

## THURSDAY, 19 JULY 2007

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### ESTIMATES COMMITTEE G—LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

#### Estimates Committee G Members

Mr ER Moorhead (Chair)  
Mrs EA Cunningham  
Hon. KW Hayward  
Mr MJ Horan  
Mr PJ Lawlor  
Hon. KR Lingard  
Mrs JR Miller

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#### In Attendance

Hon. MF Reynolds, Speaker  
Mr N Laurie, Clerk of the Parliament  
Ms S Davies, Deputy Clerk  
Mr M Hickey, Director, Corporate and House Services  
Mr C Atkinson, Manager, Financial and Administrative Services  
Mr S Gay, Executive Officer, Office of the Speaker  
Mr M Coburn, Manager, Information Technology Services

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#### Committee met at 9.02 am

**CHAIR:** I declare this meeting of Estimates Committee G open. Can I first start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which this hearing is taking place this morning. On behalf of the estimates committee, I welcome the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland, officers of the Queensland Parliamentary Service and members of the public to this hearing. I am Evan Moorhead, member for Waterford and chair of the committee. Mr Mike Horan, the member for Toowoomba South, is the deputy chair. The other committee members are Mrs Liz Cunningham MP, member for Gladstone; the Hon. Ken Hayward MP, member for Kallangur; Mr Peter Lawlor MP, member for Southport; the Hon. Kevin Lingard MP, member for Beaudesert; and Mrs Jo-Ann Miller MP, member of Bundamba.

The committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2007 for the areas set out in the committee's order of appointment dated 23 May 2007. These are the Legislative Assembly; the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries; the Minister for Communities, Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships and Minister for Seniors and Youth. The portfolios will be examined in that order. The committee will adjourn proceedings for the following periods of time: morning tea from 11 am to 11.15 am, lunch from 1 pm to 2 pm, afternoon tea from 3 pm to 3.15 pm and a break for a change of staff from 4.15 pm to 4.30 pm.

Today's proceedings are lawful proceedings and are subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. Members of the parliament are welcome to observe the proceedings but may not participate in the proceedings. In accordance with standing order 206, any person admitted to this hearing may be excluded at the discretion of the chair or by order of the committee. I ask that everyone please turn off or turn to silent mode all mobile phones and pagers.

In relation to media coverage of the hearing, the committee has resolved that the proceedings of the committee be broadcast by way of film and audio broadcasts and that photography be allowed during my opening statement and the introductory statements of each minister and the Speaker as well

as for a short period during each changeover in organisational units. The committee has also resolved to allow the live broadcast of the hearing via the Parliamentary Services web site and to receivers throughout the parliamentary precinct.

I remind members of the committee, ministers and the Speaker that under standing orders 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 standing orders require that at least half the time available for questions and answers be allocated to non-government members. Any time expended when the committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between government and non-government members.

The committee has resolved that non-committee members be given leave to attend and ask questions during the hearing today. The member for Gregory, Mr Vaughan Johnson, and the member for Currumbin, Ms Jann Stuckey, will attend the hearing and seek leave of the committee to ask questions. The member for Hinchinbrook, Mr Andrew Cripps, will attend the hearing and is in the room now.

To assist Hansard, I ask departmental and Parliamentary Service officers to identify themselves when they first come forward to answer a question if a question is referred to them by the Speaker or a member of the Legislative Assembly. I declare the proposed expenditure for the Legislative Assembly open for examination. The time allocated is one hour. I remind members of the committee that standing order 115 applies to these proceedings. Accordingly, I will not allow questions which would reflect on the character or conduct of the Speaker. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

**CHAIR:** Mr Speaker, do you wish to make an opening statement?

**Mr SPEAKER:** Yes, thank you, Mr Chairman. I say good morning to all the members of the committee who are here. I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which this parliament stands and the custodians of the sacred lands of our state. The 2007-08 budget estimates for the parliament are the first for which I am directly responsible as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland and I feel privileged today to appear before your committee.

