondly, that if the judiciary is drawn from a wider pool, this will give the judges as a body greater legitimacy. To quote from the Bar Council's paper—

We believe that the judiciary, though drawn from the ranks of lawyers, must be seen to reflect the diversity of our society if it is to have the confidence of society as a whole and in particular of those who are using the courts.

CHAIR: I call the member for Clayfield.

Ms LIDDY CLARK: I refer the Attorney to page 1-32 concerning the employment of additional staff to improve the department's capacity to process ex gratia payments to victims of crime. Could the Attorney outline this and other new initiatives to assist victims of crime?

Mrs LAVARCH: I thank the honourable member for her question. I thank her for asking a question which goes to appropriation matters. It is an appropriate question for this committee. I am very proud to advise the committee how this government is assisting victims of crime. The focus within the Department of Justice and Attorney-General is to ensure we support victims of crime as they go through the legal system and ensure that we provide after-court assistance to help victims rebuild their lives.

We have strengthened the department's capacity to process applications for ex gratia payments of criminal injury compensation through the Criminal Offence Victims Act 1995, otherwise known as COVA, by employing an additional six staff in the Criminal Injury Compensation Unit. The procedures for dealing with criminal injury compensation applications have also been improved so that matters are resolved in a more timely way for applicants. A record \$4.1 million in ex gratia payments has been provided to victims of crime since the start of this month under COVA. The department has also begun a

long-term review to examine all other payments to victims under the COVA to ensure the most appropriate level of compensation is being paid.

I am also pleased to announce that the government will increase funeral payments as part of a six-point package to provide greater assistance to victims of crime. Families heartbroken by the violent death of a loved one should not have the added trauma after struggling to pay for a funeral. Funeral expenses for Queenslanders who die as a result of murder or manslaughter will increase from \$4,000 to \$6,000. The current payment of \$2,000 for ancillary expenses, which is shared among family members and dependants, will also rise from \$2,000 to \$3,000. These ancillary expenses can include the cost of counselling.

Can I advise the committee that, to access assistance through the families of homicide victims assistance provisions, family members do not have to wait for someone to be identified, let alone someone to be convicted. They can access that assistance immediately. The cost can also include accommodation, travel to attend the trial and also the enormous cost in some instances, very tragically, where the scene of the crime requires cleaning.

Whilst not all family members seek assistance with funeral and ancillary expenses, it is so important that the government offers this type of support. Victims and their families deserve dignity at this time. We are working to provide victims with compassionate and meaningful assistance when they most need it. I also want to take this opportunity to thank the Queensland Homicide Victims Support Group for the work that they do.

CHAIR: Attorney, I am sure you will agree that children who are victims of crime sometimes get traumatised when they go through the court system. I am particularly interested in page 1-5 of the MPS, which refers to an expansion of videoconferencing facilities and specialised prosecution services from the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. Can you describe how this program will help children?

Mrs LAVARCH: I most certainly can. I thank the honourable member for his question and I thank him for his concern and interest in how vulnerable people, especially vulnerable witnesses like children, are assisted in the criminal justice system.

In December 2004, in recognition of the difficulties children face in the justice system, the government provided the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions with additional funding of \$730,000 per year to assist with the implementation of the reforms of the Evidence (Protection of Children) Amendment Act 2003. As a result, wherever possible and if the court allows, the evidence of children is recorded prior to court proceedings. Otherwise, children's evidence is given via video link or from behind a screen. These strategies reduce the trauma and stress for the children involved. The court cases do take longer using these facilities, but we certainly support these initiatives and they are great initiatives to assist children in the criminal justice system.

Videoconferencing assists greatly in this process and the government is continuing to expand these facilities across the state, with \$990,000 provided in 2006-07 to continue this program, along with recurrent funding of \$760,000. The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions has established a specialist affected child witness section in Brisbane, which is staffed by Crown prosecutors and an administrative officer working with the support of victim liaison officers. These prosecutors also travel to remote areas, and a further prosecutor has been appointed to the northern region.

The office also provides training to lawyers on the needs of children and techniques for eliciting evidence from them. The training is delivered by experts who work with victims of sexual assault, including children. These changes have had a major impact. In Brisbane, for example, guilty pleas in affected child witness prosecutions increased 285 per cent, from 41 in 2004 to 158 in 2005. Affected child witness trials increased 184 per cent, from 25 in 2004 to 71 in 2005. Convictions at trial increased 206 per cent, from 18 in 2004 to 55 in 2005. You can see what a difference it makes. Children obviously feel much more comfortable giving evidence in that way.

Mr WELLS: Mr Chairman, I refer the honourable Attorney to pages 1-3 and 1-4 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement and the government's program to upgrade courthouse infrastructure in Queensland. Could the Attorney detail spending for planning and design of a new supreme and district courts complex and other investment in new courts and court infrastructure?

Mrs LAVARCH: I thank the honourable member for the question. The Chief Justice received the news of this budget allocation towards planning for a new higher courts complex most enthusiastically. He certainly welcomed the news.

In 2006-07, the government will continue its program to provide state-of-the-art modern courthouse justice facilities, with \$32.3 million provided for courthouse infrastructure across the state. As part of this investment, \$6.3 million has been provided for the planning and design of a new Supreme Court and District Court building in Brisbane. This provision will fund the development of a design competition brief for the new complex and a schematic design from the winning entry which is expected to be completed by June 2007.

The government has also provided \$8.3 million in 2006-07 for the construction of a new courthouse and watch-house in Ipswich, which will have an estimated cost of \$75 million. Additionally, the Mareeba community will benefit, with \$1.5 million in 2006-07 and a total of \$5.3 million over two years provided for a new courthouse. This new facility will service the hundreds of people who use the Mareeba courthouse each year, including members of the public, witnesses, judicial officers, legal council and staff. The Mareeba project will bring the town's courthouse, watch-house and police station together on one easy-to-access site and will provide a modern, accessible legal precinct for the local community.

A new \$11 million courthouse will also be constructed in Pine Rivers this year, providing important facilities for the growing northern corridor. I point out that the approval to have a new courthouse established in Pine Rivers preceded me as Attorney-General. The former Attorney-General had made that decision—a very wise decision.

Additionally, a total of \$2 million over two years has been provided for new prisoner facilities at the Maryborough courthouse. Each of these courthouses will conform with environmentally sustainable design standards, including water conservation principles such as those used in the Brisbane Magistrates Court.

Other major works in the past year include the creation of a new vulnerable witness suite in Beenleigh; refurbishment of the St George courthouse; major upgrades to air conditioning at Toowoomba, Biloela and Blackwater courthouses; and upgrading of the docks at Toowoomba, Bundaberg and Cairns. The Beattie government is investing heavily to ensure that Queenslanders have access to a modern justice system wherever they live. I believe these significant investments in court infrastructure and technology demonstrate our ongoing commitment to ensuring that this becomes a reality for all Queenslanders.

Mr HOOLIHAN: Following on from the previous question, Attorney, I refer you to page 1-3 of the MPS and the statement that the government continues its program to provide state-of-the-art modern courthouses. Could you inform the committee what you are doing in relation to the courthouse at Townsville in this regard?

Mrs LAVARCH: I most certainly can, and I thank the member for Keppel for his question. The Queensland government is planning for the future justice needs of Townsville, with \$250,000 dedicated to an options study of the Townsville courthouse. I know this will be very welcome news in Townsville. The study will look at the potential to refurbish and expand the existing building in light of the expected increased demand for court facilities in the region for the next 20 to 30 years. It will evaluate accommodation options for all court services in Townsville and focus on providing the best and most cost-effective facilities to the local community.

The existing Townsville courthouse was built in 1974. I understand that at the time it was built it won some architectural awards and currently houses all of the courts, the Magistrates Court, the District Court and the Supreme Court. The study will look at how to best accommodate these courts in the future. It will focus on a number of areas, including the accommodation of the Magistrates Court activities, technology and public facilities such as waiting areas and jury accommodation. Regular court users will also be involved in the consultation process. It is very important to involve all users of the court—whether they be there as court support, lawyers, prosecutors, who are also lawyers of course, the judiciary, magistrates, court reporters and whoever else uses the court—to get a wide range of views.

The study is expected to commence in September 2006 and is likely to be completed within six months. A private architectural firm experienced in court design will be selected shortly by a merit process to conduct the study. The government is also committed to ensuring the existing courthouse meets current judicial needs. As a result, around \$600,000 has been invested in increased security at the courthouse, including a new metal detector, in the last financial year.

Over the next 12 months the existing vulnerable witness room with its associated closed circuit television facilities will also be upgraded. More than \$100,000 has been provided to relocate the existing room to a more suitable location and increase the space available for vulnerable witnesses. The government is committed to ensuring our communities have access to modern and accessible court facilities. The Townsville options study, security upgrade and planned expansion of vulnerable witness facilities at the courthouse demonstrate our commitment and will service Townsville's judicial needs well into the future.

Ms LIDDY CLARK: I refer the Attorney-General to page 1-31. Can the Attorney advise the committee how many JPs in the Community programs are currently operating in Queensland and how this program is helping Queenslanders access JPs?

Mrs LAVARCH: I thank the member for her question. I want to thank all members of parliament who have got behind the JPs in the Community program. I know you will join with me in saying that it is a great success. I know from the number of representations and phone calls I receive and the number of people who stop me in the street that people certainly appreciate that they can access a JP in the

community. Many people will have experienced the frustrations of needing documents certified and signatures witnessed and not knowing where to find a JP. In fact, we see more and more legislation which requires documents to be witnessed by a JP. So we have to ensure that people have access to a JP.

The Queensland government, through the Department of Justice and Attorney-General, is using an innovative approach to solve this problem and to make it easier to access JP services. The JPs in the Community program is a volunteer justice of the peace initiative that is conducted in partnership with various shopping centre management, Magistrates Court registries and public libraries across Queensland. The program aims to make justices of the peace and commissioners for declarations more accessible to the general public at more locations throughout the state.

I have launched a number of these services that involve volunteer JPs, along with the local members for the areas, to ensure that JPs are available each week to witness documents in local shopping centres or libraries. In some court registries there are JP facilities there for JPs to be available separate from the registry. As I said, they are incredibly popular. Over the past 12 months, the JPs in the Community program has expanded and is now established in 69 locations and counting. I probably have about three or four new locations coming in the not too distant future.

I also want to mention that the universities have come on board. They are setting up JPs in the universities because university students quite often need access to a JP. QUT, UQ and other universities want to have the program operating within their campuses. There are more than 600 participating volunteer justices of the peace and commissioners for declarations involved. That is a lot of volunteerism.

I am also especially proud of the department's innovative JPs in remote communities program. This program provides training throughout remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to enable the holding of Magistrates Courts constituted by two or more special JPs. Since Indigenous JP training began in 1998, a total 175 people from remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have now been appointed Justice of the Peace (Magistrates Court).

Mr HOOLIHAN: I refer the Attorney to page 1-5 and the expansion of wireless internet access in courthouses across Queensland. Could she explain the benefits that the wireless internet system provides to court users and the justice system?

CHAIR: Attorney, I remind you that have 1½ minutes to answer the question before 11.30 am.

Mrs LAVARCH: I can explain the benefits but probably not in 1½ minutes. Maybe I should invite you all along to a court to try firsthand the Wi-Fi facilities. I am delighted to speak about this initiative because Queensland is leading the world, with free broadband internet access now available in more than 95 courtrooms across the state. The court's Wi-Fi service uses the latest technology to save court users time and money. We have a brochure titled *No strings with Courts Wi-Fi!* I table that brochure for committee members to read at their leisure.

The service is very easy to use. In fact, all that is needed is a laptop equipped with an inexpensive adaptor card. This innovative service is targeted at court users, particularly legal representatives, and provides users with immediate access to email, legal resources on the internet and potentially their own computer networks. To date, the service has been installed in centres including the Brisbane law courts complex, the Brisbane Magistrates Court, the Brisbane Children's Court and courthouses at Beenleigh, Ipswich, Southport, Maroochydore, Rockhampton, Townsville and Cairns.

When accessing the Internet from these courtrooms, all Internet access is via a site filter that prevents users from accessing inappropriate material. The service was launched in May 2006 and has been well received within the legal sector. In coming months, the service will be expanded to Mackay, and in centres that already have the service additional courtrooms will be connected, bringing the total number of Wi-Fi capable courtrooms to 110.

Mr Chair, before we finish the session at 11.30, I wish to table the letter that I referred to in the first session of the committee's hearing this morning. This is a letter about the arrangements concerning the FOI training.

CHAIR: Are you seeking leave to table that document?

Mrs LAVARCH: Yes, I seek leave to table that document.

CHAIR: Is leave granted?

Leave granted.

Mrs LAVARCH: Can I also take this opportunity before we finish this morning to thank the director-general, Rachel Hunter; the deputy director-general, Jim McGowan; Pat Morgan, our finance officer for the department; and all departmental officers and all statutory authorities for the incredibly hard work that they undertook to prepare for estimates for today.

CHAIR: Thank you, Attorney. The time allocated for the consideration of the estimates of expenditure in the portfolio of the Department of Justice and Attorney-General has expired. On behalf of

the committee, Minister, I thank you and your departmental officers for their attendance. The transcript of this hearing will be available on the Hansard page of the parliament's web site within approximately two hours. The committee will take a short break.

Proceedings suspended from 11.32 am to 11.37 am.

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE F—COMMUNITIES AND DISABILITY SERVICES

In Attendance

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

Ms A Palaszczuk, Senior Policy Advisor

Department of Department of Communities and Disability Services Queensland

Ms L Apelt, Director-General

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

Mr B Elder, Director, Finance and Administration, Corporate and Executive Services

Ms J King, Assistant Director-General, Smart Service Queensland, Department of Communities

CHAIR: I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Communities, Disability Services and Seniors open for examination. The time allocated is two hours and 45 minutes. Before I continue, I welcome the honourable member for Beaudesert, Mr Kev Lingard, who is joining us. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time limit for questions is one minute and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give you a 15-second warning and a double chime will sound at the end of each of these time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will also sound two minutes after an extension of time has been given.

The sessional orders require that at least half the time available for questions and answers is to be allocated to non-government members. Any time expended when the committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between government and non-government members. I ask departmental officers to identify themselves when they first come forward to answer a question if the minister refers a question to them so that Hansard can record their name. Minister, if you wish to, you may make an opening statement. I remind you that there is a time limit of five minutes for such a statement.

Mr PITT: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I thank the committee for the opportunity to outline some of the significant achievements within my portfolio of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors. My portfolio is one of the more challenging and rewarding within government—challenging because I deal daily with the most vulnerable members of society and rewarding because I see constant progress in meeting their needs.

I am pleased to begin my address with the announcement that this morning I have approved funding of \$17.68 million over the next three years to provide additional support services for homeless people in Cairns, Townsville, Mount Isa, Brisbane and the Gold Coast. Specific details of the annual funding are: almost \$1.5 million for new services in Townsville-Thuringowa; \$1.3 million for new services in Cairns; and just over \$1 million each for new services in Brisbane, the Gold Coast and Mount Isa. The funding is provided under the Queensland government's responding to homelessness strategy, a four-year commitment of \$235.52 million. The Department of Communities has committed \$56.45 million over four years as part of this strategy.

I am also pleased to announce this morning that I have approved the locations of four early years service centres to be built as part of the Queensland government's early years strategy. The centres will be established at Nerang, Browns Plains, Caboolture and Cairns. These locations have been chosen on the basis of high growth in the number of families with children aged up to eight years and high levels of need within the communities. There has been \$5 million allocated in 2006-07 to establish and operate the centres, with the amount doubling to \$10 million a year from 2007-08.

This budget also consolidates my portfolio's adoption of prevention and early intervention strategies to meet the growing demand for services, initiatives focused on improving the strength of families and the wellbeing of children through universal childhood and family support services, and targeted services for vulnerable children and families. An investment in the early years of a child's life yields significant social and financial benefits for government and the community. That is why the government has provided a further investment in this area by building on its current investment of \$68 million.

Another significant undertaking from my portfolio in 2006-07 will be to begin implementing the Blueprint for the Bush, a 10-year strategy to support the sustainability, livability and prosperity of rural

Queensland. Included in the new blueprint budget are initiatives totalling \$30 million for the Strengthening Rural Communities Strategy. This will deliver two grants programs: \$15 million for Strengthening Rural Communities and a further \$15 million for Strengthening Rural Non-Government Organisations. The second of these will operate in conjunction with the broader four-year Strengthening Non-Government Organisations project announced in last year's state budget.

I now move on to Disability Services Queensland and its budget. While the record DSQ budget of \$634 million for 2006-07 is full of good news for Queenslanders with a disability, the one disappointing aspect is the light it shines on the federal government's failure to live up to its responsibility to fund disability services in Queensland appropriately. In real terms, the federal government has reduced annual funding for disability services in Queensland by \$92 million since 1998. Federal government funding in 1998 for services delivered by Disability Services Queensland was 33.2 per cent of its budget. On that ratio, in a budget of \$634 million, the federal government should be contributing \$210 million this year. Instead, its contribution is only \$118 million. The 2006-07 Queensland budget increase of 22 per cent has come about almost entirely because of the increased state government funding, with the federal contribution increasing by a paltry 1.3 per cent.

One of the significant issues facing disability service providers is how to care for people with an intellectual disability who exhibit severely challenging and often threatening behaviour. The type of behaviour I am talking about can result in the person posing a significant risk of harm to themselves, their carers, their families and/or the community. In April this year, I appointed retired Supreme Court judge Bill Carter QC to investigate and report on appropriate legislative and care options. I have requested Mr Carter review current services and investigate systems provided interstate and internationally.

This year marks the commencement of the new Disability Services Act which strengthens and safeguards the rights of Queenslanders with a disability and gives them greater confidence in the quality of support services. More than 16,000 Queenslanders with a disability received services funded by Disability Services Queensland in 2004-05. Significantly, the new act includes broad powers to monitor and investigate the delivery of services funded by DSQ and, where necessary, take appropriate action. The new legislation also encourages all Queenslanders to promote inclusive principles within their own communities. I now invite questions from the committee members.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I remind committee members that the time allocated between now and 12.35 will be for questions directed to the minister regarding the Department of Communities. I call the member for Beaudesert.

Mr PITT: Mr Chair, I thought it was initially Disability Services Queensland.

CHAIR: My apologies. It is DSQ; that is right.

Mr LINGARD: Minister, I refer to page 1-1 of the MPS, which basically refers to providing 'community access services to assist people with a disability to participate in everyday life'. In light of the Beattie government's Disability Action Week and the fact that one in 700 people are born with Down syndrome, will the minister consider providing core viability funding for the next three years to the Down Syndrome Association of Queensland Inc? To date, they have never received core funding and they are currently seeking \$230,000 in funding to support approximately 1,000 families. They have been seeking assistance since November 2005. Minister, it has now become urgent that DSAQ receive funding, as they are now faced with cutting staff and programs throughout the state. I am aware that they have also written to the Premier seeking an immediate resolution to this funding crisis. Minister, will you guarantee that this crisis will be addressed immediately?

Mr PITT: I thank the member for the question. I recognise the work undertaken by the Down Syndrome Association of Queensland over the past 30 years to support, advocate for and empower people with Down syndrome and their families. The association has had much success in these areas and is to be congratulated for its ongoing efforts. The Queensland government, in recognition of these achievements and the need in the community, provides recurrent funding to assist the association. For 2005-06, the amount provided was \$72,503. This funding helped the association to develop valuable regional networks. I can assure committee members that this recurrent funding will continue to be provided.

A submission from the Down Syndrome Association seeking enhanced funding was received by my office in mid March 2006. I understand that the association has also approached my colleagues, the Minister for Health and the Minister for Education and the Minister for the Arts. A senior officer in Disability Services Queensland has been requested to review the submission and has been in contact with the organisation to clarify some of the information within that submission and to seek additional budgetary information. In addition, a resource officer from Disability Services Queensland has been nominated to work with the association to identify its long-term resource needs. The association's president has been advised that an outcome can be expected by the end of September 2006.

In the interim, the Down Syndrome Association will be eligible to apply for funding in the 2006-07 year under the Strengthening Non-Government Organisations initiative, which is targeted towards

developing the capacity of the disabilities sector, and other funding which may be available. This funding is focused on ensuring that service responses are strengthened to meet the needs of clients.

Any application for viability funding received from the Down Syndrome Association of Queensland will be considered independently of its earlier request for funding assistance. I am aware of recent media articles in which the association has stated that a need for early advice in relation to its request for funding assistance is required. Accordingly, the assistant director-general of Disability Services Queensland will meet with the chief executive officer of the Down Syndrome Association next Tuesday, 25 July, to assess the criticality of the association's needs and to discuss all available options.

I must say to the member that we commenced funding this organisation in 1999. I am a little perturbed that the association has sought to go outside the normal means in which to lobby for and to seek support. The association first brought it to the attention of my parliamentary secretary last November but had not put in any formal submission at that stage. The formal submission, as I indicated in the earlier part of my answer, arrived in mid March. That submission, unfortunately, was deficient—deficient in detail, deficient in business plan. As I indicated on radio yesterday, I am in the business of not just funding good ideas; I am in the business of funding good outcomes. I am dealing with public money and every organisation, including an organisation like the Down Syndrome Association, is required to meet those benchmarks.

Mr LINGARD: My question obviously referred to the crisis that is there, but I appreciate the fact that you are saying that next Tuesday you will meet with that association. Minister, I refer to page 1-4 in the MPS under 'Enhanced Accommodation Support' in relation to supported accommodation assistance programs and the admission of young people to aged-care facilities. In your reply to question on notice No. 521 in April 2006 in reference to the case of Shevaune Conry—who is suffering from multiple sclerosis and can no longer be cared for by her husband in her home and is subsequently accommodated in an aged-care facility—the places nominated in your answer, such as the Jacana centre, are long-term care facilities and therefore do not have a regular turnover of young people. What progress has your government made in assisting Shevaune's husband, David Conry, in his campaign to build alternative accommodation for young people with a disability? I am aware that Mr Conry has been offered a parcel of land by the Wesley Mission and is planning for this accommodation to be built. In general, what are you doing for these types of people?

Mr PITT: On 9 April 2006 the *60 Minutes* program screened a story on the Youngcare Foundation. The Youngcare Foundation was established by Mr David Conry, whose wife, Mrs Shevaune Conry, was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1998 and was placed in a residential aged-care facility in January 2006 due to increasing care needs. The aim of the foundation is to develop accommodation support for younger people with disabilities who require 24-hour support.

The program segment focused on Mrs Conry's admission to Sinnamon Village and the issue of a younger person living in an aged-care environment. Youngcare has entered into a partnership with Wesley Mission Brisbane to build a facility on the Sinnamon Village aged-care site in the western suburbs of Brisbane. The facility will have individual units specifically designed for up to 18 younger people with a neurological disability.

Since the *60 Minutes* story, Youngcare has continued to fundraise including through a high-profile concert on 23 June 2006 featuring Bernard Fanning and Kasey Chambers held at the Brisbane City Hall. This concert attracted a strong audience. The Queensland government has recognised the need to increase the range of options available to younger people with disabilities to ensure that their living arrangements are age appropriate and that both their social and care needs are met. During 2004-05 Disability Services Queensland and Queensland Health undertook a joint profiling exercise to gain a better understanding of the needs of young people under 50 years of age living in residential aged-care facilities.

In February 2006 COAG announced a commitment to a five-year national program to start to reduce the number of young people with disabilities living in residential aged-care services. With the profiling work having already been undertaken, Disability Services Queensland is in a good position to implement this program. The program will commence in July 2006, with funding of up to \$122 million from the states and territories matched by up to \$122 million from the Commonwealth.

The Queensland government has committed funding to a total of up to \$23.9 million to the program over the five-year period, with matched funding from the Commonwealth government. The program will focus on three areas—providing cost-effective alternate residential care services for some younger people with disabilities and, where possible, improving support services to younger people who continue to stay in residential aged care, as well as assisting younger people at risk of entering residential aged care.

The initial priority of the program will be people under 50 years of age living in residential aged-care facilities who have been assessed and approved and who are awaiting placement in a residential aged-care facility. People between 50 and 65 years of age who have a disability and who are residing in an aged-care facility will also be eligible to be assisted by the program. A range of models of accommodation support will be provided to meet the needs of people with a disability who are assisted

under this initiative. Officers from Disability Services Queensland have commenced meeting with a number of non-government service providers, including the Wesley Mission and Youngcare, which are already working in and are interested in working further in this area.

Mr LINGARD: But specifically, Minister, will something be done for Shevaune Conry?

Mr PITT: I think it is inappropriate for me to target one particular case when we have need out there right across the sector. I think the responsibility of government is not just to satisfy the needs of an individual but where we can, in a new program like this, create a system that will meet the needs of many.

Mr LINGARD: Well, then, let me refer to a case and let me ask you for an answer overall. I refer to page 2-18 of the MPS. I refer to an article in the *Gold Coast Bulletin* on 12 July 2006 in relation to a young woman with an acquired brain injury who is currently locked up in a secure ward at the Gold Coast Hospital. She is constantly sedated and has been physically and sexually abused by mental patients in the ward because there is nowhere else for her to go. Doctors have tried to transfer her to a secure facility for patients with severe brain injury, but the unit will not accept her without funding from DSQ. However, according to DSQ she is technically secure and not categorised as critical and therefore it cannot guarantee funding.

According to a spokesperson for the Minister for Health, 'We have nowhere to transfer her to. We cannot release her because we have a duty of care to our patients.' Minister, do you agree that this situation is indeed ridiculous and that a person should not have to suffer because of lack of funding and places? What can you do to assist this woman and other women in similar situations?

Mr PITT: Unfortunately, the member for Beaudesert has based his question on a *Gold Coast Bulletin* report, and it is a dangerous practice to believe everything you read in the paper. If you had followed the issue a little more carefully, you would have seen that an official from Queensland Health painted a far different picture in a subsequent series of radio interviews.

My understanding is that the person to whom you refer was taken to the Gold Coast facility because of her behaviour within the community. Officials from Queensland Health had indicated that there was some concern about her mental health issues. She is not being kept in that facility inappropriately. The people who have responsibility for her mental health consider that she should remain there at this time to have those issues addressed.

As the member would know, dual diagnosis is a difficult issue for anyone—the clients and those attending to assist them. Disability Services Queensland is responsible for catering for the needs of an individual with an intellectual or cognitive disability and returning them to community life as best they can. It is unfair and untrue to say that there is nothing available for this person. She is currently held under the Mental Health Act and DSQ will guarantee funding for the required support once she is ready to transition back into supported accommodation.

Mr LINGARD: Minister, can you tell me what number of rehabilitation units for people with acquired brain injury are currently available and how many people are currently waiting for additional assistance? What is the number of people who were assisted under this needs based planning and resource allocation program last financial year?

Mr PITT: I am pleased to inform the committee that the Queensland government is working in partnership with government, academic and industry stakeholders to examine opportunities to enhance the effectiveness of disability and other service systems in meeting the needs of people with a disability, their families and carers in this state. As part of the Commonwealth-State-Territory Disability Bilateral Agreement 2002-07, the Queensland and Commonwealth governments have identified acquired brain injury as an area of mutual interest. Work has subsequently commenced on research into the service and support needs of individuals with acquired brain injury and their families and carers during and after transition from hospital.

In 2005-06 a collaborative research project was established between the Queensland government and the multidisciplinary brain injury research collaborative and the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences at the University of Queensland. As a first step, a pilot study is being conducted to investigate the support needs, range of services, gaps and barriers across service systems and service models. To date, the pilot study has recruited people from the Brain Injury Rehabilitation Unit at the Princess Alexandra Hospital and acquired brain injury outreach services. A broad range of other service providers working with people with acquired brain injuries will also be surveyed.

The pilot study will be completed in October 2006. It is anticipated that the outcomes of the pilot study will inform the development of an Australian Research Council linkage grant research proposal to develop a two-year Queensland-wide study. In 2005-06 Disability Services Queensland allocated \$48,000 to the research partnership which includes the completion of the pilot study and application for an ARC linkage grant to extend the research.

The number of people with acquired brain injury in accommodation support is 220; in community support, 298; having community access, 258; and receiving respite, 117, which gives us a total of 650.

Expenditure of \$7,000 was made following approval of the project plan. The remaining allocation of \$41,000 has been transferred to the 2006-07 budget and will be extended during this period. The transfer of these costs to the 2006-07 budget relates to unexpected delays during negotiation and approval processes, which included changes to the project methodology and project plan to include a group of people with an acquired brain injury who are still successfully living in the community after five years. Expenditure for 2006-07 includes \$12,000 for the baseline report, \$17,000 for the final report and 12,000 for the ARC linkage grant research proposal.

Rehabilitation of people with an acquired brain injury, as the member would know, being a former minister in this portfolio, is a health issue. DSQ supports people in rehabilitation when they move back into the community.

Mr LINGARD: Minister, I refer to non-government questions on notice and I refer to No. 4 in relation to advertising costs. I refer to the recent advertisement in the media and in the newspapers highlighting the new Disability Services Act. I note that you have failed to mention the cost of this advertising in the answer to the question that I asked you, and I ask again: what is the cost of the advertising campaign for this brochure on the Disability Services Act?

Mr PITT: On 29 March the Disability Services Act 2006 was passed by the Queensland parliament. I am extremely proud of this act. It will ensure that the rights of people with a disability are upheld and instances of abuse and neglect will be prevented. An essential part of the successful implementation of the act is ensuring that stakeholders are fully informed of their rights and obligations under the act and have access to the tools and resources necessary to comply with new requirements.

I am strongly committed to ensuring that all stakeholders fully understand and have the necessary tools to meet the requirements of the legislation. In recognition of this, \$0.82 million has been allocated in 2006-07 to implement a comprehensive awareness, information and training strategy. The strategy will utilise a variety of methods to meet the diverse communication and information needs of the disability sector across Queensland. This strategy commenced when the act was first introduced into parliament on 1 December 2005 and will continue throughout the 2006-07 financial year. The strategy includes \$0.41 million for a media campaign that focuses on the services, policy initiatives and increased funding provided for Disability Services Queensland. The campaign will highlight the government's response to the rights and needs of people with a disability as equal and valued members of our community. \$0.41 million has been allocated to implement a variety of other communication strategies including development of supporting publication, training and practical resources to assist service providers in understanding the requirements of the new act. Information sessions have been conducted at more than 18 locations across Queensland from May to July 2006, presenting an overview of the legislation, clarification of how the act works in conjunction with existing systems—providing members of the disability sector and the community the opportunity to ask questions.

Sessions specifically explaining the new criminal history screening requirement have also been conducted. The response to the sessions has been gratifying, with good attendance and positive feedback from the present. The recent advertising campaign was funded from this 2006-07 budget, not from the previous budget, but I was quite happy to answer that question. The total for that will be about \$450,000.

Mr LINGARD: Minister, I refer to page 2-3 of the MPS, dot point 3, which refers to additional respite and family support services at a cost of \$7.2 million in relation to the Family Support Program. I am aware that the priority panel that reviews the applications for this program last sat in November 2005. I am aware that it will not sit again until November 2006, with decisions for support packages not available until April/May 2007. Minister, will you consider reviewing the priority panel's sitting dates to every three months as opposed to the current situation of once a year? As you can appreciate, families struggling with a disabled child cannot afford to wait that long for a reply. Will the minister please provide a list of applicants who have applied and are currently on the waiting list?

Mr PITT: In November 2004 the government noted a proposal for an improvement strategy for the disability service system in the areas of needs assessment, prioritisation services and funding approaches. Cabinet also decided to release a consultation paper Have your Say on improving disability services in Queensland. The Have your Say consultation sought feedback from the community on the proposed reforms in the four key areas of assessment, prioritisation, services and funding approaches.

The consultation concluded in May 2005. Over 11,000 hard copy consultation papers were distributed across Queensland and many more were downloaded from the ConsultQld web site. Feedback was received through 99 face-to-face consultation sessions held across the state involving 910 participants, a three-day phone-in and 557 written responses via email, fax, post and web site. An information paper on the consultation feedback was released in May 2006 outlining who participated, what individuals and organisations said about the proposed improvement strategies and what the responses to the proposed improvement strategies mean.

The information paper was distributed to over 300 non-government organisations, the Disability Council of Queensland, regional disability councils and the department's regional officers. A copy of the information paper is also posted on ConsultQld and departmental web sites. The analysis of the data

and release of this document was delayed due to the amount and complexity of issues provided in the public consultation feedback. The responses include the need for transparent decision making; participation and involvement by individuals or organisations in the development of policies and processes; and accessible and comprehensive information, especially on how the department provides, shares and captures information. The Have your Say consultation results will determine future methods of setting priorities and whether the priority panels will be necessary at all.

CHAIR: I call the member for Clayfield.

Ms LIDDY CLARK: I refer the minister to page 2-4 of the MPS, where it mentions the record budget of \$634 million for Disability Services Queensland in 2006-07. Can the minister advise how this amount was arrived at?

Mr PITT: The record Disability Services Queensland budget of \$634 million for 2006-07 is a clear demonstration of the commitment this government has towards providing services for the most vulnerable people in our community. While this is a budget full of good news for Queensland, as I said before in my opening address, the one disappointing aspect is the light that it shines on the federal government's failure to live up to its responsibility to fund disability services in Queensland appropriately. The meagre funding increases provided by the federal government each year are not keeping pace with the rising demand and need of people with a disability. Like some other state agencies, DSQ derives a portion of its annual budget from the federal government contributions. These are generally longstanding arrangements designed to give Queenslanders something back from the taxes they pay.

Queenslanders will be disappointed to learn that, while they are paying ever increasing taxes to the federal government, they are getting a lesser return in the area of disability services. The 2006-07 Disability Services Queensland budget increase of 22 per cent has come about almost entirely because of increased state government funding. The federal government contribution is a paltry 1.3 per cent. Since 1998 when the Beattie government was elected, the proportion of Commonwealth funding for Disability Services Queensland has declined from 33.2 per cent to only 18 per cent of its budget. Fortunately for Queenslanders with a disability, this shortfall is being taken up by the Queensland government. During the same period, the Queensland government's proportion has increased from 66.8 per cent to 81.4 per cent. The result is that, since 1998, the Queensland government component of the DSQ budget has increased by almost \$391 million, or 312 per cent.

There is a similar disparity in the Commonwealth's contribution to the payment of funding indexation for community groups, which recognises the increased costs of providing the same service year after year. This is a significant issue for community organisations seeking to make funding stretch the same amount each year. In this budget the state government indexation component has been increased to 3.4 per cent, up from 2.5 per cent last year. Unfortunately for Queenslanders with a disability, the Commonwealth will provide only 1.8 per cent indexation. The net result is a reduction in the indexation component of grants. The rate paid to community organisations has to be discounted below the state government's 3.4 per cent because of the Commonwealth's paucity. Even if the federal government does not want to provide overall funding in line with its contribution eight years ago, the least it could do is to provide a realistic indexation payment so that community organisations can have a chance of maintaining existing service levels.

The budget increase for DSQ is a clear indication of the Queensland government's commitment to improving the quality of life for people with a disability. I am proud to be a minister at a time when significant new state government funding is being directed towards the provision of disability services. My only regret is that the federal minister obviously does not share that same commitment to providing services for this vulnerable group in our community.

Mr HOOLIHAN: Page 2-17 mentions continued work on developing balanced responses to people with an intellectual or cognitive disability who display challenging behaviours. Could you please provide information on how DSQ is developing better support systems and responses to these individuals?

Mr PITT: I thank the member for the question. The Queensland government is committed to ensuring that people who exhibit severely challenging behaviour are supported in appropriate ways. It is estimated that 1.9 per cent of the Queensland population has an intellectual or cognitive disability. Within this group there is a very small number of people with severely challenging behaviours. These behaviours can result in the person representing a significant risk of harm to themselves, their carers, their families and to the community. Disability Services Queensland already provides an array of support options for people with challenging behaviours through the service it operates and those it funds in the non-government sector. However, these support options may not appropriately accommodate people with severely challenging behaviours.

I am pleased to advise that in April this year the Queensland government appointed Bill Carter QC, a retired Supreme Court judge, to investigate and report on the options available for providing support and care to adults with an intellectual or cognitive disability who exhibit severely challenging behaviours. Mr Carter is being assisted by a panel comprising the Director-General of Disability

Services Queensland and the Department of Communities, Ms Linda Apelt, and the Director-General of the Department of Housing, Ms Natalie MacDonald. I have requested the panel to review the services currently available and to investigate the support systems provided interstate and internationally. As well, I have requested the panel provide a report that details options on the range of appropriate legislative and service requirements for the provision of voluntary and involuntary care to support adults with an intellectual or cognitive disability who present a significant risk of harm to themselves or others. This report will also provide recommendations on the option or options appropriate for implementation in Queensland. I will review the report provided by the panel with a view to developing appropriate legislative provisions and support services to the care of this group of Queenslanders. I envisage that support services will be tailored to provide support to people with severely challenging behaviour in ways which safeguard each person's rights and ensure that the safety of clients and the community are balanced.

In recent years the Queensland government has supplemented the support generally provided to people with an intellectual or cognitive disability with specific initiatives aimed at supporting people who present severely challenging behaviour. The Innovative Support and Housing initiative is a transitional model that provides proactive and intensive behavioural interventions and planning in a consistent support environment. The model also assists people to maximise their potential to move into less intensive community accommodation support options. Houses which form part of Disability Services Queensland's Innovative Support and Housing initiative have been opened at Wacol, Morayfield and Townsville. In addition, intensive behaviour support teams will bring particular expertise in human behaviour and communications so as to provide a professional service support option for people with a disability who have complex support needs. I am confident that the above projects and, in particular, the review by the panel chaired by Bill Carter QC will provide and inform the development of an appropriate range of services to support vulnerable members of our society.

Mr WELLS: Page 2-5 of the MPS refers to an allocation of \$6.9 million to implement recommendations from a review of the Accommodation Support and Respite Services. Would the honourable minister please advise what the outcomes of the review were and how the implementation of these recommendations is improving accommodation, support and respite services in Queensland?

Mr PITT: I am pleased to respond to the member's question. Disability Services Queensland's Accommodation Support and Respite Services currently provides accommodation support to 577 adults with an intellectual disability in a variety of residential settings. Additionally the service operates eight centre based respite services supporting more than 400 children and adults with intellectual disability each year. It is the second largest provider of disability accommodation support services and the largest provider of centre based respite in Queensland.

In 2005 I commissioned an independent external review into the operation of ASRS. The review provided a comprehensive set of recommendations to improve the operations of the government disability provider. The recommendations can be grouped within four key deliverables: firstly, improving the quality and capability of the Accommodation Support and Respite Service workforce; secondly, rigorous and effective performance management and the introduction of new practice initiatives; thirdly, strengthening internal and external scrutiny mechanisms and client safeguards; and, fourthly, improving business systems, reporting and corporate information and governance practices. This government not only endorsed those recommendations in full but provided an additional \$33.448 million to implement the recommendations over six years from 2005-06.

As one of the state's longest running and largest providers of services for people with an intellectual disability, it is appropriate that DSQ takes a lead in supporting people with the highest level of need and who may present with a range of complex and challenging behaviours and support requirements. This group of people is also among the most vulnerable in our community. The implementation of the review's recommendations draws together a program of improvement for ASRS that is underpinned by the Queensland Disability Sector Quality System. The government expects that the outcomes of this program of improvement will be to improve the quality of life for people accessing ASRS and enhance the quality of the services they receive. Over the long term, this will mean that people with an intellectual disability receiving accommodation support and respite services from the government provider are supported in a manner that offers them an optimum level of independence and opportunity and reflects their individual support needs.

The implementation of the review's recommendations has commenced and involves undertaking 37 interdependent projects over 4½ years to 2009-10 including introducing a new and proven service practice framework, which is designed to improve client involvement in everyday activities; strengthening the capacity of external scrutiny, providing further safeguards for ASRS clients to live free of abuse and neglect; strengthening internal client safeguards and provide additional opportunities for ASRS clients and their families to have input into how ASRS services are delivered locally and across the state; further improving the knowledge, skills and practices of our service delivery staff; and introducing new expert leadership roles in practice and service delivery.

CHAIR: Minister, I refer to MPS page 2-15. How has Disability Action Week helped to raise public awareness of disability issues in our state?

Mr PITT: I thank the member for the question. All around Queensland this week community groups and individuals are coming together to celebrate the skills, achievements and experiences of people with a disability. We are seeing positive coverage of events and activities that challenge stereotypes and promote positive images of people with a disability. Tomorrow at the Disability Action Week Awards we will pay tribute to committed members of our community who have made a difference to the lives of people with a disability. All of this is made possible through the work of the Disability Action Week State Planning Committee supported by Disability Services Queensland and our cosponsors. In 2005-06 Disability Services Queensland managed funding of approximately \$125,000 in its role as principal sponsor of the week. Working closely with the planning committee, the department has substantially increased the breadth and profile of the week's activities in recent years.

Following the success of our first regional Disability Action Week launch in Rockhampton last year, I had the great pleasure of launching this year's celebrations last Sunday at Fogarty Park in Cairns. Thousands of people were entertained by performers with and without a disability, interactive activities including mural painting and musical workshops, and the opportunity to talk with local disability representatives. It was a tremendous success, bringing the local community together on disability issues, forming sustainable networks and engaging not only community groups but also local government and media sponsors in the week. By staging this launch in regional locations, we are not only highlighting the great work happening in regional Queensland but also forging fresh collaborative approaches and ongoing action on disability issues. It is local community events that are at the heart and soul of action week, which is why a range of resources is provided to local community groups to support them to stage their own events.

There are more than 100 events happening this week from art exhibitions to morning teas to sporting events and radio programming—all promoting positive attitudes and raising awareness of local disability issues. Forty-one of these events have been supported by funding through Disability Services Queensland's Building Supportive Communities grants. Together with the state launch and awards, community events generate substantial media coverage. Last year the week generated more than 270 media stories. This is an important part of the way Disability Action Week raises public awareness of disability issues amongst a broad, general audience. The involvement of sponsors is another important aspect and has a real effect on community attitudes towards people with a disability.

This year we have attracted sponsorship from state and local government agencies, and corporate and education sector sponsors worth a total of \$70,000 in cash and in-kind support. This significant assistance not only adds to the week's activities but effectively engages our sponsorship partners and their stakeholders in the week's activities and goals. In many ways the Disability Action Week Awards are the highlight of this week, a unique opportunity to celebrate and recognise the quiet achievers who bring about positive change in their communities. This year we had a record 110 nominations. I think we can feel very confident of the commitment and energy for change that exists in Queensland communities.

Ms LIDDY CLARK: Page 2-4 of the MPS highlights a \$10 million allocation in Strengthening Non-Government Organisations. Could the minister outline what sort of initiatives this project will cover?

Mr PITT: Thank you very much for that question. The Queensland government is committed to ensuring a fairer go for people with a disability. With this in mind, I am very pleased to inform you that disability organisations have been allocated an additional \$10 million in this year's state budget through the Strengthening Non-Government Organisations initiative to improve their service delivery to clients. Combined with the \$20 million previously provided, this increase brings annual funding to assist non-government organisations to \$30 million for 2006-07. This record level of funding is an acknowledgement by this government of the vital services and support that non-government organisations provide to Queenslanders with a disability.

This initiative focuses on improving the capacity of the non-government sector to meet community and government performance and accountability expectations. The purpose of the funding is to develop the planning skills of non-government organisations, establish new or expanded services, develop workforce planning and the capacity of the sector, and establish the capacity for non-government providers to acquire or replace assets. The budget allocation will help to deliver higher quality and more accountable services to Queenslanders with a disability and their families and carers. Of the additional funding committed to this program in 2006-07, \$15 million recurrent funding has been allocated to the Sector Capacity initiative, bringing the total funding of this component of the program to \$20 million.

The 2006-07 Strengthening Non-Government Organisations sector capacity funding will target four important priorities. These are: accommodation services, hostel response, day services and early intervention services. This will assist non-government organisations to continue to develop new services to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities and their families and carers. Accommodation support continues to be in highest demand of all disability support services. This additional funding will

allow community organisations to offer a wide range of extra accommodation services to suit a variety of needs including long-term, short-term, crisis and in-home support.

Private hostel and boarding house closures continue to place demand on accommodation assistance. Additional funding has been allocated to the hostel response program to support individuals with high and complex needs affected by hostel closures in more appropriate community settings. These extra accommodations services will enable people with disabilities to carry out activities and interactions of daily living which they are unable to undertake without assistance.

There are two Strengthening Non-Government Organisations sector capacity initiatives in 2006-07—the early intervention and day service initiatives. These two initiatives are examples of this government's continued responsiveness to demand for a range of services to meet the whole-of-life support requirements of people with a disability. I would like to further clarify the total cost of the recent Disability Services media advertising. It was precisely \$418,579. That gets it right.

Mr HOOLIHAN: Page 2-4 of the MPS refers to funding of \$4.8 million to support the commencement of the Disability Services Act 2006. Will this funding provide for training programs and community awareness initiatives and criminal history checks?

Mr PITT: I thank the member for the question. The Queensland government recognises that people with a disability have the right to live a life free from abuse and also neglect. I am proud to announce that from 1 July 2006 the new Disability Services Act has come into play. Many people with a disability, their families, carers and service providers have welcomed new legislation which addresses community expectations identified during the two-year consultation period.

The act will benefit all Queenslanders by acknowledging and promoting the rights of people with a disability. The legislation includes measures to safeguard the rights of people with a disability, with a focus on ensuring that services funded by Disability Services Queensland are safe, accountable and respond to the needs of people with a disability.

In 2006-07, \$4.8 million has been allocated to Disability Services Queensland in new budgeted initiatives to support the implementation of the legislation. A new measure introduced by the act to safeguard Queenslanders with a disability is to require people engaged or proposed to be engaged by Disability Services Queensland or a funded non-government service provider to undergo criminal history screening. Importantly for non-government service providers, the cost of criminal history screening will be met by the Queensland government.

An improved regulatory framework is provided by the act and will be supported by a central compliance unit to be established within Disability Services Queensland. This framework now allows for Disability Services Queensland to monitor, investigate and enforce the act. Primarily, these functions will be undertaken by specially trained authorised officers who will be appointed by the chief executive of Disability Services Queensland. Funding has been allocated for the monitoring and investigation functions and appointment of authorised officers through the new central compliance unit. A strengthened complaints management system will complement the new compliance system. Funding has been allocated for additional officers to respond to complaints.

An essential part of the successful implementation of the act is ensuring that stakeholders are fully informed of their rights and their obligations under the act and have access to the tools and resources necessary to comply with the new requirements. Comprehensive and inclusive awareness, information and training strategies have been developed to meet the information needs of key stakeholder groups such as people with a disability, their families and carers and service providers. The awareness strategy commenced with the introduction of the act into the Queensland parliament.

As part of the awareness strategy, information sessions have been conducted in more than 18 locations across Queensland from May to July 2006 presenting an overview of the new legislation, clarifying how the act works in conjunction with existing systems and allowing members of the disability sector and the community the opportunity to ask questions. Sessions specifically explaining the new criminal history screening requirements have also been conducted. The response to the sessions has been great, with good attendances and positive feedback from those present.

CHAIR: There are only 12 months left before the end of this session. I will allocate six minutes to government and non-government members. I call the member for Beaudesert.

Mr LINGARD: I refer to the MPS at page 2-4, dot point 1, which refers to community support for people with a disability and their families and the fact that the department is aware of concerns that Community Lifestyle Support has in the Wide Bay area. Will the minister give a commitment that Community Lifestyle Support Inc. in the Wide Bay-Burnett area will receive recurrent funding to employ qualified full-time employees for the programs to go ahead?

Mr PITT: Again, I would caution the member about accepting TV reports, reports in the local newspapers and comments passed on by one of the local councils in respect of this issue. I am aware of the high-quality services provided by Community Lifestyle Support Inc. to over 70 clients with a disability in Bundaberg and nearby areas including Woodgate, Childers, Gin Gin and Bargara.

To support this work, Disability Services Queensland provides almost \$2 million in recurrent funding to this organisation. I am also aware that Community Lifestyle Support Inc. has advocated for the establishment of a therapy centre in the Bundaberg area for children in the zero to five age group. In February this year the director-general of Disability Services Queensland visited the organisation's premises in Bundaberg and discussed a number of issues with the local service manager, including the establishment of a therapy centre. However, it should be recognised that the nature of any therapy services provided through state disability funds must be in accordance with the Commonwealth-State-Territory Disability Agreement. This agreement does not allow for funds to be used on therapy services of a clinical or medical nature.