As committee members would be aware, the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill seeks to provide funding for salary and allowances for members of the Legislative Assembly and funding for the Parliamentary Service, which provides administrative and support services to the Legislative Assembly. The total appropriations sought for the parliament in 2007-08 is \$64.27 million, an increase of 10.5 per cent over last year's appropriation. The increase is required primarily to meet enterprise bargaining salary increases for staff, salary and allowance increases for members, and to undertake a major capital program to refurbish commercial kitchen facilities in the Parliamentary Annexe. One of the challenges in framing a budget for the parliament is achieving a balance between the needs of members as individual representatives and the collective needs of the parliament and the wider community. I think we have achieved that balance pretty well.

In my first budget as Speaker I was determined to ensure that the component of the budget devoted to the administration of the Parliamentary Service addressed those collective needs of the parliament and the community. I believe that I have achieved this through the relocation of internal resources to allow for the creation of a new suboutput for the Parliamentary Service, the Community Engagement Unit.

In December the Clerk of the Parliament and I commenced a review of the strategic direction of the Parliamentary Service, and we held strategic planning sessions with key managers and staff across the Parliamentary Service. At those sessions we identified a need to improve the way in which the Parliamentary Service supports the Queensland parliament in supporting its committees and its members to engage with the community. In particular, we identified a need to focus on engagement with young people, regional Queenslanders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As a result, the new Community Engagement Unit was established at the beginning of this month. There are nine staff in the unit. Six existing staff have come from Parliamentary Education, media, multimedia and publications, and parliamentary history. Three new staff will be employed—a manager, an Indigenous liaison officer and a protocol officer.

Building on what I believe is an excellent track record, Parliamentary Education will now include outreach programs for regional Queenslanders. It will come as no surprise to the committee that, as a regional parliamentarian, a former regional minister and now a regional Speaker, I see this area of regionalism as very important in terms of outreach. Our outreach programs will extend across regions and include young people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. There will be seminars, workshops, conferences and youth parliaments for educators, secondary school students, university students, public servants, members and their staff and other client groups, and educational information resources for use in educational institutions and by the wider community. Media and communications will be developed to promote parliamentary activities and events in order to improve community understanding and awareness of the role and activities of the Queensland parliament.

The new protocol officer and the new Indigenous liaison officer will coordinate official visits to the parliament and advise on protocol related matters including Indigenous protocol as well as international and multicultural protocol. It will provide secretariat support that has not been available in the past for parliamentary friendship groups and other parliamentary groups such as the Parliamentary Lions Club and provide support for the Indigenous engagement strategy.

The first priority of the new Community Engagement Unit will be to work with me and our partners to develop a major new community engagement strategy to be launched later this year. I am very excited to see the parliament embarking on this journey. This is very much a bipartisan approach. All the work we have done so far has reached across to all the different members of parliament. As a bipartisan Speaker, that is my aim and indeed that is where I will be going.

In closing, I would like to thank the Premier and the Treasurer. We have had good cooperation in regard to the CBRC process. I would like to thank the Clerk of the Parliament, his directors and managers and the staff generally for the professional commitment that they bring to their work in the Queensland Parliamentary Service. I want to place on record today in particular my thanks to John McDonough, the Manager of Property Services, for his sterling efforts over the last 15 years. John commences his preretirement leave tomorrow and officially finishes with the parliament I think in a number of months time, but I would like to thank John McDonough in particular for the sterling effort that he has made. I would also like to thank the staff of the Speaker's office for their ongoing professionalism and support. Mr Chairman, I wish the committee well in its deliberations and I look forward to the questions that we are going to be asked, and the constructive comments that we might be able to make as well.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. The first period of questioning is allocated to non-government members. I call the member for Toowoomba South.