I visited Bundaberg on 27 June at the request of the local member, the Hon. Nita Cunningham MP, to meet with local service providers. As a result of our detailed discussions, Community Lifestyle Support has agreed to work with other non-government service providers to put together a funding proposal. The Queensland government supports the enhancement of early intervention strategies and services. This is demonstrated by the provision of \$1.4 million in 2005-06 for new and enhanced early childhood and therapy services for children aged zero to six with developmental delays and by the allocation of \$1 million recurrent funding to implement early intervention strategies for families with children under five with autism and complex and challenging behaviour. This funding will continue in 2006-07. In addition, an amount of \$3 million will be provided in 2006-07 for disability services for children for under six years of age with a physical disability.

During that meeting with Community Lifestyle Support Bundaberg it became apparent that the organisation needed to work up their proposal. In direct contradiction to media reports and public statements made by a number of ill-informed people, the organisation understood that there was a need for further work. I gave them an assurance that prevention and early intervention was a high priority for me. I saw great merit in their program and gave them great hope that their submission, once submitted, would receive a favourable response.

Mr LINGARD: I refer to the MPS at page 2-10, dot point 6, and the independent evaluation of the Resident Support Program. Minister, what is the number of young people currently in nursing homes? How many young people have been offered this type of placement in the past two years?

Mr PITT: There are approximately 1,340 people under 65 years of age living in Queensland residential aged-care facilities. Of this group, approximately 232 are under 50 years of age. To put that into perspective, these residents accounted for less than one per cent of the total residential care population in Queensland.

The Queensland government has been committed to working on this issue through the Commonwealth-State-Territory Disability Bilateral Agreement. Specifically, Disability Services Queensland, in partnership with Queensland Health, completed profiling work in 2005-06 on younger people under 50 years of age residing in Commonwealth government subsidised private and non-government residential aged-care facilities and younger people who have been assessed as eligible and are awaiting placement in residential aged-care facilities. Funding of \$65,000 for this work was allocated in the 2004-05 budget. No further funds were required to complete the work in 2005-06.

The issue of younger people living in residential aged-care facilities was also taken up by the Council of Australian Governments with its focus on health reforms during 2005-06. In February 2006 COAG announced a commitment to a new five-year program to reduce the number of young people with disabilities living in residential aged-care services. The program commencing nationally in July 2006 will end in July 2011. It will utilise funding of up to \$122 million from the states and territories matched by \$122 million from the Commonwealth. As I indicated to the member beforehand, a total of \$23.9 million will be provided by the Queensland government over that five-year program.

In 2006-07 total funds of \$3.78 million represented by \$3 million from Queensland's budget and \$0.78 million from the Commonwealth have been allocated in the first year of the program. This week I received a letter from Minister Brough, the Commonwealth Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, offering a bilateral agreement on this program. I am delighted to have received this offer and will sign the agreement very soon.

This bilateral agreement will be administered separately through the Commonwealth-State-Territory Disability Agreement 2002-07. The program will focus on three areas: providing cost-effective, alternative residential care for some younger people with disabilities; where possible, improving support services for younger people who continue to stay in residential aged care; and assisting younger people at risk of entering residential care.

The initial priority of the program will be people under 50 years of age living in residential care facilities or those younger people who have been assessed and approved and are awaiting placement in a residential aged-care facility. People aged 50 to 65 years who have a disability and reside in aged-care facilities will also be eligible to be assisted by the program. It is important for me to emphasise that this program is based on choice and participation is totally voluntary. The program will be implemented in close consultation with younger people, their families and carers to ensure that choice is respected.

Mr WELLS: The next question is about autism. I have an interest in that. I take the unique opportunity of having all of your officers there to refer any of them who are interested to my second reading speech on the budget in 2004 where I drew attention to a rash of overdiagnosis of autism which was a problem for the education department rather than for your department. What I wanted to ask today relates to your department dealing with people who are genuinely autistic and in particular the Autism Early Intervention initiative which is referred to on 2-14 of the MPS. I would ask the honourable minister if he would advise what early intervention strategies will be used and what impact this funding will have on families who have children with genuine autism?

Mr PITT: I thank the member for the question and advise him that early intervention for children with autism is extremely important as it can improve their health, social and cognitive development and help to minimise some of the social and physical barriers that they might face. It is a matter I am sure you are acutely aware of. This is why in the 2005-06 state budget I announced \$1 million in new funding to implement an Autism Early Intervention initiative to assist families of children with autism aged under five years. This funding will provide for the operating costs of additional early intervention services throughout Queensland and will play a crucial role in the effective support of children with autism and their families. This will enable the child to be supported at a young age and increase their family's reliance and capacity to care.

The funding for this initiative this year was provided to Autism Queensland Inc. and the Autism Early Intervention Outcomes Unit, known as AEIOU. I would like to place on the public record the enormous amount of work done by Dr James Morton which has led to the success of this project. Autism Queensland currently provides a range of successful programs, including intensive individual and group programs as well as consultancy.

This funding will build upon their achievements and extend their work in the important area of early intervention. The organisation was allocated \$467,953 recurrent and \$99,146 non-recurrent funding for the establishment of an autism early intervention service in Rockhampton. This service will be a regional centre of excellence aiming to support all facets of the lives of children and adults with autism.

With this new funding, Autism Queensland will build upon their current work in central Queensland with the development of an early intervention program—Early AQtion. They will provide a group based program for up to 12 children under school age who require intensive input from autism specialists. Children will attend the Rockhampton centre three to five days per week. An individual needs assessment and planning process will be undertaken for each child attending the centre. This will consider the needs of the child and their family.

The program will integrate a formal developmental and educational curriculum across centre, home and other educational settings. The program will also provide speech therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy services as well as outreach to children with autism living in other areas of central Queensland. I am confident that this program will strongly complement and extend the support available in central Queensland for children with autism and their families.

AEIOU is allocated recurrent funding of \$452,000 and non-recurrent funding of \$116,200 towards the operation of an existing autism early intervention centre at Moorooka and to establish new early intervention centres at Browns Plains, Townsville, Toowoomba and on the north side of Brisbane. These centres will be established over four years, each supporting 12 children with autism. AEIOU has established an innovative partnership with ABC Learning Centres to build purpose-designed facilities for children with autism. These centres will be independent centres attached to existing ABC Learning Centres.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The hearing is now suspended for lunch and will resume at 1.30 pm.
Sitting suspended from 12.35 pm to 1.29 pm.

CHAIR: Good afternoon. Before I commence the hearing, I ask everyone to make sure that their mobile phones or pagers are turned off. The committee will now examine the portfolios of communities and seniors. I call the member for Burdekin.

Mrs MENKENS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. With regard to Seniors, Minister, I refer to the MPS at page 1-23 and 1-24 in relation to the allocation of \$0.58 million under the Time for Grandparents program. I note that since the program's launch in December last year 151 referrals have been made to camps and activities. Of those 151 referrals, is that the number of grandchildren or is that the number of grandparents who received respite? Also on that, what was the actual cost of providing the respite through the camps and activities and what was the actual amount spent on administering the program?

Mr PITT: The Queensland government recognises and values the key role that many grandparents play by raising their grandchildren when parents are no longer able to fulfil their role. The Premier placed this issue on the national agenda by raising it at the Council of Australian Governments meeting in June 2004. In 2005-06 the department allocated, as you said, \$0.58 million in triennial funding for the provision of places in recreation and day activities for children and young people being cared for by their grandparents full-time with the aim of providing some respite for these grandparents.

To date, \$0.58 million in one-off funding has been allocated to Seniors Enquiry Line, a statewide information and referral service to link grandparents to services and subsidise their access to a wide variety of activities throughout Queensland ranging from overnight camps to afternoon activity programs. The program can be accessed via a statewide 1300 telephone service for the cost of a local call.

Seniors Enquiry Line has utilised a number of service providers that have a proven track record in service delivery to children and young people, including Guides Queensland, Scouts Queensland and Queensland Police-Citizens Youth Clubs. It is anticipated that Seniors Enquiry Line will continue to provide an interim service until the permanent service provider is established via a competitive funding process in April 2007.

In the seven months of operation from December 2005, the Time for Grandparents program has made more than 200 referrals. I understand there were 126 grandparents and grandchildren, so there were 200 referrals altogether. These camps were attended by 126 grandparents and grandchildren and included information sessions on accessing government and community services, family law and coping skills.

The four overnight camps that I have just mentioned were also trialled in south-east Queensland at the Kindilan Outdoor Education and Conference Centre at Redland Bay as part of the program. Despite the fact that a majority of service provision has occurred in south-east Queensland, activities are available at about 555 locations throughout the state. Grandparents and grandchildren also had an opportunity to participate in recreational activities such as archery, abseiling and rafting. These camps were designed to provide grandparents with information skills and support networks that will increase their capacity to cope as full-time carers, thereby increasing sustainability of their care arrangements.

An Indigenous camp was also successfully piloted at Kindilan during May 2006, and that camp was designed in consultation with Indigenous grandparent groups and Indigenous agencies. In addition to the variety of adventure activities offered at Kindilan, Indigenous staff introduced traditional Indigenous games, arts and crafts, and song and dance to the program.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, I refer to the MPS at page 1-25 relating to the output statement regarding seniors policy and services. I note that funding for 2006-07 is approximately \$11.5 million. That level of funding covers the administration of the Seniors Card and some programs. But my question is: what is the actual cost to the government of the subsidies that the Seniors Card attracts? For example, what is the cost of the Pensioner Rate Subsidy Scheme, Electricity Rebate Scheme and the rail subsidies? Do you have access to data as to how many Queensland seniors benefit from those state government subsidies as well?

Mr PITT: I welcome this opportunity to inform the member and the committee of the current status of the Electricity Rebate Scheme. The Electricity Rebate Scheme provides a concession rebated off the cost of domestic electricity supply to eligible pensioner, concession card and Queensland Seniors Card holders as well as holders of a repatriation health card for all conditions—that is, the Gold Card—and those who receive a war widows or special rate TPI pension. During 2005-06 the rebate was \$9.57 per month. That is \$10.53 per month inclusive of GST. The budget for 2005-06 was \$53.6 million and the expenditure during that period was \$59.4 million. We have projected a budget for next year of \$62.5 million.

The Pensioner Rate Subsidy Scheme provides a subsidy equivalent to 20 per cent up to a maximum of \$180 per annum of the gross rates and charges levied by local governments. It aims to assist pensioners who own their own homes to continue living there by alleviating the impact of rates and charges levied by local governments. The scheme is administered by the Department of Communities under an approved policy framework and in collaboration with 122 participating local governments throughout Queensland. In 2005-06 the budget was \$45.1 million. The actual expenditure in 2005-06 was \$48.9 million and in 2006-07 the budget estimate is \$51.1 million.

In terms of transport, the government provides a generous range of public transport concessions to Queensland pensioners, seniors and veterans. Holders of a Pensioner Concession Card, a Queensland Seniors Card or a Department of Veterans' Affairs Gold Card are able to obtain a 50 per cent discount on local bus and ferry travel and on Citytrain suburban and interurban rail services. Additionally, Pensioner Concession Card and Queensland Seniors Card holders can access a 50 per cent discount on Traveltrain's long-distance rail services. That is not something that comes directly out of our budget; Transport operates that one itself. But we make that information known to seniors throughout Queensland. It is estimated that the cost of providing these concessions to Seniors Card holders who do not hold a Pensioner Concession Card amounts to approximately \$30 million per year.

Mrs MENKENS: I again refer to page 1-25 of the MPS relating to the output statement with regard to seniors policy and services. I note that the actual target reached in 2005-06 for Seniors Card holders against eligible persons was 78 per cent. What is the actual number? How many Queenslanders are actually Seniors Card holders? Of that number, how many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are Seniors Card holders?

Mr PITT: Queensland is the only state in Australia which has a two-card scheme—the Seniors Card, which, like other seniors cards in other states and territories, provides government concessions and business discounts, and the Seniors Business Discount Card, which provides business discounts only. This approach ensures government concessions are targeted towards self-funded retirees according to Commonwealth social security standards. It also makes business discounts available to all Queensland residents from age 60. These cards are a practical way of saying thank you to Queensland's seniors. These are people who have contributed so much to our community.

We are always striving to improve participation in the Seniors Card scheme by Indigenous seniors by advertising the benefits of the Seniors Card scheme on Indigenous radio and by recruiting business discounts that would be available to Indigenous seniors. The department has also endeavoured to make the process of applying for a card as accessible as possible for seniors with a variety of cultural and social needs. The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Seniors Card holders was estimated to be 1,650 in the 2005-06 budgetary period. The actual was 1,700, and we have a target of 1,880 for the next year. I am pleased to report that nearly four out of five resident Queenslanders who are 60 years of age or older hold either a Seniors Card or a Seniors Business Discount Card.

The number of cardholders continues to climb, particularly as the baby boomer generation turns 60 between 2006 and 2020, and we expect to have one million cardholders by then. The Seniors Card and business discount card are issued by the Department of Communities upon application through Smart Service Queensland. Seniors Card holders are entitled to state government concessions and business discounts, and Seniors Business Discount Card holders are entitled to business discounts only. A holder of a Seniors Business Discount Card is upgraded to a Seniors Card on their 65th birthday provided they are not working full-time in paid employment. As at 30 June 2006, 471,408 Queensland residents have been issued with a Seniors Card and 53,244 residents have received a Seniors Business Discount Card.

Mr McARDLE: Minister, I take you to MPS page 1-31 under the subheading of 'Timeliness' concerning community service orders. Can you advise the committee of the number of people and the number of orders not completed and, in addition, give a breakdown as to the reasons those orders were not completed, given that they are an integral part of assisting juveniles and other people as well to move through the legal system and not reoffend?

Mr PITT: Queensland has a contemporary juvenile justice system that provides programs and services that address the full range of juvenile justice interventions. These include prevention and development programs and support services of at-risk youth, diversionary programs such as cautioning and youth justice conferencing, bail support and conditional bail programs, and a range of community based supervised youth justice orders. The Juvenile Justice Act 1992 provides a wide range of sentencing options to the courts so that young people found guilty of offences can be dealt with effectively, from reprimands and fines for minor offences through to supervised community based orders and detention orders for more serious offences.

In 2005-06 the rate of young people subject to supervised orders was 4.5 per 1,000 of population. This compares to the 2003-04 national average of 4.6 per 1,000. The 2005-06 rate of Indigenous young people subjected to supervised orders was 34.5 per 1,000 compared to the 2003-04 national average of 34.2 per 1,000. Youth justice services operated by the Department of Communities ensure that young people comply with the requirements of supervised community based orders. A mandatory requirement of community based orders is that the young person report to their departmental officer as required in addition to complying with the requirements of the order, receiving visits as arranged and refraining from further offending.

The department provides the following support for each of the supervised orders available under the Juvenile Justice Act. A departmental officer together with the offender's family examine the young person's offending behaviour in order to identify the factors that contributed to their offending and the risk factors for recidivism. The young person may then be required to participate in interventions designed to address those identified factors and, in doing so, reduce the likelihood of reoffending.

For community service orders, a departmental officer matches the young person with a community agency that will arrange work activities for the young person to perform. This matching takes into account the nature and seriousness of the offence, the young person's skills, interests and aspirations, agency availability, and cultural background. For intensive supervision orders, a departmental officer together with the offender's family examine the young person's offending behaviour in order to identify the factors that contributed to their offending and the risk factors for recidivism. This involves convening an intensive supervision order conference involving significant people in the young person's life. The young person is then required to participate in activities agreed to at the conference which are designed to address those identified factors and, in so doing, reduce the likelihood of reoffending. We also have conditional release orders and detention orders.

Mr McARDLE: Minister, thank you for that, and I agree with the comments that you have made. However, can you tell me the number of orders that were not complied with in the last financial year,

given that you were able to stipulate that 95 per cent were? So can you tell the committee the number of community based orders that were not complied with?

Mr PITT: I am sure I will be able to in due course. We are making a phone call to get that information for you, and I will provide it during the course of the hearing.

Mr McARDLE: Thank you very much, Minister. In addition, can you also provide details as to why those orders were not complied with?

Mr PITT: We will provide that information as well.

Mr McARDLE: Can that be during the session?

Mr PITT: During this session.

Mr McARDLE: Thank you. I again take you to page 1-31 of the MPS, again under the heading 'Quality', and the percentage of youth justice conferences which resulted in satisfied conclusions. Can you explain to the committee how the percentage referred to in the column is derived? The reason I ask is that on many occasions you have violent offenders and other offenders facing their accusers. There is in many cases a strong degree of imbalance in those arrangements. Can you explain in some detail how the percentage is derived? What is the method whereby you divine that it has been successful?

Mr PITT: With youth justice conferencing we do satisfaction surveys with both the victims and the young person.

Mr McARDLE: Maybe I could help you. Could you table a copy of the survey form, if that would be possible?

Mr PITT: We can table an outline of the method of how we do those satisfaction surveys sometime during the course of today's events.

Mr McARDLE: Thank you.

Mr PITT: This is just youth justice conferencing?

Mr McARDLE: That is right.

Mr PITT: We will table that. Whilst I am answering that question, can I say that I have great faith in the youth justice conferencing system. It is proving to be a very valuable tool for society in reducing the reoffending nature of some young people and also in giving the victims of crime a degree of satisfaction—the fact that a young person has first of all admitted fault, has shown some remorse and in many cases is prepared to enter into some set of arrangements that will bring closure. It might not be in monetary form but some degree of compensation for what has occurred to the victim of the crime. The satisfaction rate, as we indicated in the MPS, is about 98 per cent. That is both for the perpetrator and for the victim.

Police and the courts are very keen to use this process. As such, the government has realised that, it being a valuable tool, it needs to be further resourced. During this last budget, as you would have noticed in the budget documents, we intend to invest more heavily in this process itself.

Mr McARDLE: One of the major concerns facing our society is violent crime committed by juveniles and repeat offenders. In 2001 there was a commitment that juvenile violent offenders would, in fact, be named by the courts. It remains, however, a discretion of the court. Is it the government's intention to move to amend the legislation to require naming in certain circumstances or perhaps to provide clear guidelines as to when those names should, in fact, be made public?

Mr PITT: Let us look at what happens already. Section 234 of the Juvenile Justice Act 1992 provides a mechanism by which the courts can order that identifying information about a young person be published. This legislative provision, with its system of checks and balances, commenced on 16 December 2002. It provides the courts with the option of naming young serious offenders and was supported by the opposition when it was introduced to and passed by the House in 2002. In fact, the current Leader of the Opposition, Mr Springborg, commended this government for including section 234 and for providing courts with the capacity to name serious juvenile offenders. As I said, it is the court, not the government, that has the naming power under section 234 of the act. As the opposition acknowledged in supporting these provisions in 2002, that is how it should be.

The act provides for a young person who commits an offence to be publicly identified if the young person has been found guilty of an offence for which an adult could receive life imprisonment, the young person has been sentenced to a lengthy period of detention to a maximum of life, the offence involved violence against a person and that the court considers the offence to be particularly heinous, the court considers that it is in the interests of justice that the child be identified, and the time limit for appeal has expired or any appeal finalised.

Section 292 of the Juvenile Justice Act 1992 allows the director-general of the Department of Communities to release information about a child offender if that information is to ensure another person's safety. The Juvenile Justice Act 1992 affords young people with a number of special protections, including nonpublication of identifying information regarding a youth offender. The juvenile

justice principles underpinning the Juvenile Justice Act 1992 recognise and reflect the developmental immaturity and vulnerability of young people in the justice system. Included in these principles is the importance of reintegrating a youth back into their community. The stigma of naming a young person publicly may potentially hamper this process. Fortunately, offences of the type that could lead to the naming of young offenders are not commonly committed by young people. During 2005-06, you would be aware that no young offender was named.

I just reiterate that as politicians we ought to be very careful about what we do with respect to some of these things. It might seem like a good idea at the time, or it might seem cute or in response to community outrage for us to make a judgement if we were in the position to have the authority to do so. May I suggest to the honourable member that the judicial system is in a far better position than we are to consider all the facts and all the ramifications of such an activity. I suggest to the member that the naming of young offenders should remain with the judicial system and that he should allow those people who have been charged with that responsibility to discharge those duties in an appropriate fashion.

CHAIR: I now call the member for Clayfield.

Ms LIDDY CLARK: I was really heartened by your opening remarks earlier this morning with regard to homelessness. I refer you to page 1-5 of the MPS. Can you advise of the initiatives contained in this year's budget which show how the state government is continuing to meet its commitment to helping people who are homeless?

Mr PITT: Thank you very much. As you indicated, this morning I announced that homeless people throughout the state will receive increased support thanks to the Queensland government funding of \$17.68 million over the next three years. I also announced this morning the successful providers who will deliver homelessness services in Cairns, Townsville, Mount Isa, Brisbane and the Gold Coast. By providing initial funding to a range of non-government organisations, we are able to establish a comprehensive range of services to help deal with homelessness and public intoxication.

More than \$5.8 million each year for three years has been approved statewide for these services to reduce homelessness. I am confident that this significant investment will enhance responses to the accommodation, health and safety needs of some of the state's most vulnerable people. The funding is provided under the Queensland government's Responding to Homelessness strategy. It is a four-year commitment totalling \$235.52 million. The Department of Communities' contribution to that strategy is \$56.45 million over four years. The funding will deliver new and improved services to help homeless people, including supported accommodation services for families; traditional accommodation for young people; information, referral and support service hubs for homeless people; homelessness early intervention services; and public intoxication outreach and response services in Brisbane.

My cabinet colleague the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing, the Hon. Robert Swarten, has allocated \$6.7 million through the Department of Housing to support a number of these projects by providing properties for the accommodation services and \$500,000 brokerage funding for the service hubs. This major investment by the two departments demonstrates the Queensland government's commitment to reduce and prevent homelessness in Queensland.

The new and improved Brisbane services include \$602,242 per annum for Micah Projects to provide homelessness early intervention services in partnership with five other community organisations. This service will assist people at risk of becoming homeless to maintain independent accommodation by providing targeted short-term support and case management. There is an allocation of \$280,835 per annum for Micah Projects to provide supported crisis accommodation for homeless families in partnership with the Brisbane Boarders Association and \$214,786 per annum for Micah Projects for a public intoxication outreach and response service to provide outreach support to people in public places who are at risk of harm due to intoxication.

Services on the Gold Coast include \$599,866 per annum for the Uniting Church Blair Athol accommodation support program to provide a service hub for homeless people. This service will provide information, referral, support and advocacy services to homeless people. There is an allocation of \$449,530 per annum for the Wesley Mission to provide homelessness early intervention services. This service will assist people at risk of become homeless to maintain independent accommodation by providing targeted short-term support and case management. There are services in Cairns, Mount Isa, Townsville and Thuringowa. If the member wishes, I can provide that information to her after the session has closed.

Mr HOOLIHAN: In relation to the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, which is mentioned on page 1-10 of the MPS, I note that there is a difference between the state funding for SAAP and the federal funding. Could the minister elaborate on why the federal component is lower than that of the state?

Mr PITT: I thank the member very much for the question. You might be aware that the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, SAAP, is the Queensland government's primary response to homelessness. It is a vital part of its commitment to safe and supportive communities. In 2005-06, \$52.2 million was allocated by the Department of Communities to non-government organisations to

deliver 196 supported accommodation and related support services for homeless people or people at risk of homelessness.

SAAP is a cost-shared program between the Queensland and Commonwealth governments. In January 2006, I signed the SAAP 5 agreement with the Commonwealth to provide a framework for SAAP funding from 2005 to 2010. Overall, there is an increase in SAAP funding for Queensland but only because the Queensland government's significant new investment in services to address homelessness has been included in that. The Commonwealth government has provided no additional funding for SAAP during the agreement and is contributing to a worsening of the financial viability issues for funded services by providing indexation at a rate significantly lower than cost increases.

For the first time in the history of SAAP, the Queensland government will put in more money than the Commonwealth government. Queensland will provide 53 per cent of funds over the five years of the agreement. Over the five years of the agreement, the Queensland government will provide an investment of \$165.8 million while the Commonwealth government will provide \$153.8 million. The Commonwealth has withdrawn \$9.3 million from base funding, diverting that money to the creation of an Innovation Investment Fund.

Throughout the negotiations for the new agreement, the Queensland government continued to raise the issue of the financial viability of funded services and the need to provide adequate funding levels. The Commonwealth's redirection of \$9.3 million over five years away from SAAP's funding base ignores the finding of the independently conducted national evaluation of SAAP 4. That review recommended a significant injection of funding into the program to address unmet need for services and cost increases faced by funded agencies.

In contrast to the Commonwealth government, the Queensland government has responded by allocating an additional \$57 million to SAAP over the five years of the agreement through the Responding to Homelessness budget initiatives. The Responding to Homelessness budget initiatives include accommodation for rough sleepers, young people and homeless families in Brisbane, the Gold Coast, Townsville, Cairns and Mount Isa; integrated service hubs in Brisbane, the Gold Coast, Townsville and Cairns; and homeless early intervention services in all 10 departmental regions. As well, Homeless Persons Information Queensland, which was launched in June last year, is part of that. This service will provide telephone information, advice and referral services to Queenslanders who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

In addition, \$2 million was allocated for Responses to Homelessness on the Sunshine Coast. Some of these services were established in the 2005-06 budget. Applications from non-government agencies to implement the new services have been called for. An announcement of service providers will be made shortly.

Mr WELLS: My question to the minister is in relation to the early years service centres, which are referred to on page 1-5 of the MPS. How will these centres assist families and children? Can you tell us where they will be located?

Mr PITT: The establishment of the early years service centres is an initiative of the government and it is something that I fully support and endorse. It will improve services and support for children aged up to eight years and their families in a range of ways. In 2006-07, the government allocated \$5 million for prevention and early intervention services for families. Of this, \$3 million will be used to establish two early years service centres, building upon existing strong services such as neighbourhood centres and child-care and family support hubs. A further \$2 million will be used to boost prevention and early intervention services for families with children aged zero to eight years.

From 2007-08, funding doubles to \$10 million per annum. Of this, \$8 million will be used for four early years service centres, enabling two purpose-built centres in areas where there are currently no similar services, in addition to continued funding for the two centres built on to existing services; and \$2 million will continue to be used to boost prevention and early intervention services for families with children aged zero to eight years. This equates to an investment of \$35 million over four years to improve services for children and families.

The centres will offer a combination of universal services—that is, services meant for all children and families—and targeted services for children and families who are identified as being more vulnerable. Examples of services and resources children and families can expect to find at an early years service centre include playgroups, toy libraries, parenting resources, family support services, health support such as health screening and assessment, in-house clinics and referral, support for school readiness and the transition to school, and parenting and child development services and programs.

Specialist early childhood multidisciplinary teams will assist up to 200 families per annum, including providing outreach services such as home visiting services and access strategies for vulnerable families. The teams will also visit a range of early childhood facilities in the centres' catchments, such as child-care centres, family day care, child-care and family support hubs and neighbourhood centres. This role will include providing training, information, mentoring and support to

staff in these settings; performing health screening and assessments; assisting staff in working with children with complex needs or behavioural issues in how to identify families that may need more targeted support and with making appropriate referrals to specialist services; and providing opportunities for parent interaction-education—for example, offering parenting or child development programs, advice or resources.

Through the site visits and the collaboration of staff and families at early childhood centres, it is anticipated that problems for children and families can be identified and responded to earlier. This will prevent longer term negative consequences for children and their families and reduce the need for more intensive and sustained intervention at a later stage. Research suggests that investment in the early years of a child's life to promote and support caring family relationships and healthy child development yields significant social and cost benefits.

CHAIR: Minister, page 1-3 of the MPS refers to prevention and early intervention. Can you advise the committee on the reasoning behind the government's investment?

Mr PITT: I thank the chairman for his question. I am pleased to have the opportunity to highlight the initiatives undertaken by the Department of Communities in the area of prevention and early intervention. My department currently funds a number of prevention and early intervention initiatives for families ranging from universal childhood and family support services through to targeted and intensive services for vulnerable children and families and families at risk of homelessness.

Families form the social fabric of our community. They nurture our younger citizens into adulthood to become our future leaders, workers, parents and community members. We also know that today families face different pressures to those faced by families so many of us grew up in. The early years are a critical time in human development and have a lasting influence. Investment in the early years of a child's life yields significant social and financial benefits for government and for the community generally. However, family and child support requires strong communities and cannot rely solely on the capacity of individuals.

Interventions to support parents and families are more likely to succeed if they are integrated across a range of services. That is why the government has provided a further investment in this area by building on its current investment of \$68 million. The new early years strategy of \$5 million builds on these initiatives, as does the 2005-06 investment in the Referral for Active Intervention initiatives of \$7.6 million allocated for intensive child and family support services in 10 locations. This initiative will be strengthened in 2006-07 with an allocation of \$0.9 million to boost other local services providing support to vulnerable families in those 10 locations.

In 2005-06, provision of \$1.5 million was made to strengthen and develop specialist child and family counselling services to address and identify the gap in the availability of specialist child and family counselling services, particularly in rural, remote and Indigenous communities. This funding established intensive family support services in Mareeba, Innisfail, Townsville, Mount Isa, Cannonvale, Caboolture, Broadbeach and Cairns. Other prevention and early intervention initiatives are the future directions initiatives, and funding was initially provided to community based organisations for 21 projects to trial new service models. After evaluation in 2003, 18 services were assessed as examples of best practice and appropriate for further development and piloting. Of those 18 prevention and early intervention pilot services, 12 are now managed by the Department of Communities, with funding of \$4.6 million allocated in 2006-07. The remaining six are managed by the Department of Child Safety.

The Safe Haven initiative is a jointly funded prevention and early intervention initiative by the Commonwealth and Queensland governments which aims to reduce the impact of domestic and family violence on children and young people in the Indigenous communities of Cherbourg, Coen, Palm Island and Mornington Island. The Queensland government has committed \$10.2 million to the project over three years to add to the \$7.5 million committed by the Commonwealth.

Ms LIDDY CLARK: Through you, Mr Chairman, to the minister, can you inform the committee of the 10 locations that were allocated the \$7.6 million for intensive child and family support services referred to on page 1-3 of the MPS?

Mr PITT: Yes, I can. Last month I was pleased to announce 10 new locations across the state which provide intensive support for vulnerable children and their families through funding of \$7.6 million for the Referral for Active Intervention program. The new Referral for Active Intervention program is directed at protecting children and preserving families. These services will help the most vulnerable families in our community with children up to eight years by providing assistance with everyday tasks such as behaviour management, budgeting skills or planning meals. These skills will help to keep families safe and reduce the pressure on parents.

The Abused Child Trust has been allocated funding of \$1,057,516 to service the Cairns area and \$479,315 for the southern Gold Coast. In Townsville, Relationships Australia has been allocated \$653,184, and \$889,988 has been allocated to the Australian Red Cross to establish a service in Rockhampton. Lifeline Community Care Queensland has been allocated \$480,000 for a service for the South Burnett, \$480,000 for a service in Toowoomba and \$889,997 to service the Loganlea, Beenleigh

and Eagleby areas. Mission Australia will be providing a service to the Caboolture, Deception Bay and Redcliffe areas through an allocation of \$890,000 as well as \$890,000 to service Ipswich and \$890,000 to service the Inala-Goodna suburbs.

In addition to this recurrent funding commitment of \$7.6 million, I also announced funding of \$245,408 for one-off establishment costs to a number of these organisations. These funds will be used to provide intensive family support services to families at risk of entering the child protection system. Providing funding to these 10 non-government organisations in these 10 areas of high need will mean that children and families will have a comprehensive range of support services available to them.

This program has been developed jointly with the Department of Child Safety in response to recommendations made by the Crime and Misconduct Commission—in particular, recommendation 5.14, which states that a department other than the Department of Child Safety should deliver prevention and early intervention services to vulnerable communities and families.

The reason these referrals will be focused on families with children aged zero to eight is that it is at this age when preventative strategies are likely to have the greatest impact on improving outcomes for children and their families. Those skills will help to keep families safe and reduce the pressure on parents. While the department already delivers a program to assist families with life skills, the 10 new services will provide case managers for each family. The case managers will take a very active role in helping individual families, starting with an assessment of their individual needs and referral to a range of appropriate specialist services. This is about assisting families most at need while also reducing the number of children coming into the care of the Department of Child Safety.

Mr HOOLIHAN: Minister, page 1-3 of the MPS also mentions the Blueprint for the Bush and you referred to the blueprint in your opening. Could you outline for the committee what the blueprint means for rural Queensland?

Mr PITT: I am very pleased to do that. This is a project that is very close to my heart. On 1 June the Premier and I launched the Blueprint for the Bush and the Rural Economic Development and Infrastructure Plan at Croxdale station outside Charleville. Croxdale will be made available by the Queensland government as a site for an iconic blueprint initiative to establish the Outback College of Rural Education to provide rural and life skills for urban schoolchildren.

The blueprint is the most comprehensive and far-reaching plan for the bush ever produced in Australia. It has been developed in collaboration with one of the state's peak agricultural bodies AgForce Queensland and the Local Government Association of Queensland. I would like to place on the public record my appreciation of the work done by both Peter Kenny from AgForce and Paul Bell from LGAQ.

Public consultation took place between April and November 2005. More than 700 people attended either the ministerial regional community forums in Barcaldine, Mitchell and Mount Isa or 22 regional meetings held as part of the extensive tour of the state. More than 2,500 individuals or organisations provided responses from 249 meetings held across more than 109 rural centres. The blueprint will provide the building blocks for continued prosperity for current and future generations of Queenslanders.

Examples of real initiatives to achieve this are: The committing of \$350 million to replace more than 100 older timber bridges on regional roads over the next five years; maintaining rural leasehold land rents at present levels for the next 12 months, over 12,000 properties; broadening the eligibility criteria for the \$130 million vegetation management structural adjustment scheme to include land-holders and catchments where there is less than 30 per cent remnant vegetation cover; investing in an extra \$1.2 million over two years to employ farm counsellors to help land-holders prepare and lodge applications; and establishing the Queensland Health Rural Scholarship Scheme.

As a whole-of-government program, a number of other commitments have been supported by my ministerial colleagues. The 2006-07 budget provided an additional \$153.4 million over the next three to four years for blueprint initiatives, including \$30 million for the Strengthening Rural Communities Strategy, which is administered by the Department of Communities. Five million dollars will be allocated over three years for the upgrade of rural airports to provide safe all-weather airstrips vital to rural and remote communities. This is particularly important to support emergency air services identified by the Royal Flying Doctor Service and Aerial Ambulance. And \$4.5 million over three years will be spent to extend the regional planning program to north, central and south western Queensland.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, I refer to page 1-11, dot point 3 of the MPS where you refer to the Referral for Active Intervention program, the RAI, and note that 10 new services are being established. In your press release of 21 June 2006, you stated—

These services will help the most vulnerable families in our community, with children aged up to eight years, by providing assistance with everyday tasks such as behaviour management, budgeting skills, or planning meals.

The placement of the centres was developed out of a joint departmental working group between the Department of Child Safety and the Department of Communities.

As commendable as these RAIs are—and we know what the services are, so we do not need you to explain those—why has no service been provided for Logan City given that the Logan area has a high demand for intervention services and has some of the highest reporting figures in relation to families and Indigenous families coming into contact with the Department of Child Safety. It is clear on the outcomes of this working group that the consideration of these needs was not a high priority. What was a priority for this type of service and why not include Woodridge and Browns Plains, which are high needs areas?

Mr PITT: I thank the member for that question. That is a good question.

Mr HOBBS: It was a bit long. I am sorry.

Mr PITT: That is okay. My answer will not be quite as long though. The process I have used since becoming minister regarding the allocation of funds has been based on a needs assessment survey I did right across the state. As the member would know having been a previous minister, we get pushed from pillar to post by the media and by people who scream the loudest for services and it is easy to give in to those and it is easy to allocated funding to places of need where the need is perhaps not as great as other places. What I endeavoured to do early in my ministry was to undertake a significant body of work whereby right across my portfolio—whether Disability Services or Communities—to analyse the data available right across Queensland. That data was drawn from a whole range of sources—ABS figures; Census figures, which, as you know, are probably pretty unreliable because by the time you get them they are just about out of date; local government figures; figures from various government departments; and anecdotal evidence, which included press reports and concerns raised by citizens. As a result of that, we needs mapped the whole of Queensland.

When it came to the RAI services, there was a need for me to garner other information which would be held by the Department of Child Safety. So by meshing the needs based analysis outcomes that my department had arrived at, along with the imperatives that had been indicated to us by the Department of Child Safety, we were able to spend those resources in the areas that were identified as going to have the most impact. I know and you know that there is not one service government provides where there is not a place in this great state of ours for which there is a demand for that service. But I can assure you that the people of the area that you mentioned were not overlooked. This tranche of support that we are providing has gone to the areas of greatest need by combining those two needs based assessments. I feel as a minister very comfortable about that because that adds a little bit of science to the human services which had been missing for a long time.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, will you be able to keep a good eye on that particular area, because it appears to me from the information we have got that it is an area of very high need? Will you give this committee an assurance that you will monitor that area and, if the need does arise, you may be able to provide a service to that area?

CHAIR: Member for Warrego, do I take that as a second question?

Mr HOBBS: Yes.

Mr PITT: I am happy to answer that question. Yes, I will be monitoring areas of need right across the state. I must tell you that the process we have embarked upon is not a static process. It is not one of these processes that will be visited every two years or three years. We are constantly updating the information that is governing decision making on my part. What I am trying to do is make sure that I perform my duties in the most responsive and responsible manner possible.

When you talk of the Logan area, RAI is not the only means by which we can strengthen families and intervene early. There are a number of other programs that are already in place there. Investment in other services—for example, the intensive family support and the forthcoming early years strategy—will have an impact on that area and other areas across the state. So you do have my guarantee that I will not take my eye off the ball. You can rest assured that services are being provided now. As areas come to the fore or their need is assessed as being high and new funds become available, we will be entering into those fields as well.

Mr HOBBS: Thank you. Minister, I refer to dot point 2 on page 1-34 of the MPS in relation to Smart Service Queensland under the heading 'Recent Achievements'. It states that the Department of Communities launched the 13HEALTH hotline in partnership with Queensland Health. As commendable as this health hotline number is—and we know what it does, Minister—I would have thought it should be the sole responsibility of Queensland Health and the funding from the Department of Communities could be reallocated into a more suitable program to assist families, children, youth and seniors. Minister, will you provide a separate funding breakdown of the department's contribution to this hotline? Is it ongoing? According to the Minister for Health, Mr Robertson, in his ministerial statement on 9 March, 13HEALTH initiatives were costing Queensland Health \$25 million. I would have thought that amount of money could have bought the whole call centre.

Mr PITT: Smart Service Queensland is a whole-of-government initiative and we operate on a fee-for-service basis from other government departments. When it comes to 13HEALTH, Smart Service Queensland provides the portal, the entry, the access point for people who are ringing that number and

then officers from Queensland Health provide the advice. As you would be aware, we would never be able to train up people to receive calls on some of the complex medical issues that officers from Queensland Health are required to answer.

Queensland Health provide corporate and clinical governance and they provide a nursing workforce and health contact centre management within Smart Service Queensland. They also provide a specialised decision support system to provide appropriate health advice to callers. That is the way it operates. The future services for consideration under the partnership arrangement include the statewide oral health call centre; a child health line; an alcohol, drug and information service; and a cardiac rehab phone program.

Mr HOBBS: It is a big cost to your department, Minister.

Mr PITT: In relation to the cost to my department, in 2005-06 \$3 million was expended by Smart Service Queensland on service integration activities—that is, services that have been transitioned for service delivery through SSQ in the past year. There are a whole range of other ones, including Fair Trading.

Mr HOBBS: What year was that?

Mr PITT: In 2005-06, \$3 million was expended by Smart Service Queensland on service integration activities. That is bringing the services to the table. Services that have been transitioned for service delivery through Smart Service Queensland in the past year include occupational licensing and business inquiries; consumer inquiries; a number of other services on behalf of the Department of Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development; disability information services on behalf of my other department, Disability Services Queensland; inquiries in regard to educational financial assistance, school enrolments, school information and school holidays on behalf of the Department of Education and the Arts; the baby capsule hire service; community ambulance cover inquiries; community education first aid; and a number of other services. So you can see that the department has a cost in bringing these other organisations in, but we do it on a fee-for-service basis when it comes to providing the information through the service itself.

Mr HOBBS: Thank you. Minister, I refer to the third dot point on page 1-34 and Smart Service Queensland and the 13HEALTH call centre. I have three parts to this question. Firstly, in relation to the training of temporary staff, why were there two recruitment agencies supplying staff to SSQ for six months and both agencies paid their staff different rates to do exactly the same job? Secondly, why did the department hire Clifton training rooms at the alleged cost of \$100,000 for two weeks of staff training and then proceed to sack the staff after they were trained? Thirdly, according to the health minister, the 13HEALTH call centre was to employ 40 nurses. There was no mention of temporary staff giving medical advice with just two weeks training. Surely, this represents a public health risk if the wrong advice is given and it is also a waste of taxpayers' money spent on training. So the questions I have for you are about the two recruitment agencies, the hire of the Clifton training rooms and the temporary staff giving medical advice.

Mr PITT: I will be handing this question to the assistant director-general, Jane King, who is responsible for Smart Service Queensland. Before I do, I would like to place on the public record the fact that SSQ was recognised in national awards just recently as the best, the most outstanding, the gold medal-winning call centre for all levels of government across Australia. So we are talking about an organisation that is really delivering for Queensland and putting us in the forefront of this new form of communication with the general public. I would now ask the assistant director-general to respond to your question because she has all of those details.

Ms King: I might have to get the specific details on the actual issue in regard to sacking of staff et cetera. We certainly have not put any staff off as such. We do have two recruitment agencies who are on a panel who provide the assessment and selection processes for our staff. We have two agencies because they are divided between our customer service advisers. So one agency looks after that process and a separate agency looks after team leaders and specialists who are required within the contact centre industry. So that is why there are two separate agencies.

In regard to Clifton, we hired training rooms simply because of the incredible expansion that we have been undergoing. We did not have sufficient training facilities within our own environment. We certainly did look beyond that within government premises but we were not able to get suitable premises for training, remembering that computer based training is part of our requirement. So we were required to go to Cliftons because of the timing and the volume of training required and because it needed to be supplied in a premises that had the computer capability sitting there as well. Certainly, though, we have not put anyone through two weeks training and then put them off. So I am not sure if that is a Smart Service Queensland issue or perhaps a Health issue. I am not clear on that one.

Mr HOBBS: I refer to dot point 4 on page 1-10 of the MPS under the various headings of 'Output Performance', 'Output: Community Policy and Services' and 'Review of Output Performance', in which you state that the Department of Communities will be—

- Providing \$1.4 million for Indigenous healing services which incorporate contemporary and traditional healing models for people in Indigenous communities affected by violence and crime. An additional healing service was established on Thursday Island, with a service in the North West Cape region scheduled to be established by July 2006.

As commendable as these programs are, why was the Department of Communities required to fund \$1.4 million for a traditional healing service centre when surely this money should have been funded by Queensland Health? How many other programs have been transferred from Queensland Health to Communities and Disabilities?

Mr PITT: I think you have a misconception of what a healing centre is all about. It is not a first-aid post. It is not a hospital. It is not a health centre. Healing centres cover a lot more than just direct health issues; they cover family violence, domestic arrangements—anything to do with supporting culturally appropriate strong families.

I am pleased to advise that the government continues its commitment to addressing domestic and family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through its triennial funding of \$1.5 million per annum. This is allocated to six Indigenous healing services. Healing services provide contemporary and traditional healing to people in Indigenous communities affected by violence and crime. The healing services are designed to provide direct services, activities and coordination of responses to meet the multiple needs of people affected by violence and crime, including children. The services also promote spiritual and emotional recovery from the effects of violence and cultural dispossession affecting Indigenous communities.

Healing services have now been successfully established at Thursday Island, Pormpuraaw, Injinoo, Rockhampton and Cunnamulla—all of which provide regional outreach. A sixth healing service will be established by August 2006 to provide services to communities in the north-west of Cape York. In 2006-07, the department will review the model used by the healing services to assess their effectiveness in reducing the impact of family violence in these communities. So it is not something that we will just let roll on. We have to from time to time do a stocktake.

Although the healing services provide one avenue of response to domestic and family violence in Indigenous communities, the department is also looking at prevention activities which particularly target young people and men. The Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Month campaign this year incorporated a focus on Indigenous men, with the key message that every man must take a stand against domestic and family violence. A radio advertising campaign was developed and aired on Indigenous radio stations throughout the state during the month of May. The advertisement urged men to open their eyes and take a stand against domestic and family violence. Advertisements were also placed in restrooms and public bars and clubs across the state to support the campaign. The advertisements consisted of A4 posters and perpetrator help cards. Coasters were also distributed at these venues. A total of 148 Indigenous advertisements were installed.

I guess what I am trying to point out to the member is that these healing services are not just a health related issue. They attack one of the core issues that my department is charged with the responsibility for addressing—that is, domestic and family violence, and in particular violence against children.

Whilst I have a couple of moments, I would like to give a follow-up answer—if it is okay with you, Mr Chair—to a question from the member for Caloundra when he asked about the actual number of community service orders that were not completed within the time frames as established by the court and why they were not completed. I have that information for you. It is estimated that the number of community service orders not completed within the established time frames for 2005-06 totalled 57. This represents 6.1 per cent of the total community service orders due for completion in that time. Failure to complete community service orders can be attributed to difficulties in providing community service due to the remoteness of some young people. So that would account for a percentage of that percentage. To increase the provision of community service, the government is increasing—

CHAIR: Minister, your time is up. Would you like more time?

Mr PITT: I was just trying to give a piece of information to the member for Caloundra.

Mr HOBBS: Perhaps you could table the answer.

CHAIR: Would you like to table the answer?

Mr PITT: I only have one more sentence to go, if you do not mind.

CHAIR: Okay.

Mr PITT: To increase the provision of community service, the government is increasing its Department of Communities expenditure for youth justice service centres from \$26,374,505 in the 2005-06 financial year to \$29,892,612 in the 2006-07 financial year. So I think we have addressed the failure rate and perhaps the reasons why, but there is a commitment from the government to invest more heavily in that to ensure there is greater compliance.

Mr HOBBS: I refer to Community Care Inc, formerly Logan West Community Care. Minister, what funding programs has your department removed from CCI? Why did your department remove these

funds? Has your department conducted an investigation into the use of taxpayers' funds at CCI, and will you provide the committee with any report in relation to that? What action will you take to ensure that these taxpayers' funds are meeting the needs of the community? We know what it does.

Mr PITT: I am just wondering if the member could refer to the MPS and indicate to me where I might find a reference to that.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, it is part of the Community Care Inc; it is part of your responsibility.

Mr PITT: I have to beg to differ here. There are heaps of things that are my responsibility.

Mr HOBBS: Okay, I will find one for you, although I will be lucky to find a spot. You may want to look at answering it in the meantime. So you are not prepared to answer it, Minister?

Mr PITT: It is not a case of not being prepared to answer it. I am one of these people who has spent my life playing by the rules.

Mr HOBBS: Don't you know anything about Community Care Inc.?

Mr PITT: One moment—

Mr HOBBS: \$177 million—

Mr PITT: Don't badger me. I am going to respond. You have asked a question—

Mr HOBBS: You know the issue, like I do.

Mr PITT: You asked a question; I am about to respond.

Mr HOBBS: I would like to hear your response, Minister.

Mr PITT: My response is this: I have spent my life abiding by rules and parameters as set for me—

Mr HOBBS: Don't be childish!

CHAIR: Member for Warrego!

Mr HOBBS: You know it is your issue.

Mr PITT: We know who is being childish here.

Mr HOBBS: You know it's your issue and you are being pedantic.

CHAIR: Order! Member for Warrego!

Mr PITT: I am going to continue to explain—

CHAIR: The member has asked a question, and I ask the minister to answer the question.

Mr PITT: I am going to explain, Mr Chairman, that I have spent my life obeying the rules whether in the military or as a teacher—

Mr HOBBS: Come on, Minister! So have we all.

Mr PITT: I would expect the member for Warrego to have the courtesy—

Mr HOBBS: I would expect you to answer the question. Why won't you answer the question?

CHAIR: Order!

Mr PITT: I would expect you to have the courtesy to abide by the rules set down for these estimates debates.

Mr HOBBS: You wont answer the question. What are you hiding?

Mr HOBBS: You are insinuating—

CHAIR: Order! Member for Warrego, you have asked a question. I want to hear the minister's answer.

Mr PITT: Thank you very much, Mr Chairman, for your protection. You are insinuating that I have no knowledge of this issue. What I have asked you to do is to quite clearly indicate to me where this particular—

Mr HOBBS: 1-13, dot point 3.

Mr PITT: Let's find it.