**Mr HORAN:** Mr Speaker, thank you for the way that you have been leading the parliament in the time that you have been Speaker. With regard to pages 8 and 9 of the MPS, I would like to ask you about the Parliamentary Annexe. The annexe has been in place for 30 years now and in that time it has become a hive of activity, with more staff than ever and about a thousand visits and functions to the parliament per year. Probably one of the most important things for members of parliament is to vote in the parliament. There is a serious problem with the lifts. Many members of parliament who perhaps would not be described as elite athletes often have to run down seven flights of stairs and a couple of hundred metres to get into the parliament in time to vote. Do you have any plans, particularly regarding the health and safety of some of these people, to improve the lift service so that in busy periods they can access the parliament in time?

**Mr SPEAKER:** I would like to thank the deputy chair and member for Toowoomba South for the question he has asked. I think it is one that has been on all of our minds. Certainly since I have been a member of parliament—I am in my 10th year—there have been members caught on occasions in regard to the lifts.

I received a letter earlier this year from the deputy leader of the coalition, the member for Maroochydore, regarding the lifts servicing the Parliamentary Annexe. As a member who has been provided with an office and accommodation in the annexe towers at various times during my parliamentary career, I can personally empathise with fellow members frustrated by the delays that arise when waiting for lifts to arrive. At a very personal level, having gone down those numbers of stairs and having had aches in the backs of my legs for a number of days after doing so, I empathise very much from a body perspective as well.

You are correct in saying that the number of lifts contained within the annexe tower has been an issue since the building was first opened in 1979. I am advised that during the course of construction, or very early in the building process, it was decided to increase the number of floors in the building by an additional four levels. Unfortunately, there was no similar planning at that stage to increase the number of lifts to cater for this additional traffic.

You may be aware that an option study was undertaken in 1989 by the Department of Public Works to explore potential solutions to the efficiency problems that had already become apparent at that time. Predictably, the study found that the only possible option to significantly enhance efficiency would be the construction of additional lifts within the tower. As you would appreciate, progressing this option would require a massive funding injection beyond the capacity of the Parliamentary Service and would cause a considerable amount of disruption to the operations of the precinct.

I have an open mind on this issue. I will shortly be putting together an all-parliamentary committee which will consist of government members and opposition members, and Independents will be represented on that committee as well.

What I would like to identify in regard to the real needs that exist, not only now but also in the next 10 years or so, are what are our particular priorities. This will be an expensive exercise. As a Parliamentary Service we do not have, as you would appreciate, the money to go ahead with that. We would be going cap in hand to CBRC. I would like to get that all-party parliamentary committee started

over the next month or so. Putting that committee together has been on my mind now for the last few weeks—getting an all-representative group who can advise me and be reflective of the parliament. I think the lifts are a problem and I have an open mind in regard to where we can take it from here.

**Mr LINGARD:** I refer to pages 8 and 9, capital acquisitions. What plans are in place to increase the capacity of the Parliament House computer network to save and handle the increased size of electronic files, including increasing the size of Parliament House mailboxes?

**Mr SPEAKER:** Our information technology system is extraordinarily important for all of us in an age where our dependency in this area is so high. In regard to information technology, it is a priority area for us. Over the last few years we have done a lot of work, as you would know, to enhance our system. Because of the in-depth nature of your question I will confer with the Clerk for a moment. I might ask if we could get the ICT manager to give an explanation of where we are at and to look directly at that question you have asked. I call on our ICT manager, Mike Coburn, to expand on that question you have asked.

**Mr Coburn:** We are continually reviewing plans for capacity of storage of all files on our network, including emails. Over recent times—I think over the last 12 months—we have increased the size of mailboxes to the electorate offices. Originally they were 10 megabytes, they then went through to 20 megabytes and I think they are now 50 megabytes in capacity. That is being reviewed. As we update our infrastructure and make more capacity available we continually review the size.

In light of that, we also have to consider the communication links between offices here and the remote offices. The way the systems are designed is if there are issues with connectivity it becomes an issue for the electorate officers to download and effectively access those stores. We are mindful of the situation. We did put forward a proposal when we last refreshed the hardware in the electorate offices to allow more storage of electoral office information on the central computers here in parliament, but at that stage many members declined that offer because of concerns regarding security and continuity of their own data. In that case we actually enhanced some of the storage capacities out in the electorate offices. As I said, this is an ongoing process and we obviously have an open mind to that. Obviously we are very mindful that we give you the appropriate services that you require.