Mr HOBBS: This is where we have something like 'could assistance be included that claims that employees have not received full payments, claims of being overcharged and not having their needs met, inappropriate use of lawyers and security guards and abandoning Logan West by moving their headquarters to Mansfield'.

CHAIR: Member for Warrego, would you like to extend the time for the minister, please?

Mr HOBBS: Yes.

Mr PITT: I thank you very much for your courtesy on this occasion. The department is currently undertaking civilian prevention and early intervention work in the field of child and family support services. Since 2002, work has been progressing in the development of this new family support service delivery model in early intervention trials on pilots. The whole-of-government early years strategy examines improved approaches to prevention and early intervention—

Mr HOBBS: A point of order, Mr Chairman: we know what the issue does. If you want me to repeat the question—

CHAIR: There is no point of order. Member for Warrego, the minister is able to—

Mr HOBBS: We want to see reasons why it has broken down, not what it does. We know what it does.

Mr PITT: It is my belief, Mr Chairman, that I have three minutes to answer this question and I am in the process of doing so. Every time the member for Warrego interrupts, he is taking his own time away from this very important process.

CHAIR: Minister, I ask you to return to your question, please.

Mr HOBBS: Answer the question.

Mr PITT: The whole-of-government early years strategy examines improved approaches to prevention and early intervention. With these priorities in mind, I have made the decision to reallocate funds for trials of new family support models aligned with the department's priorities for early intervention and prevention service delivery to inform future program development as opportunity arises. Three organisations in the Logan area have been invited to apply for funds for \$178,000 for a 12-month trial of a new model of family support service delivery providing the opportunity to further develop early intervention models that respond to the needs of vulnerable children and families in the Logan area.

The new model of family support service delivery will focus on individual families and target those with children aged zero to eight years. Community Care Inc. is currently managing funds of \$177,882 for a range of community and family support services. Although I have made the decision to reallocate these funds for use in the trial of the new model, I have invited Community Care Inc. to provide a submission for the funds, and I expect to announce the successful organisation in September 2006.

CHAIR: I now call the member for Murrumba.

Mr WELLS: Regarding Cyclone Larry, which is referred to in the MPS at page 1-11, what has the department done to assist the victims of this natural disaster?

Mr PITT: The Queensland government has played a major role in the disaster recovery response to Tropical Cyclone Larry. As most of the committee would realise, the eye of the cyclone hit my electorate in the town of Innisfail. My family and I felt the surrounding effects of Cyclone Larry in my community of Gordonvale. I would like to place on record the heartfelt thanks the people of Mulgrave feel for all the support the Beattie government and staff have given to the recovery effort in Innisfail. Most of all, I want to pay tribute to the families in Innisfail who not only weathered the storm but who are now rebuilding their homes and their lives in the town.

Immediately following the cyclone, a 1800 disaster recovery hotline was established by Smart Service Queensland. To date, the 1800 line has provided information, advice and a referral service to more than 12,000 callers. My department provided support to community members to assist in the restoration of their emotional, social and immediate economic wellbeing. One-stop shops and outreach services were established to facilitate access to a range of support services or assistance measures offered by government and non-government organisations. At its peak, on day 8 of the recovery effort the Department of Communities had more than 250 staff deployed to 13 one-stop shops in delivering outreach services. This number included staff from across my portfolio including Disability Services Queensland. I would like to take the opportunity to thank those hundreds of staff who have assisted in the recovery efforts so far and who continue to support far-north Queensland communities.

To date, one-stop shops have assisted with more than 28,000 people, have made more than 2,100 referrals to counselling services and have conducted more than 5,900 outreach visits. Three one-stop shops continue to operate and are located in Babinda, Innisfail and Malanda. Outreach services also continue to operate throughout the region including providing services to isolated communities and farms in addition to an information support and referral telephone service.

In addition to the community recovery work, the Department of Communities administers the joint Commonwealth-state natural disaster relief arrangements. This includes a range of relief and assistance measures delivered through a series of three grants to alleviate personal hardship. The first of these grants is for emergency relief assistance in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, and they are also known as phase 1. This grant was provided to people who did not have the financial resources to meet their immediate needs for food, accommodation, medical supplies and clothing. Individuals receive up to \$150 and families up to \$700.

The Department of Communities processed approximately 14,000 eligible applications and distributed \$5.5 million under this grant program. The essential household contents grant, also known as phase 2, provided assistance towards the repair or replacement of essential household goods to the uninsured. Up to \$1,500 was provided to individuals and up to \$4,500 for families minus any payment under phase 1. The Department of Communities has processed more than 2,700 eligible applications and disbursed more than \$3.4 million to date.

Mr HOOLIHAN: I would ask the honourable minister if he could outline the benefits of increasing the department's ability to license and monitor child-care services, as mentioned on page 1-5 of the MPS.

Mr PITT: The Queensland government is committed to the safety and wellbeing of children using child-care services. The introduction of the Child Care Act 2002 and the Child Care Regulation 2003 in September 2003 brought with it a range of options to enforce compliance and to minimise risk to children using child-care services across the state. As minister, I take the issue of safety very seriously and I am committed to ensuring that the licensing and monitoring of compliance with the child-care legislation is carried out effectively in the interests of all children and families using these services in Queensland. The continual growth of child-care services across the state has made the issues of licensing and monitoring compliance with the legislation more important. The most pressing matter for the department is to ensure compliance with legislative requirements and consistency in licensing and monitoring of child-care services.

The government has demonstrated its commitment to strengthen the capacity of the department to license and monitor child-care services by allocating \$1.91 million in 2006-07. The resource allocated in 2006-07 will enable the department to implement a range of strategies to further enhance the capacity of the department to administer the child-care legislation. Some of these strategies include \$0.71 million to create a specialist licensing and support team to provide a statewide service including staff training and provision of complex legislative advice to enhance the capacity of the department to administer the child-care legislation and \$1.2 million for additional licensing staff to be placed in the high-growth areas of greater Brisbane, the Gold Coast, Moreton and the Sunshine Coast regions.

The government's commitment to increase resources for child-care licensing and monitoring will also strengthen the ability of the department to monitor compliance with the legislation across child-care services and to minimise risks for vulnerable children and families. I am pleased to report that I anticipate significant benefits for children and families in Queensland as a result of the latest injection of resources to increase the department's ability to license and monitor child-care services. Some of the benefits will include a stronger capacity for the department to license and monitor the increasing number of services in high growth areas and increase consistency in licensing and monitoring practices across the regions; an increase in opportunities for regional staff to access training in professional development to enhance the quality of licensing and monitoring of child-care services; increased access to complex legislative advice to assist regional staff to manage complex licensing and compliance matters promptly; an increase in the capacity of the department to identify and develop additional policies and resources to clarify legislative requirements and to enhance compliance within the sector; and an increase in the capacity of the department to support the child-care sector and to develop and maintain partnerships with the sector.

I can assure the committee that the department will not relent in its commitment to monitor compliance with the child-care legislation. Departmental staff will continue to work actively with child-care services to clarify legislative requirements and provide support to enhance the capacity of services to comply with legislative requirements.

CHAIR: Minister, I have a daughter graduating from year 12 this year, so I have a particular interest in the Gold Coast schoolies. Can you advise the committee what the department is doing to ensure that this is a safe event? Can you justify the expenditure to the taxpayers of Queensland?

Mr PITT: Yes, I can and it is a significant event. As a matter of fact, today I signed a contract with Surfers Paradise Management and the Gold Coast City Council for what will be the successful running of Gold Coast schoolies again this year. Gold Coast schoolies week is the country's largest annual youth event. Consistent with the Premier's three-point plan incorporating partnerships, safety and an increased awareness of rights and responsibilities, I am proud of the diligent effort of my department in collaboration with other agencies and community organisations which are already dedicating significant energy and resources towards strategic and operational planning.

Safety is of paramount and critical importance in regard to school leavers attending Gold Coast schoolies. I visited the Gold Coast region and the local and business community. The Gold Coast Schoolies Week Management Board, comprising representatives of the Queensland government and the Gold Coast City Council, ensures that Gold Coast schoolies week promotes safety for all involved and is well coordinated. Established committees are participating in extensive planning and consultation with agencies including the Queensland police, State Emergency Services, Queensland Ambulance Services and the department of fair trading.

Consultation has also commenced with the community organisations that provide significant resources and services to Gold Coast schoolies including Hotel Chaplaincy, Red Cross, Volunteering Gold Coast, Drug-Arm, Scripture Union and Rosies Youth Mission. The Queensland Police Service will again be coordinating the joint emergency service centre from schoolies headquarters and the Queensland Ambulance Service will be staffing the ambulance treatment centre in the schoolies precinct. Additionally, a professional security firm will be engaged to supply additional security officers over the official 10-day period.

Consistent with the Queensland government's commitment, the levels of police, Liquor Licensing officers and emergency services provided for Gold Coast schoolies week in past years will be continued, and my department will provide high levels of support to ensure the utmost attention to safety is delivered. In line with the contractual arrangements, the Gold Coast schoolies week events coordinator is required to provide an extensive overall event plan including detailed strategies regarding a risk assessment, security and crowd management and alcohol management. Also, the event coordinator under the agreement is required to consult and liaise closely with the Queensland police, Queensland ambulance, Gold Coast City Council and any other relevant government services or agencies in relation to safety issues.

A total volunteer workforce exceeding 1,400 individuals is expected for Gold Coast schoolies week 2006, with a large percentage of these very committed and experienced volunteers. My department will ensure that appropriate training and induction is undertaken to ensure that all volunteers meet legislative requirements and adhere to a code of conduct which will be closely monitored by the event coordinator. All volunteers will be required to hold a positive notice blue card for child related employment issued by the Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, and my department has participated in extensive consultation to ensure that the blue card registration process is conducted in a highly organised and efficient manner.

Mr HOOLIHAN: Minister, page 1-2 of the MPS mentions multitenant services. Where are the pilot services going to be located? And how are these beneficial to those communities?

Mr PITT: Thank you very much for that question. You will have noticed in the 2005-06 budget that I announced \$24.3 million for the strengthening of non-government organisations' initiative. I am proud to announce that, since last year's budget, the partnership between the non-government sector and the government has been going extremely well. \$24.3 million has been allocated over the next four years for projects aimed at strengthening the capacity of non-government organisations. Non-government organisations deliver a vast range of vital services and support to families and individuals and are the backbone of many Queensland communities.

Our clients are some of the most vulnerable people in our communities and this project is helping us to deliver services more effectively and efficiently. One of the mechanisms that we will be utilising to drive this project is through the establishment of multi-tenant services. Multi-tenant services will allow organisations to come together and share resources. This will result in making referrals much easier for clients as some organisations will be housed under the one roof. In January 2006 I approved the establishment of three pilot multi-tenant service centres in Mackay, Caboolture and Toowoomba. This pilot initiative is an important component of the Strength in Non-Government Organisation strategy. The government has committed just over \$2 million over four years to the multi-tenant service centre pilot. The objective of this pilot initiative is to demonstrate the benefits to communities of services co-locating to share resources and coordinate their services. The multi-tenant service centre in Mackay will house three women's services offering assistance in the areas of health, pregnancy and domestic and family violence. Clients of these services will benefit from the co-location, which will free up workers from administrative duties to concentrate on providing services.

In Caboolture, five local organisations currently providing prevention and crisis support services to struggling families and individuals and care to people with disabilities will combine in the Caboolture multi-tenant service centre. Several of these organisations are small ones and are almost totally dependent on volunteers for their operation and have struggled in recent times to meet the rising costs of providing their services. The co-location of these services will provide them with stronger governance, better support for the volunteers, cost sharing and greater integration into local service networks.

The Toowoomba multi-tenant service centre will be operated by a consortium of four community organisations providing services ranging from community service information to support for older people through to legal advocacy. Outcomes for clients of these services will be enhanced by the sharing of resources, training and volunteer management between the service partners and the capacity to cross-refer clients. In each of the three centres the outcome will be more viable and sustainable organisations providing more effective and coordinated services for the people who use them.

Mr WELLS: You have just been talking about non-government organisations, specifically tenant organisations. Also on page 1-2 of the MPS you refer to a project Strengthening Non-Government Organisations. How have we strengthened non-government organisations generally?

Mr PITT: During the last budget the Premier and I announced the Strengthening Non-Government Organisations project, a \$24.3 million four-year initiative to assist community

organisations. Funding was subsequently increased to \$26.9 million over the four years. This strategy includes various initiatives aimed at assisting and supporting non-government organisations in their vital role of delivering a range of community services to Queenslanders. The strategy is being funded for four years and I am very pleased to announce that there have been some real achievements in the short time since its endorsement.

In 2005-06, funding of \$280,000 was allocated for the Communities Vocational and Education Training Partnership Initiative, and investment of over \$1.9 million has been committed to this initiative over the four years. This initiative enables existing workers and volunteers to access recognition of existing skills, gap training to obtain qualifications and training in other critical skill areas. Since February 2006, 364 community service workers have participated in this training. Initially it was expected that 100 workers would participate in training activities in 2005-06. This initiative is assisting in providing the community services sector with a skilled workforce to meet the increasing demand for services within the community. It is expected that more than 1,000 workers will benefit by receiving training in critical skill areas during the four-year period.

In 2005-06, \$610,000 was expended on the Community Bookkeeper Initiative to enhance the financial management reporting capacity of non-government organisations. This is enabling non-government organisations to achieve consistency in reporting as well as compliance with the international accounting standards. I am pleased to say that 666 community organisations received a one-off allocation of \$555 to enable them to convert to a standard chart of accounts developed for non-profit organisations or increase their financial management and processes in a practical way. More than 800 staff and volunteers of community organisations attended free training sessions held throughout Queensland to assist them understand and implement the standard chart of accounts. The training sessions are complemented by the provision of user manuals and other helpful resources developed to assist non-government organisations convert to the standard chart of accounts if they choose to do so.

The Building Links Initiative has a budget of \$2 million over the four years of the strategy. I approved the first year of grants totalling \$700,000 in June this year. In July 2006 more than 30 consortiums of community organisations across Queensland will share in this funding to assist them to implement planned collaborative activity or develop business case proposals that will lead to increased sharing of services and greater efficiencies. This initiative will help these consortiums to be more sustainable and provide key learnings for other non-government organisations considering collaborative activity. The multi-tenant service centres pilot initiative will benefit non-government organisations in the community services sector through co-location, sharing of resources and coordinating services.

Ms LIDDY CLARK: Minister, how is your department responding to the issue of volatile substance misuse, as mentioned in the MPS on page 1-9?

Mr PITT: Volatile substance misuse, or chroming, is a distressing problem that is difficult to address because it is usually symptomatic of a range of complex and difficult circumstances. Many people who chrome are young people. Many are Indigenous young people. Many come from violent or abusive family backgrounds. Many are homeless or not engaged in education. They may be using a multitude of other substances and may be suffering from a range of health and mental health problems. VSM is also a difficult form of substance abuse to control as most substances such as paint, glue and petrol are legitimate items that are easy to access and are not illegal to use.

The aim of the government's response to VSM has always been to assure the safety and wellbeing of these young people. The Department of Communities has trialed places of safety services to provide short-term support for young people who have misused volatile substances. The places of safety also provide options for follow-up case management and referral to other services. These services operate in inner Brisbane, Logan, Townsville, Mount Isa and Cairns in conjunction with the Queensland Police Service's trial of places of safety and police powers. These powers provide police with the authority to take a VSM-affected person to a place of safety that could include a friend or relative's home, hospital as well as the designated place of safety services.

Volatile substance misuse is a problem we all find distressing and one for which we want to find genuine solutions. That is why the government committed itself to an independent evaluation of the places of safety trial by the Crime and Misconduct Commission. The CMC report recognises the extremely complex nature of volatile substance misuse and commends the state government in sponsoring an innovative approach to the problem and subjecting itself to an independent external examination of this approach. The report notes that 'in trialing and evaluating a number of different approaches, the Department of Communities has made it possible to develop a service delivery model that shows real promise'. It commends the Queensland government 'for sponsoring an innovative approach to the problem of VSM'. The report reinforces the difficult circumstances faced by young people who currently misuse volatile substances, accepting—again a quote from the CMC—'there are no easy answers to the problem of VSM'.

Following the Crime and Misconduct Commission's review of both the places of safety and police powers trial, the government is introducing a range of improved strategies to deal with volatile substance misuse. New and revised VSM services are being established in seven locations in

conjunction with places of safety police powers. These areas include the original five locations and two more have been added: Caboolture and Rockhampton. These services will provide a mix of outreach services, support for immediate recovery from intoxication, and longer term support including case management to address the underlying causes and issues associated with volatile substance misuse. The service specifications are being developed to meet the service needs of each location.

CHAIR: Of the remaining time I will allocate 12 minutes each to government and non-government members. I call the member for Warrego.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, I refer to the Blueprint for the Bush where you say that \$153.4 million is allocated, and you have also said that \$53.7 million was prior funding and that \$99.7 was new funding. I have gone through that new funding and you have mentioned areas like rural airports that have been funded for many years and \$4 million for additional funding for Queensland's 14 regional tourist associations. I was a foundation member of one of those groups 24 or 25 years ago. This is not new funding, and I could go on. When you look at the \$99 million, take off about \$62 million that is dodgy funding that you have put here you end up with \$37.3 million. When you go through those you end up with strategies, planning and infrastructure plans. While that is welcome—it is good to have that—the reality is that \$2.3 million is left over in hardcore funding that is probably going towards working for the bush. Have you ever estimated the amount of taxes and charges across all portfolios levied on agricultural enterprises and businesses outside south-east Queensland such as water taxes, stamp duty on crop insurance, concessional registration et cetera?

Mr PITT: Could you just repeat the figure you offered as the new money?

Mr HOBBS: You have said—

Mr PITT: No, the figure you offered as the new money.

Mr HOBBS: You have said \$99.9 million is new money, and it is clearly not true.

Mr PITT: I think it is important I outline for you exactly what the new money is. The blueprint is a 10-year plan for investment of \$150 million over three to four years.

Mr HOBBS: You had that question before.

Mr PITT: It highlights key new government initiatives for the bush that will start this year. These include \$42.3 million over three years for a whole-of-government Blueprint for the Bush package of service enhancement proposals led by the Department of Communities. This package is made up of—and I will indicate them to you—

Mr HOBBS: Minister, you answered this question before.

Mr PITT: —\$30 million for the Strengthening Rural Communities Strategy, which is administered by the Department of Communities.

Mr HOBBS: The government member asked that question before. You have already answered that bit of it. We know what they are. I am asking you: is there a new way to look at taxes and so forth?

CHAIR: I remind committee members that the minister is able to answer the question the way that he sees fit.

Mr PITT: There is \$30 million for the Strengthening Rural Communities Strategy which is administered by the Department of Communities. This will be used for two grant programs: \$15 million for the Strengthening Rural Communities Grants Program over three years, which will assist rural communities to build capacity, revitalise image and relationships and enhance access to rural services including \$4.2 million for 2006-07; and \$15 million for the Strengthening Rural Non-Government Organisations Grant Program to assist non-government rural organisations to share resources, provide non-government organisation workers the opportunity to access training and support and strengthen rural Indigenous non-government organisations. An amount of \$4.1 million is committed for 2006-07.

The department will also improve communication and promotion through initiatives such as a bush telegraph and Country Week and ensure the blueprint's implementation is well supported. The \$5 million over three years for the upgrade of rural airports to provide safe all-weather airstrips is vital to remote and rural communities.

Mr HOBBS: It has been in every budget, Minister.

Mr PITT: An amount of \$153.4 million is new money. It is the new initiatives plus additional dollars from existing initiatives. So there is \$153.4 million that is new money.

CHAIR: I call again the member for Warrego.

Mr HOBBS: Minister—

Mr PITT: Before I finish off—

Mr HOBBS: Thank you, Minister.

Mr PITT: I still have time on the clock.

CHAIR: Order! Minister, I thought you had finished your answer so I called the member for Warrego.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, let us examine one of these issues just to give an example: \$4 million in additional funding for Queensland's 14 regional tourist organisations. I said to you that I was a foundation member of one of those organisations 24 or 25 years ago. How on earth can that be new funding for a new initiative—Blueprint for the Bush. Hell, they have been funding them for 25 years.

Mr PITT: I do not know what planet you are on, but if someone offers someone an extra \$4 million-plus in new money—

Mr HOBBS: It has been funded for years.

Mr PITT: It is new money. There are existing programs that are out there. They will continue and there will be \$4 million-plus of new money. That is quite clear. It is quite clear that if you are offering extra money it is new money.

Mr HOBBS: It beats me. Minister, I refer to MPS page 1-11, dot point 2 and the implementation of the CMC report *Protecting children: an inquiry into abuse of children in foster care* and associated blueprint reforms. Key activities include \$12.3 million on the protection of children. Would the minister please indicate where and how the \$7.6 million for referral for active intervention was spent and how effective was the \$4.7 million that was spent on the 12 prevention pilots? What reporting structures have been implemented and what is the result of these programs? Also, if the department has spent all its money on these programs, why does it take three weeks to report a child rape in north Queensland? It appears that these 12 pilot programs have had no positive impact.

Mr PITT: As to the last part of your question, you are totally out of order. That is a matter between the agencies concerned. My department has no responsibility in respect of that. I ask you to withdraw that part of your question and repeat the first part and I will answer it.

Mr HOBBS: I am happy to repeat it. Please indicate where and how the \$7.6 million for referral for active intervention was spent and how effective the \$4.7 million spent on the 12 pilot programs was? The evidence is already there. You should know this off the top of your head. It is in your area.

Mr PITT: In June 2002 the government provided an increase of \$148 million over four years to 2005-06 under the Queensland Families: Future Directions strategy. Funding was initially provided to community based agencies for 21 projects to trial new service models. After an evaluation in 2003, 18 services were assessed as examples of best practice and appropriate for further development and piloting over three years. Of these 18 prevention and early intervention pilot services, 12 are now managed by the Department of Communities and the remaining six are managed by the Department of Child Safety.

In 2005-06 funding of \$4.7 million was allocated to the 12 prevention and early intervention pilot projects or services managed by the Department of Communities. Between January 2005 and December 2005 719 clients, 16 per cent of whom were Indigenous—that data is sourced from the Future Directions 2 database—have been referred to these services for much needed support. Without this support many young people and their families would enter or become further entrenched in the child protection and juvenile justice systems. The pilots have confirmed these things: the prevention and early intervention service models need to be diverse as one size does not fit all; effective models match the services provided with the presenting problems and intensity of needs effective models have flexible service delivery in terms of the duration of intervention, the type of services provided, the locations of services—either home based, outreach or centre based; services must be provided by professionally qualified staff; reflective practices, such as action learning teams and client outcome projects, should be at the core of service delivery if services are to improve; and sound corporate governance is required and committed work teams and coordinators are important for these services.

I think it is quite clear that without these services we are in danger of having more serious and ongoing problems. The services are having an impact. For you to present yourself to this committee today and single out one incident and try to assert that the system may not be operating effectively and not producing results is absolutely outrageous. The evidence shown so far is that these services are having an impact. I firmly believe in early intervention and prevention and would hope that the member for Warrego has a similar commitment to those processes.

Mr HOBBS: I go back to what you said a while ago in relation to the Blueprint for the Bush. I think you must be believing what you are reading too much; I am not sure. You said that there is \$153.4 million of new money. There is not. In your answer to my question on notice No. 1 it clearly says 99.7. That is exactly the figure that I quoted. I suggest that you go back and read that answer as I think that the lily has been gilded fairly well. My question relates to the staffing tables on page 1-8 of the MPS. What re-education courses, background checks or pre-employment by the Department of Communities? Are they still undergoing and will they be undergoing re-education and background checks?

Mr PITT: You have really got me confused here. You started off on the Blueprint for the Bush and now you are on to staffing issues. Is that all part of the same question? I will answer the first part

regarding the Blueprint for the Bush and then I will ask the director-general to talk about the staffing issue. As I said before, there is \$153.4 million—

Mr HOBBS: You said new money.

CHAIR: Member for Warrego, can you please let the minister answer the question.

Mr HOBBS: You said new money.

Mr PITT: I do not know how rude you can get. Can you wait a moment and give me a chance to answer the question. Of the \$153.4 million in expenditure \$99.7 million has not been previously announced. I can list all those things because they were in the answer to the question on notice to you. The \$153.4 million is money allocated to the Blueprint for the Bush initiative of which I have indicated to you that \$99.7 million had never been previously announced. The other money is new money topping up existing projects to ensure the strength of the Blueprint for the Bush. I do not know how you define these things, but if you give additional money, it is new money.