**Mr SPEAKER:** I will add to that by saying that the consultative committee that I am going to be forming over the next month can take these sorts of issues in a live way and certainly take on board and perhaps survey in the normal way we would. Sometimes, in terms of the equipment we have in our electorate offices, it does vary in the Parliamentary Service. The consultative committee will look at issues like this in a real way, report back to me and, of course, work with our staff in that regard as well.

**Mr HORAN:** Catering in the parliament is very extensive for special awards functions, school children's groups, seniors' visits, group visits, parliamentarians dining in the area and public dining. A little while ago the parliament moved away from employing Queensland staff that were on a permanent basis or semi-permanent casual basis to employing contract casual labour—large amounts of contract labour—which appear to be mostly people from overseas. They are very pleasant young people, mostly backpackers and so on. There seems to be an incredible amount of training required almost on a daily basis for these staff because of the high turnover. I think it puts excessive demands on the senior staff here. Secondly, I also wonder about what security checks there are. Whilst they are pleasant young people, they are from other countries and they are in the midst of everything that happens in this parliament.

**Mr SPEAKER:** I thank the member for Toowoomba South for the question. When we look at the variety of staff that we have in the Parliamentary Catering Service, we have our permanent staff who have been here for many years and do a sterling job for us, we have our permanent part-time staff and we have our casual staff. The casual staff have traditionally come from employment agencies. You are referring to the latter group who are quite often young people from overseas who come from those employment agencies.

I want to say very strongly today that my preference is to employ permanent staff rather than casual staff. Certainly striking the balance can be difficult. Striking the balance between the actual number of core permanent staff and casuals is a challenge, particularly given the peaks and troughs in demand—that is, with the House sittings and the function trade. Given the fact that we have actually had over 50,000 people coming through Parliament House for functions in the last year shows, firstly, the very good quality and professionalism of the running of functions and the quality of the food and the service we are giving them.

I know that different Speakers too can have different views about the extent to which permanent and casual staff are employed. Over the last two years there has been a move towards establishing permanent positions in lieu of casuals. Consideration is now being given to the current practice of using employment agency staff for kitchenhand duties and the possibility of hiring a permanent Parliamentary Service employee in lieu of agency staff.

In essence, I agree with what you are putting today. There is a balance you need to have with regard to permanent and casual staff. If we look at the number of staff that we have in that area, in catering staff generally over the last year we have had 23.8 permanent staff; approximately 2.5 full-time equivalent temporary staff; and we have also spent about \$230,000 on employment agencies. At the end of the day what I have indicated to the Clerk and to the Parliamentary Service generally is that we should be looking at our permanent staff as a priority. But I do know that there is a balance required. To have more permanent staff you would then have a greater parliamentary expenditure. It is really about meeting that balance. I am in favour of permanent staff rather than part-time permanent staff or rather than casual staff, but we do need to have a balance and look at the bottom line effect as well.

**Mr LINGARD:** On page 14 of the SPS, under the heading 'Income Statement', note 9 reflects an increase in supplies and services due to a deferral of minor projects from 2005-06. Which projects were deferred and at what cost, have those deferred projects been carried over to this financial year or have they been scrapped?

**Mr SPEAKER:** I thank the member for Beaudesert for the question. Can I clarify that you are talking about page 14?

**Mr LINGARD:** Note 9.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Increase in supplies and services due to deferral of minor projects from 2005-06 and the introduction of a new asset accounting policy; is that the area you are referring to?

**Mr LINGARD:** Yes.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Can we take that on notice and give you those facts shortly?

**Mr HORAN:** I want to ask you a question about rainwater. In my previous question I asked about security checks on overseas people. Could you possibly answer that as well in this next answer?