Mr HOBBS: I thought the minister was going to get someone to address the staffing levels.

Ms Apelt: For the Department of Communities the overriding consideration determining a person's suitability for employment is the safety and also the wellbeing of clients and employees. Criminal history checks are mandatory for all persons being considered for employment by the department. In 2005-06 I requested 2,107 criminal history checks from the Queensland Police Service.

Having a criminal history does not automatically disqualify someone from employment. Before a decision is made regarding employment the criminal history is assessed as per the departmental criminal history checks procedures and examined against specific criteria. The criminal histories of the majority of persons employed by the department include minor offences only—that is, offences that are not violent, of a sexual nature or perpetrated against a child. In addition, most of those employed have only one of two isolated offences which were committed in the past, often as young adults. This type of criminal history does not indicate a pattern of behaviour which compromises a person's ability to be employed and work with clients who may be vulnerable or at risk.

Mr HOOLIHAN: MPS 1-5 refers to \$3.1 million recurrent funding and \$200,000 equity to enhance youth justice based services and targeted interventions. Could you outline what these services are and how they will benefit the Queensland community?

Mr PITT: I am pleased to do that. The Queensland government is committed to ensuring that the youth justice system continues to deliver best practice programs and services to meet both the needs of young people and the broader community, including victims. Young Queenslanders face many choices and challenges which impact on their capacity to reach their full potential. While we are committed to promoting the development, leadership and participation of our young people and programs which support young people at risk, those who offend must be held accountable.

The Department of Communities works with young people to address the issues that have led to their offending behaviour and to assist them to reconnect with their families and reintegrate into their communities. My department provides youth justice services designed to divert young people from the criminal justice system. For those already in the system it provides supervisory, rehabilitative and reintegrative services to prevent recidivism and further entry into the criminal justice system.

Youth justice programs and services operate through an extensive regional network of youth justice service centres and through youth detention centres. The \$3.1 million in recurrent funding and the \$200,000 equity provided in the 2006-07 budget will enhance my department's ability to provide interventions and services to those in the youth justice system.

It will do this, firstly, by expanding the availability of youth justice conferencing—a cost-effective response which has a high satisfaction rating with participants including victims. Conferencing continues to be a positive and effective diversionary and restorative justice process for young people, their families and the victims of juvenile crime. The demand for youth justice conferencing has increased by 169 per cent since it was first introduced. Increased funding will provide an additional 204 referrals per annum to this key diversionary program.

Secondly, to increase the accessibility to youth justice conferencing for all Indigenous young people, the Department of Communities will employ one additional youth justice service centre manager and 5.5 full-time equivalent Indigenous program development officers to deliver and coordinate services. This will result in increasing services to approximately 383 predominantly Indigenous young people in six youth justice service locations across the state.

Thirdly, establishing the Northern Outlook, which uses adventure based learning as a key strategy for engaging young people at risk, helps to prevent contact with a criminal justice system and to reduce recidivism. This exciting expansion of the outlook program based in Boonah will have 160 young people participating in programs in its first year, 400 in the second year of operation and the number of participants increasing in subsequent years.

Fourthly, providing the Griffith Adolescent Forensic Assessment and Treatment Centre with enhanced funding will enable this high quality sex offenders assessment and treatment program to cater for an additional 24 young people at any one time. That will increase to 53 the number of young people at any one time who can be referred to the service by the courts.

Lastly, a new statewide youth justice quality assurance team will ensure effective assessment of young offenders to identify the services and levels of intensity required to reduce the risk of reoffending. I do have a response to the member for Caloundra in relation to a question that he asked before. Could I have your permission to detail that response? Is that okay with government members?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr PITT: I think Mr McArdle asked me to provide the methodology for the figure provided on page 1-31 of the MPS relating to the percentage of youth justice conferences where participants, including the victim, are satisfied with the outcome. The satisfaction survey methodology is as follows. All participants in youth justice conferencing are surveyed at the finalisation of a conference. The survey consists of 18 questions on a four-point scale—agree a lot, agree a little, disagree a little or disagree a lot. The percentage satisfied is based on the question: 'I was satisfied with the agreement made at the conference.' In 2004-05, 98 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the outcome.

Mr McARDLE: Can you table the document?

CHAIR: It is up to the minister whether he wishes to do that.

Mr PITT: I am quite prepared to do that. I do not have it here with me right now, but we will make that available to the committee.

Mr WELLS: I am very interested in the issue of homelessness. There have been some really regrettable cases of it in my electorate recently, partly in association with the closure of caravan parks. MPS 1-9 refers to integrated service responses to address and prevent homelessness. What kind of success have we had with that initiative?

Mr PITT: The Department of Communities recently received \$56.5 million over four years to establish a new and innovative response to homelessness under the responding to homelessness strategy. I am happy to report to the committee that these responses have been highly successful in addressing the needs of many of our most disadvantaged Queenslanders. For example, in 2005-06 the department committed \$8.8 million to develop a range of new service responses in key locations throughout Queensland. Of this, \$4.4 million was allocated for services to address homelessness and public intoxication in Cairns, Townsville, Mount Isa, inner Brisbane and the Gold Coast.

Another example of the department's ongoing commitment is the provision in 2005 of \$700,000 per annum over three years for the establishment of homelessness service hubs in Brisbane. The first of these hubs, the Homeless Persons Service Centre in South Brisbane, is based on a collocation model. Clients have benefited from a one-stop shop approach as they can be assisted on site without the need to travel to any other agencies. Many clients who frequent the Homeless Persons Service Centre are in the South Brisbane area and a large percentage of clients who receive assistance from hubs are families.

From 1 July 2005 until 31 March 2006 the Micah hub has case managed 1,205 clients, including 235 families with 371 children. It has helped to prevent eviction or secure new accommodation. Significantly, this includes the relocation of 50 homeless people from tent city in South Brisbane to better forms of accommodation.

The second hub, known as HART 4000, commenced full operation in October 2005 at the Wesley Den in Albert Street, Brisbane. The network model adopted by this hub has resulted in better coordination of assessment and referral between agencies and reduced the requirement for clients to travel between multiple agencies repeating their story each time. As was the case with the South Brisbane hub, the fortunes of the Albert Street hub's clients have similarly improved.

From 1 July 2005 to 30 June 2006, the HART 4000 hub has case managed 1,328 clients and has helped them prevent eviction or secure new accommodation. Indeed, evidence suggests that the level of rough sleeping in the inner city has reduced significantly and visibly since the establishment of the two Brisbane hubs.

In addition to these services \$4.02 million has been committed over four years to establish and operate a statewide call centre for homeless people called Homeless Persons Information Queensland, HPIQ. I was pleased to officially launch this free-call, 24-hour, seven day a week call centre on 14 June 2006 at the Homeless Persons Service Centre in South Brisbane. To date it has assisted over 200 callers with information about housing options as well as information about financial support and practical assistance.

CHAIR: I have another question on schoolies. I am duty bound to remind you that your answer to this question will determine whether children get permission from their parents to go to schoolies, including mine. What type of activities took place in 2005? What has been planned for this year?

Mr PITT: Spoken like a true parent. Schoolies week has been a growing event on the Gold Coast since the 1970s. This government has been closely involved since 2003 in increasing the safety of young people who attend. This was a result of a review of existing arrangements which was requested by the Premier after schoolies week 2002.

As part of this review, the public was asked directly how it thought the state and local governments could improve the management of the event. Suggestions included improved government coordination and a greater focus on diversionary activities. Schoolies week does not only happen on the Gold Coast, though this is by far the biggest event with 55,000 to 60,000 young people attending. Other locations throughout the state are also becoming popular sites for celebration. After schoolies week 2004, I endorsed improved support for statewide schoolies celebrations. In 2005 non-recurrent grants for projects to assist and support in the coordination of safer schoolies celebrations in regional locations throughout Queensland were made available for the first time, and similar arrangements will be in place this year.

Making schoolies week as safe as possible is a major challenge, so partnerships and effective planning are essential. Schoolies committees or task forces played a key role in the planning and implementation of activities for schoolies week in all of the sites that received funding last year. These committees consist of local representatives from the Department of Communities, local government authorities, Queensland police, Queensland Health and other key stakeholders. These committees have already started planning for schoolies this year. Activities at regional sites last year included diversionary activities, free or subsidised safe alternatives such as alcohol-free dance parties, concerts, day trips, sports, late-night movies and other activities. The aim of these diversionary activities is to occupy schoolies in safe supervised environments and avoid antisocial behaviour by discouraging the use of drugs and alcohol and alleviating boredom. Of course, the Gold Coast schoolies event has all of those things within a designated schoolies precinct.

The Department of Communities contributed funds totalling \$80,198 for the provision of safety, coordination, recreation and diversionary activities. Other agencies also contributed funds and volunteers in different locations—local government authorities, Queensland Health, the Queensland Police Service and the Queensland Ambulance Service. Volunteers come not just from government agencies but also from volunteer organisations including Hotel Chaplaincy, which alone provides over 1,000 volunteers at different locations throughout Queensland, Rosies, St Vincent de Paul, Scripture Union, Red Cross, Drug-Arm as well as individuals and parents who generously donate their time. These volunteers assist in the provision of a wide range of services including visitation, referral, mediation, first aid and security services at schoolies sites throughout Queensland. I acknowledge their efforts and those of the agencies, the communities and the businesses whose support was crucial to the success of schoolies week last year. No major incidents were reported from any of the regional locations and feedback from schoolies themselves was very positive.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The time allocated for the consideration of the estimates of expenditure in the portfolio of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors has expired. On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister and your departmental officers for your attendance. The transcript of this hearing will be available on the Hansard page of the parliament's web site within approximately two hours. The hearing is now suspended and will—

Mr PITT: Mr Chairman, would it be possible for me to make a closing remark to table two documents that may be required by members of the committee?

CHAIR: Yes. One minute.

Mr PITT: One minute will be enough. I have here a response to a question from the member for Warrego regarding the 13 help initiative, and I will table that for you. Also for the member for Warrego, I am going to again table the answer to non-government question on notice—NGQO—No. 1 which really answers all of the questions you had about our Blueprint for the Bush, which you obviously have not read. I thank you very much, Mr Chairman, and members of the committee for your patience today and the opportunity to answer questions regarding the activities of the portfolio which I am proud to serve.

Leave granted.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The hearing is now suspended and will resume at 3.30 pm.

Proceedings suspended from 3.18 pm to 3.30 pm

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE F—SMALL BUSINESS, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY POLICY AND MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS

In Attendance

Hon. CP Cummins, Minister for Small Business, Information Technology Policy and Multicultural Affairs

Department of State Development, Trade and Innovation

Mr S Booker, Acting Director-General

Mr B Anker, Deputy Director-General

Department of Premier and Cabinet

Mr S Maguire, Executive Director, Multicultural Affairs Queensland

Mr N Elliott, Director Finance

CHAIR: Good afternoon. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the organisational units within the portfolio of the Minister for Small Business, Information Technology Policy and Multicultural Affairs open. The time allocated is one hour and 30 minutes. Before I continue, can I ask everyone in this room to turn off their mobile phone or their pager please. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

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

Mr CUMMINS: Thank you very much, Mr Chairman. It is with great pleasure that I report the Beattie government's commitment to my three portfolio areas within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and the Department of State Development, Trade and Innovation. The synergies between Small Business, Information Technology Policy and Multicultural Affairs are significant, and my third portfolio area in particular impacts on every aspect of government and across all portfolios and agencies. Ensuring cultural inclusion across government is a critical task, and I am very delighted that every one of our 25 departments has now adopted multicultural action plans as a direct result of the Beattie government's strengthened multicultural policy.

Multiculturalism is intrinsic to the Smart State and essential to our economic prosperity. Language skills, knowledge of overseas markets, overseas contacts and expertise in cultural protocols give business a competitive edge. Many of the Smart State small businesses are run by migrants, and with one in five jobs and one in four in the regions linked to exports our multicultural connections are increasingly important. Queensland merchandise exports in normal terms grew an extraordinary 39 per cent in the three months to April 2006, almost double the national growth for the same period. Business investment here increased 6.2 per cent in the March quarter and by a whopping 29.5 per cent over the year to March. The March quarter growth has more than doubled the national increase for that period of 2.9 per cent. Small business is driving the state and national economies, which is why a dedicated ministry was formed to support the sector here in Queensland. Queensland's economic growth has outperformed Australia for 10 consecutive years. We have the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years, and now with a payroll tax threshold of \$1 million some 90 per cent of Queensland employers pay no payroll tax at all.

The Beattie government is delivering a range of innovative programs, most of them devised, developed and delivered since we came to power in 1998. We have put the focus on red-tape reduction, and since 1999 our stocktakes show more than \$90 million in savings for business. We have set up coaching programs for women in business, for leadership and management in all small businesses and through our Small Business Accelerator Program. This program, also a Beattie government initiative, is

delivering \$7 million in election commitment funding to fast-growing Smart State small businesses. Our online services, including the Smart Small Business web site, are world class.

Queensland's ICT—information communication technology—sector is thriving through Beattie government grants to help cluster development, to support attendance at overseas trade shows, to provide professional business advice and mentoring and to support management skills. The commercialisation of our IP—intellectual property—is delivering dividends to Queensland taxpayers in increased efficiency to government areas. We are thinking and acting globally and locally to make the most of the amazing talents of our home-grown ICT experts including our games developers and our regional ICT industries and to ensure the application of ICT to every possible sector to increase profitability and performance.

Through our policies for small business, information technology and multicultural affairs, we have clearly articulated our Smart State vision. Every week I take the views of small business, information technology and multicultural sectors to the cabinet table. This advocacy reflects the important role my portfolios have in state government. Whether it is growing regional business, taking feedback from our statewide consultation with the small business sector to tailor new, responsive projects or implementing an export development plan for the ICT industry or funding new projects through the Muslim Community Engagement Strategy, the Beattie government will deliver jobs, training, community projects and benefits to business and industry both now and into the future. Our global focus and reputation for a smart, inclusive and welcoming state culture will ensure generations of Queenslanders enjoy a safe and economically healthy environment in which to raise families, do business, become educated and pursue prosperity for all. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The first period of questioning is allocated to non-government members. I call the member for Maroochydore.

Miss SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, I refer to the Ministerial Portfolio Statement at page 1-1 and I table a copy of the organisational chart for the state development and innovation department and ask: could you please identify on this chart which divisions and units you have responsibility for?

Mr CUMMINS: I would like to thank the member for the question, and let me assure you, as I have just stated in my opening address, the Beattie government is very proud of not only delivering improved outcomes for small businesses right across Queensland but the latest Queensland state accounts show that the gross state product in Queensland increased, as I said, by a four per cent trend in the December quarter 2004. We believe this is directly due to the positive, proactive policies that we have in Small Business, Information Technology Policy and Multicultural Affairs.

My portfolio responsibilities include the delegated authority to approve funding and activities in the area of small business, IT policy and multicultural affairs. The Department of State Development, Trade and Innovation services the Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for State Development, Trade and Innovation and the Minister for Small Business, Information Technology Policy and Multicultural Affairs. So the Department of the Premier and Cabinet services the Premier and the Minister for Small Business, Information Technology Policy and Multicultural Affairs. With the appropriations lying with these ministers, you have obviously raised these questions with them in previous estimates.

Staffing and budget allocations for these departments are found in the annual reports of each department, and you will find them in the financial statements obviously. I am happy to say that departmental staffing numbers as at 30 June 2006 for the work units in DSDTI and DPS who principally service my portfolio are as follows: within the Office of Small Business, 17.4; within the ICT Sectoral Development Unit, 26.5; and Multicultural Affairs, 21. The majority of the department's service delivery network of regionally located state development centres is focused on small business activities. However, these staff also deliver the full range of the department's products and services. By that I mean that the staff in our network of 19 state development centres across the state work one on one with small businesses every day. Our government, the Beattie government, recognises the importance of small business, the ICT industry and of course multicultural affairs, as I said in my opening statement. That is why we have a dedicated minister representing them at the cabinet table.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, just to confirm following the organisational chart, the ICT Sectoral Development Unit and the Office of Small Business within the State Development, Trade and Innovation portfolio are the divisions and units which you are responsible for?

Mr CUMMINS: That is correct I believe, yes.

Miss SIMPSON: So together with Multicultural Affairs, that means that the total number of staff that you are responsible for under the department is 65?

Mr CUMMINS: Departmental staffing numbers, as I just said, as at 30 June for the work units of DSDTI and DPC who principally service my portfolio are as follows: Office of Small Business, 17.4; ICT

sectoral unit, 26.5; and Multicultural Affairs, 21. But realising across the 19 state development offices around the state, many of them deliver services on a daily basis on a one-on-one basis with small businesses.

Miss SIMPSON: But, Minister, these staff you do not in fact have line control of? Correct?

CHAIR: Order! I remind committee members that they need to wait for the chair's direction before they ask a question. I call the member for Maroochydore.

Miss SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr Chair. So, Minister, you have approximately 65 staff with some part staff numbers that you are responsible for as a minister of the Crown, yet you have a ministerial expenses allowance that is greater than the emergency services minister and the Attorney-General, who have a considerably heavier workload. How do you explain how you can have those resources of a minister when you have such few responsibilities in the cabinet?

Mr CUMMINS: For a start, I do not think you are really in a position to judge workloads of ministers. So the question in fact is incorrect. But in attempting to address—

Miss SIMPSON: So you do more than the Attorney-General?

CHAIR: Order!

Mr CUMMINS: In attempting to address what you are inferring, let me say that the most important aspect about the operations of the department should be considered from the client's perspective—that is, the small businesses and the people in the IT industry right across Queensland who we are working with us to continue to help them grow and prosper and to help them continue to create more jobs. That includes what tailored packages of services they require to compete and grow in a very competitive market. It is also important that no matter what type of assistance is being delivered our clients are continually offered a seamless integrated service which is not artificially segregated to reflect ministerial functions and responsibilities. We want to make sure that we have equitable delivery of services to small business and ICT industries as well as multicultural affairs right across the state. I think what you are saying is that because the opposition has no policy on small business, has no policy on information communication technology or no multicultural affairs policy the Beattie government should not have a minister. Well, that is probably why you find yourself in opposition and we are not.

CHAIR: I call the member for Maroochydore.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, I ask you: before February of this year, how many pieces of legislation were you responsible for?

Mr CUMMINS: Since February—

Miss SIMPSON: Before February this year, how many pieces of legislation were you responsible for?

Mr CUMMINS: I have three minutes to answer if you would like me to give it a go. Just tell me when you are finished your question. The retail shop leases legislation came under my control in February this year. But if you are again inferring that there is no need for a minister for small business, what you should do is go out there and find out what third parties are actually saying. I want to quote from unsolicited emails that I received this morning.

The media obviously has blinkered vision. In terms of the small business arena, I will read the following—

I believe Minister Cummins has made a significant difference to small business in 12 months with great things, as we all know. I am aware the minister faces budget estimates hearings today. Pass on my 100 per cent support for him and all his initiatives in the small business area. I know we will make a difference ... we have taken the first step, we will build a better Queensland for small business.

That came from Trevor Beckingham from the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia. As I say, in no way have I tried to solicit any support today. The executive director of the MTAQ supports small business Minister Cummins. In a press release Mr Selmes reports that the MTAQ welcomes the creation of the portfolio of Small Business and the specific appointment of a minister to that portfolio. Mr Selmes went on to say—

As a member of the Small Business Advisory Council I have seen first hand the proactive role the Minister has been taking on small business issues and the carriage of important legislative changes to the Trade Practices Act through the National Small Business Minister's Council.

Further—

Mr Cummins plays a positive role in the carriage of small business issues through the state government.

Commerce Queensland, in referring to the government's decision to lift the payroll tax threshold following our small business discussion paper, stated—

Small business is a high priority in the Smart State.

Miss SIMPSON: We have just listened to the minister talking about the love notes he sent to himself to prove that he has something to do.

Mr CUMMINS: Point of order. I find that offensive and I ask that it be withdrawn.

Miss SIMPSON: If you want to try to justify your existence—

Mr CUMMINS: No, these were third-party endorsements.

CHAIR: Order! Could the member for Maroochydhore ask the question, please.

Miss SIMPSON: I refer you to your ministerial statements, which are simply cut and pasted from the Ministerial Portfolio Statement of the Deputy Premier and state development minister. How can you justify coming into this estimates when your financial outputs are simply a cut and paste from the Ministerial Portfolio Statement of other senior ministers?

Mr CUMMINS: It is clear that the opposition, because of its lack of policy, is being loose with the truth yet again. A quick flick through my MPS and that of the Deputy Premier will show that the output performance is significantly different. The output statement is the same but the output performance of my MPS is focused on small business and ICT, as it should be. The Deputy Premier's does not. The MPS reflects the program areas most clearly related to my portfolio. For multicultural affairs—

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, with respect, you are misleading this committee. It is simply a cut and paste from those corresponding sections in the MPS.

CHAIR: Order! Member for Maroochydhore, the minister will answer the question the way he sees fit.

Mr CUMMINS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. As I said, a quick flick through my MPS and that of the Deputy—

Miss SIMPSON: It is a very quick flick through, too.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydhore, once again I remind you that the minister is able to answer the question the way he sees fit.

Mr CUMMINS: If you have a quick flick through my MPS and that of the Deputy Premier, you will see that the output performance is significantly different. If the member for Maroochydhore or any of the other opposition members want briefings, we can provide them. But they are significantly different. The output statement is the same, but the output performance of my MPS is focused on small business and ICT, as it should be. The Deputy Premier's does not. The MPS reflects the program areas most related to my portfolios. For Multicultural Affairs there is an independent output statement, which is listed on page 2-5 of the MPS.

The members of the opposition realise that within 12 months we will have a state election. I am quite happy that they campaign around the state saying that they do not believe that small business, information and communication technology or people in the multicultural affairs area deserve a minister. Of course, they have sold out the bush. Now they are selling out small business. We know what they are not going to represent. It is about time they tabled some policies so we knew what they want to represent.

Miss SIMPSON: In responding to the minister, we want a minister who is not a minister for hyperlinks to other ministers' ministerial portfolio statements. Prior to February of this year you had no legislative responsibilities. From February of this year you took on one piece of legislation and you were responsible for this piece of legislation. How can we seriously believe that this government is looking after small business when it does not want to hand you any responsibilities?

Mr CUMMINS: It might be best to go and ask small business and see the endorsements we get from them.

Miss SIMPSON: What did small business say to you when legislation was brought in that changed the workplace health and safety laws to give authorised officers, including members of the union movement, rights of entry to their businesses which would include the right to look not just at safety issues but also at their records? We do not dispute the need for good workplace health and safety laws, but there were no penalties in that legislation to deal with abuses of power and you stayed silent. How can a small business minister stay silent when there are no penalties to prevent abuses of power for rights of entry into people's businesses, not necessarily on safety issues?

CHAIR: Minister, before you answer the question—and I will allow this question—I would like to remind committee members that questions to the minister have to have reference to the Appropriation Bill.

Mr CUMMINS: As I said earlier, I would be extremely pleased, in the lead-up to a state election, if the non-government members and especially the opposition in their campaigning stood strongly on every street corner and told every worker and every other Queenslander how they are going to stand with John Howard and these draconian IR laws. I am very pleased that the Labor Party, its ideals and beliefs do not agree with those of those opposite and their terrible, unnecessary legislation. The track record of Queensland's industrial relations was the best that we have had for quite a period of time. Yet other states that came under federal legislation had nowhere near as good a record.

Queensland businesses will have to employ more lawyers and advisers and will have to spend more money to assist them with another change that was clearly not needed. The overwhelming population will see through these draconian laws. They will not accept them. They do not want to go back to the old days when people were sent down the mines for 2s 6d. People want to see a level playing field. That is not what they are going to see under the conservatives' industrial relations laws.

You will also find that many small businesses will be extremely confused because this comes under the Corporations Act. Many of those small businesses that are not incorporated will be in limbo when it comes to the industrial relations laws. I just hope that throughout the election campaign members opposite go out there and say to every working Queenslander how very proud they are of John Howard and the National Party's support for the full sale of Telstra and selling out the bush.

Mr HOBBS: And so we are.

Mr CUMMINS: I am glad you interject, member for Warrego. Just keep going out there and saying how you support—

Mr HOBBS: Best thing ever.

Mr CUMMINS: You think it is the best thing ever. That is the great. You think that IR is going to be good for your electoral chances. Please, run on that platform. Small businesses out there have told me that they do not think the IR laws are good laws.

Miss SIMPSON: I note that the minister did not answer my question in regard to the powers of entry of authorised officers, who are not government employees, into people's businesses under the changes to the workplace health and safety laws.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, your question please.

Miss SIMPSON: I ask: why did you stay silent about the fact that these laws do not provide the proper checks and balances to ensure that those powers of right of entry to look at people's records are not abused?

Mr CUMMINS: The Queensland Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995 clarifies the powers that an authorised representative has to enter a workplace. As per the name of the act, these powers confer the rights of entry on an authorised representative in the interests of workplace health and safety. Allowing right of entry in this context is clearly not new. In the interests of both employer and employee welfare, New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory all allow—

Miss SIMPSON: And to look at the records.

Mr CUMMINS: They all allow right of entry to authorised representatives under their respective occupational health and safety laws. Queensland laws, I believe, are no different. They provide a transparent and accountable process under which authorised representatives can enter a workplace and do not condone the abuse of such access.

The state opposition would have us believe that the legislation grants union officials unfettered access to workplaces in order to scrutinise business and employee records. This is fiction. Yet again, it is not true. The opposition in this state would also have us believe that the laws grant union representatives identical powers as workplace health and safety inspectors. I am advised that, again, that is untrue. That is another fabrication. The facts are that the law forbids any such behaviour by union representatives. If this were to occur, the offending union representative would have their appointment suspended or revoked if found guilty by the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission. The affected representative's only recourse would be through the Industrial Court.

Miss SIMPSON: That is hardly a lot of comfort after your government failed to review the operational licence fraud in time. Minister, I ask you again: in regard to your ministerial responsibility, you have ministerial expenses of \$1.3 million. You have admitted that you are responsible for only 65 departmental staff. Since February of this year you came into being responsible for only one piece of legislation. Why is it that Premier Beattie just does not trust you with more responsibility?

Mr CUMMINS: Absolutely amazing, but that is what we have come to expect, I suppose. What I would like to hear from the opposition is its policies on small business, ICT and multicultural affairs. When we checked the web site today, again there was nothing. What I would like to know from the opposition is what it plans to do for red tape reduction. Let me say this: we are working in a bipartisan manner across all levels of government to reduce red tape. As a state, we took a submission that came from the Red Tape Reduction Task Force down to Canberra to work with the Prime Minister, who wants to work with all the states and territories. We will work with the federal government to reduce red tape. What do we hear from the opposition? Nothing but criticism—no support for small business, no support for the IT industry, and we know that, with multicultural affairs, it has no policies whatsoever.

Mr WELLS: The minister is here today as Minister for Small Business, Information Technology Policy and Multicultural Affairs. I refer to page 1-1 of the MPS and ask: recently in some media and here the opposition has questioned the viability of this portfolio. Will the minister respond to those claims? In

particular, will he advise whether the small business community has been beating down his door supporting the opposition's call for more legislation and more regulation for small business?

Mr CUMMINS: I would like to thank the member for the question. Yes, some have questioned the legitimacy of Small Business, IT Policy and Multicultural Affairs but, as I said earlier, I do not know that you need to listen to me on this issue. I would like you to listen to unsolicited comments made by a wide variety of people, including the media, industry associations, small business owners and ICT and multicultural groups. In relation to small business, Tony Selmes from the Motor Trades Association said—

As a member of the Small Business Advisory Council I have seen first hand the proactive role the Minister has been taking on small business issues and the carriage of—

Miss Simpson interjected.

CHAIR: Order!

Mr CUMMINS: I take on board that comment. Again, that is misleading the committee. You would be quite welcome to ring or speak to Tony Selmes. I have not spoken to him. I would encourage anyone to do so. You are reflecting again on credible businesspeople. When you cannot get your own way as an opposition, you try to drag everyone down to the gutter that you seem to wallow in.

I have already quoted Trevor Beckingham. On 9 June this year on that same issue, Sunshine Coast law firm Ferguson Cannon, a very well respected firm in the member for Maroochydore's electorate, said—

The increase in the payroll tax threshold is a significant step forward for small business, and the Government and I should be congratulated on the initiative.

On 8 June this year, Lucia Forman, a small business owner, said in relation to payroll tax—

Thank you so much for listening to us.

On 12 May 2006, Tony Chicco, a small business owner, said—

We believe you have what it takes to move small business in Queensland to a place where success and profitability will come to those who take the initiative to work smarter not only in this country but on a global level.

On 13 June 2006, the chief executive officer of Restaurant and Catering Queensland said—

The association believes you are making some impressive head-way on behalf of small business.

On 28 June this year, the Boating Industry Association said—

I congratulate you on your recent initiative to remove the cash flow burden on small business. You can be assured you have full support of Boating Industry Members to have the Australian Taxation Office withdraw its ruling that requires GST to be paid up front on goods, for which deposit of more than 10 percent has been received.

That is something I took to the federal ministerial council with the federal minister, Fran Bailey. In relation to ICT, the *Australian* said—

Mr Beattie and his ICT policy minister Chris Cummins demonstrated a clear grasp of the issues facing the sector and a strong willingness to work with the industry to overcome the challenges ahead.

Computer World—

CHAIR: Minister, your time is up.

Ms LIDDY CLARK: I refer to page 1-6 of the MPS that refers to the Small Business Accelerator Program. Will the minister outline the benefits to small business operators of this program?

Mr CUMMINS: I thank the member for the question. The Small Business Accelerator Program, the SBA, is a \$7 million, four-year Beattie government election commitment to help high-growth Queensland companies in a range of targeted sectors and is delivered through three elements. The first is the SBA grants program, which provides up to \$15,000 on a dollar-for-dollar basis through three stages involving business diagnostics, growth plans and the engagement of mentors or consultants to help implement growth plans. The second is the Advanced Business Planning Program, which combines workshops and coaching to develop growth planning skills. The third is the microbusiness review, which is an internationally renowned benchmarking tool developed in the United Kingdom by a consortium of universities and industry leaders that enables Queensland small businesses to compare their operations with world's best practice from up to 37 different countries around the globe.

Companies with sales growing more than 10 per cent annually and employing up to 20 staff are eligible to apply for assistance through the program. We also run information workshops around the state to promote the program. The SBA program helps business owners improve their performance, look to the future and plan properly for the future. This translates into increases in both profits and jobs.

I am delighted today to announce another 13 grants for businesses in Mission Beach, the Gold Coast, Capalaba—somewhere dear to your heart—Milton, Hemmant, Bundaberg and Kingaroy, worth more than \$58,000. These businesses include building industry manufacturers; a building, landscaping, cleaning and maintenance service company; manufacturers of custom-built security screens and other glass products; software engineers; a labour hire and recruitment firm; a graphic design and sign creation company; homewares and designer decorative items manufacturers; a bakery; an event

management service company; electronic dog training aids specialists; mobile car paint restoration and protection service; a company manufacturing biodegradable cleaning products; and information and multimedia specialists. You can see the wide range of small businesses being supported by this government through the Small Business Accelerator Program.

Mr HOOLIHAN: I also refer to page 1-6 of the MPS where it refers to Small Business Week. Will the minister please outline the purpose of Small Business Week?

Mr CUMMINS: I thank the member for the question. From Sunday, 30 July this year until Saturday, 5 August, the Beattie government will be holding a new Small Business Week with the theme 'Communicating with small business'. The purpose of the week is to highlight and celebrate the importance of contributions of small business to the Smart State economy and to raise awareness of the full range of support services and products for small business from the Beattie government and, of course, other sources.

This is a statewide program of events starting on Sunday, 30 July, with the announcement of the winners of the inaugural small business photographic awards. The next day, Monday, 31 July, the Beattie government will hold a one-day conference and mini trade show in Brisbane, 'Growing your business: the ICT factor', to show how ICT can transform business performance and profits. On Wednesday, 2 August we are sponsoring the CPA Australia's speed networking function at the convention centre. Together with CPA Australia, we will be hosting a small business heroes lunch at the Hilton Hotel on Thursday, 3 August, where local small business success stories will share their experiences. On Friday, 4 August the government will host a free sausage sizzle in Queens Park for the CBD small business community with departmental displays on how the government can help small business, and I invite all members to attend. Later that day I will be addressing a Franchising and Business Opportunities Expo that will provide the latest business information on the rapidly growing small business sector.

Statewide events throughout the week will include seminars and workshops on a range of topics: effective planning for business growth, marketing strategy, e-commerce, human resources, start-ups, eBay for business presentation, increasing profits through customer service, work life balance, protecting your IP—intellectual property—Australian Taxation Office information and power management for peak performance. I commend all of those organisations that have partnered with the Beattie government to deliver the full program of events. Groups such as eBay, the CPA, the restaurant and caterers association, the Franchise Council of Australia, CFM, *Queensland Business Review*, Videopro Business Centre and Deakins Lawyers.

CHAIR: Minister, page 1-6 of the MPS refers to the recently released 'Small business: a high priority for the Smart State' discussion paper. Would you please advise the committee of the feedback received from small business operators around Queensland?

Mr CUMMINS: Thank you very much, Mr Chair. I would like to, once again, publicly commend you for your chairing of the Small Business Advisory Council, another very strong voice that is fed through me to the cabinet table. The initiative 'Small business: a high priority for the Smart State' is something I am very proud of. The 'Small business: a high priority for the Smart State' discussion paper was released for public consultation on 21 March 2006.

Having travelled right across the state to see for myself the service that our local state development centres are providing, I also wanted to make sure that we listened to how we could build on the successes and, more importantly, to talk to local businesses about the issues they were facing. Some of the areas visited when I travelled the state to promote the paper and encourage small business operators to have their say included Mackay, the Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast, Toowoomba, Ipswich, Rockhampton, Townsville, Caboolture, Bundaberg, Bowen, Proserpine, Logan and Virginia. We are not a Brisbane-centric government; we travel right across the regions to make sure that they have input to this government.

Also included in this consultation process were public forums held in Cairns, Hervey Bay, Brisbane and, of course, the Sunshine Coast. The call for submissions closed on 12 May this year after an extensive consultation process. Over 320 responses were received from all across Queensland. The information gathered from these responses will be reviewed by my department and used as a basis for strengthening support for Queensland small business. Some of the issues raised by small business operators included management skills development, red tape reduction, communication with small business, the skills shortage and GST compliance difficulties.

A direct outcome of the consultation of this discussion paper was the announcement in the budget of the payroll tax threshold rising from \$850,000 to \$1 million. No wonder business is on the move in Queensland. This is great news for small business. What this means in real terms is that 90 per cent of Queensland employers will pay no payroll tax at all. That is a further 4,000 employers paying less payroll tax.

James Visser from Restaurant and Catering Queensland has welcomed this decision by the Beattie government saying—

This move is a significant benefit to small businesses to continue to grow and employ Queenslanders, and this latest decision of the government ensures that this will become easier for many operators in the future.

Our tax-free threshold is the highest of any state in mainland Australia. It is almost double that of South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales. We also have the lowest payroll tax rate in the nation at 4.75 per cent.

Mr WELLS: I refer the honourable minister to page 1-6 of the MPS, which addresses the development of growth plans under the Growing Regional Business initiative. Will the minister outline the six regional areas that are being engaged in projects to strengthen growing and emerging industries in those regions.

Mr CUMMINS: I would be very pleased to. The Growing Regional Business initiative is a Beattie government election commitment, accelerating regional economic growth in the regions of Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, Whitsunday and Hervey Bay, with a Wide Bay-Burnett focus, and also on the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast. This is an election commitment to further generate investment and reinvestment opportunities in regional Queensland. A central plank of the government's commitment to regional Queensland is stimulating new investment and creating new jobs. With around 60 per cent of Queensland's 216,000 small businesses located outside of Brisbane, they obviously have a very strong, key role to play.

This initiative aims to strengthen the regional development focus of our network of state development centres to increase business development activities and to progress ideas for the growth and new business opportunities in the six Queensland regions mentioned earlier. We want to identify new business opportunities in those emerging industries and infrastructure that will help underpin regional investment attraction.

A commitment was made by the Beattie government to work with local business and community representatives to progress ideas for growth and new business opportunities; to prepare investment prospectuses to help market their regions; and to compile annual reports to government with recommendations on how the government could support new opportunities, emerging industries and infrastructure needs. So, in keeping with the Queensland government's aim to promote the state's potential and existing capabilities to the world, this initiative provides a range of tools for regions to market their industry capabilities to potential investors.

We are also improving a wealth of practical information to assist potential investors when making decisions about investing in regional Queensland. The Growing Regional Business initiative consists of a regional investment prospectus web site showcasing Queensland regions that are located on the smart regions web site and the implementation of targeted growth programs. The regional investment prospectus and the web pages provide business enterprises located in regional Queensland. They include an excellent overview of the economy, existing business and networks, business infrastructure, lifestyle and each region's future prospects.

Growth plans for each of the six regions have been developed in partnership with local business and the community to generate and encourage more regional business investment and reinvestment. Each region has identified their targets for growth industries. For example, the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast offer perfect locations for business investors wishing to take advantage of a fantastic lifestyle. For somewhere like Mackay-Whitsunday, its abundant mineral resources as well as its strong growth in mining and related services, tourism and marine industries make the region an ideal investment location.

Ms LIDDY CLARK: Minister, with reference to the assistance to the ICT industry since you became minister, how has that relationship with that industry changed?

Mr CUMMINS: In a very positive direction, because the information communication industry is a very critical Smart State industry accounting for over 62,000 direct jobs, 4,360 employing businesses and an estimated 5,500 independent contractors and sole traders with annual revenues of over \$21.1 billion, including \$7.89 billion in interstate sales and \$878 million in exports. These are good dollars and good jobs for Queensland obviously.

The Beattie government is very serious about this industry, so serious as to appoint an IT minister. As minister, I am very committed to the development of an innovative and dynamic ICT industry here in Queensland. ICT is a perfect Smart State initiative. It is innovative, it is knowledge based and it is clean. The Beattie government has committed an \$18½ million package towards information and communication technology industry development. The centrepiece of this package is a four-year growth strategy called Smart ICT: Taking IT to the World, which will sell Smart State brilliance both nationally and internationally.

Here in Queensland, we have high-quality and highly-skilled people, strong universities and first-class infrastructure. I am very keen to see that used to create more Queensland ICT jobs and real businesses. My portfolio is progressively implementing a range of initiatives, including promoting industry partnerships, promoting the uptake of Queensland based ICT solutions in non-ICT businesses, growing our international markets and assisting medium-sized information and communication

technology companies to identify and overcome any growth barriers. We are working very, very closely with the industry.

Earlier this year, I announced additional funding for the ICT Industry Work Group, which was established by the Premier and my ministerial colleague Robert Schwarten, to assist with the development of the IT industry. The industry feedback has been very positive. AIIA chair for Queensland and ICT Industry Work Group member, John Vickers, welcomed the opportunity to continue working with the state government on industry development, saying—

This spirit of collaboration between the government and industry has extended to a level that has not been experienced in Queensland in the past and members of the Industry are more hopeful than they have ever been that real outcomes will result. Our work together to date is encouraging and sees us on the way to achieving better outcomes for the Queensland ICT industry and the government

The Australian Computer Society Queensland chair and ICT Industry Work Group member Mark Lloyd added—

The Industry maintains its resolve to collaborate positively with the government through the ICT Workgroup to reinforce Queensland as the Smart State. The Premier's and Minister's commitment—

CHAIR: Minister, your time is up. I call the member for Maroochydore.

Miss SIMPSON: I refer to MPS 1-11 and particularly the 'Employee expenses', which were about \$50 million last year and slightly less this year but still about \$50 million. Do you have responsibility as minister for all those employees?

Mr CUMMINS: I would like to thank the member for the question. Whereabouts are you referring to in the MPS, I am sorry?

Miss SIMPSON: It is 1-11, 'Employee expenses'.

Mr CUMMINS: Could I take that on notice and come back to you later?

Miss SIMPSON: Yes, you can take that on notice. I need to clarify that because according to what the minister previously told me there are about 44 departmental staff that you have ministerial oversight of.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, would you like to ask your next question?

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, you were trying to paint a glowing picture of what a good job you think you are doing as small business minister. I ask you: what do the small businesses of Traveston think of your government? Have you undertaken an impact assessment of what that decision will mean for those businesses today and for the next 30 years?

Mr CUMMINS: Once again, I have got a list, which I will hopefully get back to further, of not self-assessment but of what the industry says. That is not self-praise. That has not been solicited, so again I take offence at the comments from the member but that is by the by.

I am very well aware of the statements that the member for Maroochydore has made about businesses and the Traveston Dam. Really, if the member were serious about the businesses concerned and not simply playing politics, she would have followed up details after asking me in the House about businesses that she alleged she was concerned about when she raised it. Have I received anything from the member? No. Rather, my staff as a result of her statements set about contacting the business people that have been mentioned. Officers from the state development centres at Maryborough, Caboolture—

Miss SIMPSON: With respect, Mr Chairman, the minister's comments are offensive and untrue and I ask that they be withdrawn.

Mr CUMMINS: Did you forward any of that to my department?

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, I asked you a question in the parliament about what impact there would be on these businesses and you had no answers for them.

Mr CUMMINS: They are not untrue because—

CHAIR: Order! Minister, the member for Maroochydore would like you to withdraw your statement. Would you do so?

Mr CUMMINS: I will withdraw.

CHAIR: Can you go back to answering your question, please.

Mr CUMMINS: The officers from the state development centres at Maryborough, Caboolture and the Sunshine Coast have contacted businesses to collate information related to the effect of the proposed dam on the business community in the Mary Valley. As initial consultations with affected businesses occur, the government will be in a position to clearly identify the areas of need and determine the support that will be provided to businesses. State development officers are meeting businesses at the government's one-stop shop opened by the Department of Communities in Kandanga in the Mary Valley and are available. The Premier has provided reassurance that the community

concerns would be addressed as part of the design and construction process for the proposed new dam on the Mary River. The government will work closely with the local community to minimise the impacts of the proposed Traveston Dam.

There will be thorough consultation on processes and actions to minimise the impacts of the dam. The government has appointed the former Governor of Queensland, Major General Peter Arnison, as an independent community guardian to represent the views of the community. Major General Peter Arnison will head up a Community Futures Task Force that will work with the community to consider issues such as jobs and industry assistance as well as how to help local businesses capitalise on the construction of the dams now and into the future.

So Major General Peter Arnison is heading up the Community Futures Task Force. A case management approach has been adopted to manage support for businesses. State development officers are meeting businesses, as I have said, at the Kandanga one-stop shop in the Mary Valley. A business hotline is in place providing business support, information and referrals.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, are you confirming that you took no ministerial assessment of the impact upon small businesses prior to your government making the decision to go ahead with the Traveston Dam?

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, is that a question?

Mr CUMMINS: Whereabouts in the MPS are you referring, I am sorry?

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, I will refer you in the MPS to growing regions where you talk about growth plans for the regions. This has a direct impact on the Cooloola region. In fact, it will have a negative impact upon their growth. I ask you: when your government made a decision to go ahead with the Traveston Dam, did you present any information about the impact upon small businesses in that area?

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, I refer you to the standing order that a question must be relevant to the Appropriation Bill. I would ask the minister to only answer if he wishes to do so.

Mr CUMMINS: Thank you, Mr Chair. In deciding the site of a major water supply that the south-east corner, including the Sunshine Coast, will need in the future, many issues were considered—not only the best yield of the dam but also the area of least impact. So, yes, making hard decisions like that relating to the Traveston Dam does not make us any friends in the area. It is one of those things that not only the Premier but every cabinet minister and probably every member of the Beattie government realises that unfortunately many people will continue to hate us for and despise us for not only for the rest of our lives but for the rest of their lives.

I know that people of the Sunshine Coast need water onwards of 2015-16. We have a plan to deliver water not only to the people of the Sunshine Coast but to the people of south-east Queensland. I have said it before and I will say it again: I am very proud that I was born and bred in Ipswich. In the seventies and eighties, I can remember the Wivenhoe project and how it was delivered west of Ipswich and Brisbane in the Esk area. We will need major water supplies into the future. We are in government and we must make those decisions.

Let me just quote from the *Sunday Mail* on 16 July. No-one would ever accuse Andrew Bolt of being a supporter of the Labor Party. The article states—

The following places are all now on water restrictions: most of southeast Queensland, Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra, Adelaide, Perth and Geelong.

That's right. Nearly every mainland capital—home to more than half our population—is now short of water. How much worse will the crisis get as the cities grow?

...

Beattie is a brave man, then, to defy this irrational hatred of dams, and the Greens are doing their worst to make him pay for it.

Brown led a farcical protest flotilla of canoes down the shallow Mary River, bumping on the rocks below, and complained: "Dams are so last century."

...

As demographer Bernard Salt of KPMG Australia told the ABC, "There comes a point when water conservation doesn't do it. We need more dams."

...

The ban on dams is anti-human.

...

I hope his courage is catching ... Say yes to dams for humans.

The water crisis in this country is too serious for us to keep being this stupid.

That came from Andrew Bolt. I think people realise that the Beattie government is in power. We make hard decisions. Yes, there will be an economic impact in that area. There will be a far worse economic impact on not only on the Sunshine Coast but all of the south-east corner unless we have more water for the future.

CHAIR: Minister, your time is up.

Miss SIMPSON: We all know there needs to be good water planning, but surely you do not expect this committee to believe that good water planning means not doing any economic impact assessment on this particular dam site before it is announced. What compensation will you put in place for the small businesses and their staff affected by the Beattie government's decision to build Traveston Dam? This is a question I have asked you previously which you were not able to answer. I ask again: what compensation will you put in place to deal with the small businesses and their staff who have been affected, given that previously when you were asked this question you had no idea?

CHAIR: Can I ask the member for Maroochydore whether there is an MPS reference here, because I cannot recall from the MPS that there has been any expenditure allocated for—

Miss SIMPSON: Yes, it is to do with growing the regions and the growth plans for the regions. The Cooloola region has just been given a death sentence for the next 30 years with no economic impact assessment.

CHAIR: I can understand the question if there is an MPS statement referring expenditure by the minister's department to compensate small businesses. You are asking a very general question of the minister. I will only allow it if the minister wishes to reply.

Mr CUMMINS: Once again, Mr Chair, I am very happy to answer the question. I do find the comments offensive, but the member obviously has form in this area and I will not bother asking for a retraction. The state development officers have so far contacted over 30 businesses—I believe it is 32—to collate information related to the effect of the proposed dam on businesses. Initial consultations commenced in July this year and are expected to continue. Some businesses have indicated a negative impact on their future business potential, and others have commenced planning to identify opportunity for future business development. Once initial consultations with affected businesses have occurred, the government will be in a position to clearly identify the areas of need and determine the support that will be provided to the business. This will include responses to short-term business issues and of course to longer-term economic development upwards over the next decade.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, I would like to ask you this question again. How many staff are you responsible for, because I note you have 38 advisers with you here today?

Mr CUMMINS: I beg your pardon. How many advisers?

Miss SIMPSON: There are 38 in the room.

CHAIR: So what is the question?

Mr CUMMINS: I think she is clearly misleading the House.

Miss SIMPSON: I was just looking at the 38 people behind the minister.

CHAIR: Order! Can you repeat the question please, because I am not too sure what it was.

Mr CUMMINS: I think I have answered the question previously. I think she is just trying to mislead the House.

CHAIR: I just want to listen to the question again.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, you could not answer a line item in the budget paper there, where there was \$50 million worth of employee expenses, and you took it on notice.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore!

Miss SIMPSON: You have got 45 departmental staff and there are 38 people in the room.

CHAIR: Order! Member for Maroochydore, you either ask another question or repeat the question.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, I ask you another question with regard to page 1-11 of the MPS—

Mr WELLS: A point of order, Mr Chair: the honourable member should ask questions through the chair.

CHAIR: Would the member for Maroochydore please do so.

Miss SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr Chair. I refer the minister to page 1-11 of the MPS. Grants and subsidies come to about \$120 million. Could the minister advise the committee whether he is the responsible line minister for the \$120 million and provide a breakdown of that \$120 million?

Mr CUMMINS: Sorry, 11-1 did you say?

Miss SIMPSON: Page 1-11 of the MPS with regard to grants and subsidies of \$120 million. Is he the sole minister responsible for those? And can he provide a breakdown of those grants and subsidies?

Mr CUMMINS: Between both the Deputy Premier and minister for state development and me, they are the total funds.

Miss SIMPSON: So you are not in fact the minister responsible for all those funds?

Mr CUMMINS: Not for the total amount of those funds.

Miss SIMPSON: Then why do we have it here in the MPS?

CHAIR: Order! Minister, have you finished answering the previous question, because I could not hear the latest question?

Mr CUMMINS: Yes, I have.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, can you ask the question again so I can at least hear the question?

Miss SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, you are confirming, then, that for the output income statement here, which is also a cut and paste from the state development minister's MPS, you are not responsible for all the figures here—

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, this question has been asked before. I will allow it one more time as a courtesy to you. The minister, if he so wishes, can answer it. This question has been asked at least once or twice before.

Miss SIMPSON: Could the minister provide a breakdown of all these grants and subsidies, given that this is the MPS estimates committee that we are here for?

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, you can ask that question later.

Mr CUMMINS: I will answer the question, to add to the member for Maroochydore's sideshow. As minister for small business and information technology policy, I approve all grants for the Small Business Accelerator Program, the International Trade Show Assistance Program, the Leadership and Management Program and Women in Business. I also approve the expenditure under the Fast-Tracking Growth Program to support the continuing growth of Queensland based medium sized information and communication technology businesses. If the committee or the member want a separate breakdown, I am more than happy to provide that.

Miss SIMPSON: So, Minister, how much in total of the grants and subsidies are you responsible for?

Mr CUMMINS: I will provide that breakdown. I have just indicated that I will provide that at the earliest opportunity.

Miss SIMPSON: Could the minister confirm how long that will be?

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore—

Mr CUMMINS: No, I can't confirm how long it would be.

Miss SIMPSON: It shouldn't take that long, Minister.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, I expect you to direct your questions through the chair and I expect the minister to answer through the chair as well. I call the member for Maroochydore for the next question.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, from the question on notice I believe there is about \$1 million worth of grants, but I wanted to clarify that with you and to appreciate whether in the MPS estimates document that is supposed to be your MPS estimates document you are in fact responsible for all of the financial figures, or are some of those still the state development minister's responsibility?

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, that question is extremely similar to probably three or four questions that you have asked before. I have to rule this question out of order. Next question, please.

Miss SIMPSON: Well, we will await the minister's advice in regard to the grants and subsidies.

Mr CUMMINS: A point of order, if I may, Mr Chair.

CHAIR: What is the point of order?

Mr CUMMINS: It is a question about the process. If I take on board a question and say that I will bring information back, Mr Chair, is there a period of time?

CHAIR: You can take the question on notice if you so wish.

Mr CUMMINS: I will take the question on notice, as I have indicated, and I just hope the member for Maroochydore understands that and the process.

CHAIR: That is fine.

Miss SIMPSON: Mr Chair, I will ask a question of the minister in regard to multicultural affairs, which is also under the Premier's department but appears in his portfolio statement on page 2-1, where it states that Multicultural Affairs Queensland will promote and improve the economic gains resulting from cultural and linguistic diversity. Could the minister please advise me of the specific programs involved in promoting the use of other languages in business in Queensland and detail any grants associated with that?

Mr CUMMINS: I thank the member for the question. Multicultural affairs obviously is very strong and vibrant in this state. The *Diversity Means Business* publication is currently being developed under the Queensland government multicultural policy as a means to maximise diversity for economic gain. In recent years Queensland has recorded stable and significant increases in both interstate and overseas migrants who have brought specific skills and knowledge to international trade networks and funds the growing Queensland economy.

The government's commitment to promote *Diversity Means Business* will support the positioning of Queensland as a major player in the global world and as a progressive and innovative state. To capture the economic benefits of migration and multiculturalism, *Diversity Means Business* will focus on increasing awareness of the economic advantages of multiculturalism and the government's strategy to utilise this diversity to benefit the whole community.

The publication will comprise the government's position statement on how it will use cultural diversity for economic gain and case studies to show how particular government initiatives are achieving better outcomes by harnessing the benefits of cultural diversity that will be developed. There are no grants associated with this initiative. While developing *Diversity Means Business*, peak community agencies and government departments have been consulted and they have all expressed support. I will launch the publication by the end of this calendar year.

CHAIR: The hearing is now suspended. We will resume at 4.50.

Proceedings suspended from 4.36 pm to 4.50 pm.

CHAIR: The committee will now continue its examination of the portfolio of the Minister for Small Business, Information Technology Policy and Multicultural Affairs. I call the member for Keppel.

Mr HOOLIHAN: Thank you, Mr Chairman. The MPS refers to a national summit for ICT skills that has been held recently. What does the government hope to achieve by holding this summit?

Mr CUMMINS: Thank you very much. One of the significant challenges currently facing the Australian information and communication technology industry is attracting and retaining skilled workers. In recognition of this, the Queensland government hosted a national information and communication technology skills summit here in Brisbane on 21 and 22 June. The summit provided a forum for prominent industry leaders, academics, policy makers and educators from around Australia to address current ICT skills requirements, to plan for future industry needs and to develop agreed initiatives to address ICT skills shortages. There was a common goal and a commitment towards working collaboratively to address the ICT skills shortage. It is not just a problem for Queensland; it is a nationwide issue. And that is why we called the summit—to help develop nationwide solutions.

The main question posed to the summit participants was: how do we make ICT careers attractive as a career of choice? The question was underpinned by three themes: the image of ICT as a profession, the nature of the work environment, and education and careers. Participants hailed the skills summit as a watershed event for all ICT sectors, praising the Queensland government for taking the lead on this skills issue. Australian Information Industry Association CEO Rob Durie stated that the event had helped galvanise support for a concerted, cohesive effort by industry, education and government to progress outcomes from the summit.

Summit participants agreed to focus their efforts on positively impacting the image of the ICT industry and ICT careers, introducing professional standards in the ICT workplace, and the articulation of clearer education and career pathways. Over the course of the two-day summit, representatives participated in robust debate while working towards possible collaborative solutions to key skills issues. Agreement was made to progress a number of key industry-wide initiatives through a genuine spirit of engagement at both the state and federal levels.

Building on these themes, I announced a new \$250,000 ICT Career Start program designed to encourage potential workers and school leavers into ICT careers. The Commonwealth Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts also released the ICT skills foresighting working group's report *Building Australian ICT Skills* to coincide with the summit. The document analyses prevailing trends and identifies a number of major inhibitors which threaten Australia's future ICT skills development, productivity gains and competitiveness.

A number of summit participants committed to the immediate implementation of a number of other significant initiatives including a national ICT, or NICTA, pledge to provide \$200,000 in ICT scholarships to students in three Queensland universities this year. Thirty-five new ICT graduate placements were announced by the Queensland Department of Public Works, \$240,000 from the department of

education and training for an ICT skills formation strategy at Griffith University and other very positive inputs from that skills summit.

Mr WELLS: Page 1-4 of the MPS refers to the success of the Smart State's smart women workshops. Since the subject matter of those workshops is an issue in which I have had a lifelong interest, I ask the minister: are there plans to have another workshop in the forthcoming financial year?

Mr CUMMINS: I thank the member and, yes, you are absolutely correct: the workshops are very popular and they are very necessary. A total of 18 workshops were held in locations right across the state. Around 550 participants attended them. The focus of this series was on providing participants with strategies for improving their business networks, establishing successful strategic alliances.

Queensland businesswomen have shown considerable interest in accessing assistance aimed at improving their business management skills. During our recent National ICT Skills Summit, which I just mentioned, I was very pleased to announce new funding of over \$27,000 for the state government to be a major sponsor of the Technology Skills in Business workshops which are going to be run by Women in Technology. In fact, they have an awards night this Saturday night. They are a very vibrant group of women involved in information technology, encouraging more women of all ages into that industry.

The workshops we were talking about will be aimed at increasing the participation of women in ICT training and education programs through improved understanding of the role of ICT business success. I have asked a number of my parliamentary colleagues to be involved in this program to champion it at a local level—and I have made sure that they are all females—and to drive this initiative: Di Reilly, the member for Mudgeeraba on the Gold Coast; Lindy Nelson-Carr, the member for Mundingburra; Karen Struthers, the member for Algeester; Carolyn Male, the member for Glass House—she will look after the Sunshine Coast—and Jan Jarratt, the member for Whitsunday, for the Mackay region. I would like to thank all those MPs for their involvement and congratulate Women in Technology on a very positive proposal—one that they want to again work on with me, my department and the government.

The business community in Queensland is continually changing. One of the changes I am pleased to see is that an increasing number of Queensland women are establishing their own businesses. Since November 1989 the number of Queensland women in small business has risen by an average of almost 13 per cent each year. It is something we should all be very proud of. Approximately 34 per cent of all Queensland businesses are operated by women. Obviously we would like that to rise. I am very confident that the Technology Skills in Business workshops will be an overwhelming success and will continue to build on our government's very strong track record in supporting the fairer sex.

CHAIR: Minister, I would like to ask you a question regarding the Red Tape Reduction Task Force—an initiative funded by your department. Can you advise the committee what savings have been achieved for business by slashing red tape?

Mr CUMMINS: I would like to congratulate Queensland's strong business community for being very positive in the way that it inputted to the Red Tape Reduction Task Force. We annually conduct a stocktake right across the state government. We recently released the 2004-05 stocktake report. It was the eighth annual report. The report shows that in the 2004-05 financial year the initiatives that we have introduced have delivered savings of more than \$14 million for Queensland businesses.

Some of the highlights include the abolition of workplace registration, the streamlining of development application requirements and the continuing expansion of a range of online services, particularly SmartLicence Online—something that I think all members should be talking to businesses about. Since 1998, the savings to business reported that the annual red tape stocktakes are now estimated at more than \$90 million. As I have mentioned, we are working on specific reviews and we will use that feedback to continue to drive our reforms and make sure that Queensland remains the best place to do business anywhere in Australia.

The Queensland government recognises and supports the principles underpinning the drive for regulatory reform. These reforms are aimed at removing unnecessary business impediments to efficiency and innovation while recognising the benefits of appropriate regulation to ensure safe and supportive communities and market efficiency.

Queensland is committed to continuing these efforts at a state level where it is pursuing reform activities to target specific red tape reduction opportunities and improve the state's regulatory landscape. If I could touch on the federal government, there has been some movement at a federal level with regards to red tape, in particular their decision to streamline processes through an increased offering of online services, and I believe that is long overdue. Queensland has been taking the lead role in this area for years with initiatives such as the SmartLicence Online as I have pointed out. It is indeed paying dividends for businesses right across the state.

If I could quote from the *Weekend Australian* again where John Howard and the Labor leaders supported a far-reaching agenda including measures to boost child literacy and numeracy and cut business red tape. This is what came out of COAG last week. The meeting agreed that money for water reform should be targeted, as we know. Mr Howard and the Premiers hailed it as the best meeting ever.

The major outcome has been an agreement—a huge, indeed mammoth—national reform agenda which will cover important areas of capital as well as issues of regulation, red tape and other matters touching on infrastructure. It is across two levels of government.

Mr HOOLIHAN: I ask the minister if he could outline how the Beattie government's new and strengthened multicultural policy is embedding service improvements across government agencies?

Mr CUMMINS: I thank the member for his question and again his strong support of multiculturalism right across Queensland. The Beattie government's Multicultural Queensland—Making a World of Difference policy highlights the strengths of a population that is multilingual and internationally connected. The policy nourishes trade, tourism, investment and jobs growth as well as ensuring equitable access to services and programs by all Queenslanders regardless of their cultural or religious backgrounds. All government agencies have now deployed multicultural action plans and report to cabinet in annual reports on the progress of implementation.

Chief executive officers of our agencies now have multicultural performance indicators in their performance agreements. The plan includes strategies such as provision of cross-cultural training to departmental staff, improved consultation with ethnic communities, promotion of employment diversity, language service initiatives, improved access to funding for ethnic communities, improved ethno-specific data collection, research on the needs of communities and guidelines to ensure that services are inclusive. Some outcomes already that we have seen include the Department of Child Safety providing funding of \$50,000 to the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland to implement a foster care recruitment project among culturally and linguistically diverse communities; Queensland Health refocusing its priorities and increasing funding allocated under the Healthier Multicultural Communities Initiative to \$1.027 million in the year 2006-07; and \$2.005 million from 2008-09 onwards to support ongoing implementation of the initiative.

As well as 25 state government departments developing multicultural action plans, the Anti-Discrimination Commission of Queensland, Legal Aid Queensland and the Residential Tenancies Authority have voluntarily developed plans. I would like to publicly commend them for taking a lead in this area.

I am also delighted to report that this month, through the Multicultural Assistance Program, the Beattie government is providing nearly \$34,000 to support multicultural events and projects including the Congolese and Solomon Islands Independence Day celebrations, Mercy College Multicultural Day, Global Grooves in the Garden in Mackay, a cultural diversity forum hosted by Centacare in Cairns and the Brisbane Valley Multicultural Festival in Esk. I would like to encourage all members to strongly support these and get the public more involved where we can.

Ms LIDDY CLARK: Minister, with your comment before on the fairer sex, it would be nice to see the fairer sex sitting at the executive table. I would now like to congratulate—you can smile.

Mr CUMMINS: That is why I have not thrown any questions over to those just yet.

Ms LIDDY CLARK: I have been watching. I would like to now congratulate the department on their successful international benchmarking for the Queensland Smart Small Business web site as noted on page 1-4 of the MPS, and I ask: what plans are there to ensure that the web site remains a world leader?

Mr CUMMINS: If you do actually look at this table behind me, three of the four very important people who keep the show running are females. I would like to congratulate the department on the success of their web site. The small business web site was benchmarked nationally and internationally as the best small business web site in terms of breadth and comprehensiveness of online services available and the depth of functionality of all those services for small business. Some of the web site features include SmartLicence, a service for state Commonwealth and local government business licence information and transactions and state government licence processing. Over 90,000 business clients utilised this service in 2005-06. It also includes Government Business Information Service, or GOBiS, a service for information on all state and Commonwealth government support to business. Over 20,000 business clients used this service in 2005-06.

The web site also includes the Business Resource Centre and online book shop, the service providing business with government and commercial information used for business planning and viability assessment. Over 3,500 business clients used this service in 2005-06. This web site also includes the [SmartSkills learning service and a range of diagnostic based interactive business management tools. However, we will continue to review and refine the web site. In fact, I am pleased to announce that since benchmarking the site it has been expanded to include the following fully interactive business management tools: winning new business, selling to government, product and service warranties, doing business online and understanding customer needs. I know members are interested. You will find it at www.smartsmallbusiness.qld.gov.au to follow the links to all of these tools.

Business owners and operators are repeatedly telling us that they are increasingly time poor, that they are putting in long hours at the business and that a lot of their remaining time is taken with administration and doing the books. By building up services available online we are making it as easy as

possible for business to access so they can simply log on whenever they have the time without having to be bound by office hours. Again, I am very pleased with what has been achieved. Business is telling us that they appreciate the freedom that it affords them. We will continue to work hard to make sure we remain a world leader in this field.

Mr WELLS: Minister, there is reference to regulatory reviews in Queensland's participation in the COAG reform agenda. What does this mean in terms of red tape for Queensland's businesses?

Mr CUMMINS: I again thank the member for the question. As we saw at COAG where the Prime Minister was working with the states to reduce red tape on businesses, it is a major impediment. It is one of the issues we hear loud and clear, not only through the white paper Small business—a high priority for the Smart State, but also businesses continually tell us about it whether we be at chamber of commerce meetings, at the kids' football or whatever. Right across-the-board, whether it be local government, state government or federal government, we are going to continue to work to make sure we impact on red tape.

I would like to congratulate Queensland's business community on the very strong support they are showing for the Beattie government's red tape reduction efforts. Members would be aware that late last year I announced a review of hot spots for the regulatory reform as well as specific reviews of the tourism and retail industries, delivering on election commitments under the 2004 small business policy. Along with the manufacturing industry review that was already underway, these four reviews received a total of 1,277 submissions, which I know you will agree is a fantastic response. Clearly, business is keen to have its say and they like the fact that we are there to listen. Those who made a submission can already see that their efforts are having an impact.

Based on the feedback received through mid-January, the Red Tape Reduction Task Force provided a report to the Premier for the COAG meeting in February. Using our submissions, COAG agreed on a national reform agenda, which I quoted from in that article before, but it is Queensland that has taken the lead in reviewing business regulation. COAG also agreed to address six priority cross-jurisdictional hot spot areas where overlapping and inconsistent regulatory regimes are impeding economic activity. These include rail safety regulation, occupational health and safety, national trade measurement, chemicals and plastics, development assessment arrangements and, of course, building regulation. This means that the Beattie government is making it easier for Queensland business to get on with the job and actually do what they want to do, and that is do business. While this government has a comprehensive policy direction to encourage and grow small business in Queensland, obviously the opposition still remains a policy vacuum.

CHAIR: Minister, your time is up.

Mr CUMMINS: What they have been able to come up with is a shoot-from-the-lip suggestion that business wants more legislation.

CHAIR: Minister, your time is up. In the remaining time I will alternate between the government and non-government members. I call the member for Maroochydhore.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, I refer to MPS page 2-06, output income statement Multicultural Affairs. The amount of grants and subsidies funding for 2006-07 totals \$3.35 million. However, the department will actually spend more than that on administering the grants and subsidies program. Some \$3.8 million will be expended on employee expenses, supplies and services. I ask: will you have this unit's administrative costs evaluated and have you considered the provision of a fairer, more effective delivery of multicultural affairs policy?

Mr CUMMINS: I am not entirely sure that the figures you have are correct.

Miss SIMPSON: They are from your MPS, Minister.

Mr CUMMINS: I think the basis of the question and the way you have posed it are, in fact, incorrect. Multicultural Affairs Queensland is responsible for providing advice on multicultural issues, coordinating multicultural policy development and planning across the Queensland government, and promoting positive community relations. So they do not just oversee grant funding. They do a lot more than that. Multicultural Affairs Queensland coordinates a whole-of-government implementation of the Queensland government's multicultural policy by developing strategies and providing advice to government agencies regarding best practice in the provision of programs and services to a culturally diverse society. Multicultural Affairs Queensland has a responsibility for consultations, cross-cultural training, the administration of grants programs and, of course, the promotion of harmonious community relationships. So to imply that all they do is oversee administration of grants programs is entirely incorrect.

Grants available through Multicultural Affairs Queensland for distribution total \$3.4 million of which \$50,000 is put aside for administration of the various components of the funding programs. I will just repeat that: a total of \$3.4 million of which \$50,000 is put aside for administration of the various components. Staff salaries, I am advised, make up approximately \$157,600 for full-time equivalents of 2.4. As I said at the start of the answer, your question, in fact, is wrong.

Mr HOOLIHAN: Minister, page 1-06 of the MPS refers to targeted assistance available to small business operators who choose to buy a franchise or perhaps work from home. Will the minister outline services offered by State Development to the growing business sectors of franchise, home based and microbusinesses?

Mr CUMMINS: I would be very pleased to. I know in regional and rural areas as well as Brisbane we are finding the growth of home based businesses. People are deciding more often that they want to work from home. I think it is a marvellous opportunity. Franchising is a vibrant section of our business community here in Queensland, not to mention an important contributor to the state's economic growth.

Today there are well over 12,000 franchise businesses operating throughout the state employing more than 110,000 Queenslanders. They have made a large contribution not only in terms of the economy but also in terms of unemployment that was so chronically bad in years past.

Queensland is seen as the powerhouse of franchising in Australia and the birthplace of many new franchise concepts. We have more head offices and outlets per head of population than any other state in Australia. We have a long association with the Franchise Council of Australia and we are committed to growing this sector in Queensland. My department provides sponsorship for franchising activities. It will sponsor the 2006 Franchise and Business Opportunities Expo to be held in Brisbane in August 2006 during Small Business Week, which I mentioned earlier. It will again sponsor the National Franchise Convention to be held on the Gold Coast in October 2006.

My department supports research in the franchising sector to develop meaningful products and services. The Griffith University business school, in conjunction with the Office of Small Business, conducted research into the relationship between a franchisor and a franchisee. The department helped develop the franchising code of conduct, one which was warmly applauded.

Griffith University Franchising Australia Survey 2004 found that the code has been an effective tool in reducing the level of disputes in the franchising sector. The department delivers seminars and workshops in conjunction with the Franchise Council and has provided significant funding to support the sector in developing and delivering a series of seminars throughout regional Queensland as well as delivering a workshop series on how to franchise your business. This has complemented our existing services to the Queensland franchise sector which already includes a range of fact sheets, workshops and other programs.

I think franchising is inherently innovative. It is a sector that is always looking for new and better ways to deliver products and services and to create new opportunities. This is already a smart sector of our growing economy. In fact, Queensland was the first state to lead an international franchise trade mission. The home based business sector is a growing industry, equally innovative with more and more business owners electing to operate their businesses at home or from home.

CHAIR: The member for Maroochydore will you do the honour of asking the last question of the day.

Miss SIMPSON: Thank you very much, Mr Chairman. With regard to multicultural affairs, what funding is available for community and cultural festivals this year and how does it compare to last year?

Mr CUMMINS: I thank the member for the question. Funding of multicultural groups and groups that want to be involved is something that is extremely important. In 2006-07 grants available through my portfolio for distribution total \$3.335 million. The Multicultural Assistance Program aims to strengthen multiculturalism in Queensland by celebrating diversity and promoting cohesion and harmony within Queensland's culturally diverse society, providing opportunities for Queenslanders to participate in a broad range of cultural activities and encouraging community development.

The festival events and project grants component of the Multicultural Assistance Program provides funding for one-off projects, events, festivals and activities developed by the community as well as the third year of a three-year funding package for major multicultural festivals including the Cultural Fest in Townsville, the Paniyiri Greek festival held in South Brisbane, the Mount Isa multicultural festival, the Australian-Italian festival in Ingham, the central Queensland multicultural festival in Rockhampton and the Woodford Folklines multicultural program.

The funding was increased for Muslim community grants by \$65,000 per year. The amount available for allocation under these grants is \$0.765 million and applications close on 28 July. It is very timely for us to encourage people to make sure they get their applications in. These funds include \$65,000, as I have mentioned, for the Muslim Community Engagement Strategy to assist communities in working together to build bridges of communication, interaction and understanding between Muslim communities and the wider community. The Beattie government has made a \$1 million commitment to the highly successful LAMP program, which is the Local Area Multicultural Partnership program.

Miss SIMPSON: I am talking specifically about the festival component for this year compared to last year.

Mr CUMMINS: I will come back to that if I could, please. The LAMP, the Local Area Multicultural Partnership program, is a partnership strategy between the state government and local governments to

support and engage communities to be actively involved in multicultural Queensland. The grants include \$1.055 million for the Multicultural Community Worker Program which assists multicultural community organisations to fund up to 20 workers who link people from ethnic communities to services, undertake advocacy and promote multiculturalism. I would like to take your interjection on notice, if I may.

CHAIR: The time allocated for the consideration of the estimates of expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Small Business, Information Technology Policy and Multicultural Affairs has expired. Minister, on behalf of the committee I thank you for your attendance as well as that of your departmental officers. The transcript of the hearing will be available on the Hansard page of the parliament's web site within about two hours. On behalf of the committee I would like to thank the Hansard staff, the time keepers and the attendants for their support today. That concludes the committee's consideration of the matters referred to it by the parliament on 21 April 2006. I declare this public hearing closed.

Mr CUMMINS: If I may just say in closing remarks.

CHAIR: Minister.

Mr CUMMINS: I would like to thank you, Mr Chair, and all members of Estimates Committee F. The estimates process is a very important part of government in Queensland. I also thank the officers of the parliament for their efforts in ensuring a smooth hearing. I have made it pretty clear here today that small business, information technology and multicultural affairs are priority areas for the Beattie government. They are an essential part of the Smart State. I am very proud to represent those people at the cabinet table. I thank the officers from the Department of State Development and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet for their efforts across my portfolio.

With regard to the first question I took on notice from the member for Maroochydore regarding staff numbers, I think the member referred to \$50 million allocated to employee expenses under the business and market development and innovation output on page 1-11. The cost of the staff directly associated with my portfolio is a subset of that. Regarding question 2 taken on notice, grants for the business and market development and innovation output on page 1-11, I point out that I have given this information to you in question on notice No. 3. I table it for your information.

Miss SIMPSON: Can we clarify whether the minister is still taking on notice that figure because that was not provided.

Mr CUMMINS: I have given you this information in question on notice No. 3 so I table it.

CHAIR: Is leave granted.

Leave granted.

CHAIR: Once again, I declare this meeting closed.

Committee adjourned at 5.23 pm.