**Mr SPEAKER:** Yes.

**Mr HORAN:** I think we have all noticed the big rainwater tank located between the Parliamentary Annexe and Parliament House itself. I was going to ask you about the full potential of water harvesting in this place. I do not expect you to have those details, but if you would be able to provide the committee with the flat roof area of the complex and the average rainfall for this area and what the water harvesting potential is. I think there is a formula of a litre per square metre per millimetre of rain. It may be that there is a greater potential for water to be harvested to be available for use within the building or outside to maintain modest gardens in this particularly dry time.

**Mr SPEAKER:** I thank the member for Toowoomba South for the question. First of all, we have done a lot of work on the water conservation area and we are very, very pleased with the results we have had. During 2006-07 a rainwater harvesting system was introduced within the precinct for the first time. The objective of that system is to reduce whenever possible the call on the town water supply by the building's air-conditioning systems. The first step involved the installation of the 125,000 litre water storage tank between the Parliamentary Annexe and Parliament House, a rainwater harvesting system that allows, through systems of pipes and drums, stormwater from the annexe to be directed to the tank. Also we have the air-conditioning condensate recycling systems that allow, through various pipes and pumps, condensate water generated by the major air-conditioning units to be directed to the tank. The water that is stored in the tank is then available for two purposes: to supplement the current town water supply used for air-conditioning cooling tower requirements by pumping water from the tank up to the cooling towers; and, where possible and required, to supplement lawn and garden watering.

The cost of installing that system has been about \$151,000. That harvesting system became fully operational in June 2007. Since that time approximately 180,000 litres has been harvested from stormwater and air-conditioning condensate and approximately 140,000 litres of this water has been pumped up to the cooling towers. The quantity of the water harvested is largely dependant upon the weather conditions, particularly stormwater. It is therefore expected that over time and at different periods of the year the levels of water recycled and harvested will fluctuate.

If the water tank was full and it was not supplemented with rainwater it could provide a proportion of the total cooling tower requirements for approximately three to four weeks before the tank would be fully empty. With regard to your questions in relation to how many square metres of roofing there are and how we could actually harvest not just from the stormwater but from the roofs as well, I will get that information to you. In that regard I suppose in many ways we are looking at the cost and the return and the outcome that we are going to get.

Going back to the question in regard to security, you quite rightly point out that we did not adequately cover that. I will ask the Clerk if he would not mind just adding to what we have been asked in regard to security.

**Mr Laurie:** Certainly any casual staff that come through an employment agency per se would go through the normal screening procedures that we would have for any non-cardholder within the precinct. They would not enter the precinct without going through a security screening process like any other visitor to the precinct. We do not run criminal checks or anything of that nature on those people. We do, I suppose to a very large degree, rely very much on the physical passing through of security that we would normally have for anyone that enters the precinct who does not hold a card. I take your concerns on board.

Can I supplement Mr Speaker's answer about the balance of permanents versus casuals. We have been trying to move towards a more permanent staffing base. I think we did reach a stage that was unacceptable in terms of the number of casuals versus the number of permanents. I think in the last couple of years we went from 19 permanents up to about 23.5 or 24 permanents.

**Mr SPEAKER:** An increase of about four.

**Mr Laurie:** That is over the last two years. In an environment of very low unemployment it is very difficult sometimes to actually obtain staff with the requisite skills. I know that we have had some difficulties with recruitment to such an extent that we have another permanent full-time position that we did not feel we had anyone adequate to fill the job so we will go out and readvertise it towards the end of the month.

**Mr LINGARD:** I refer to page 1 of the SPS and your positive role in the community. I also refer to the previous question. The school based traineeship program in high schools has been a very successful program. Programs in hospitality, IT, horticulture, office administration, cheffing and waitressing would be some of the apprenticeship programs which could be successful at Parliament House. Recent Speakers have not allowed the program to be conducted at Parliament House. Will you allow the school based traineeship program at Parliament House?

**Mr SPEAKER:** Since I have been Speaker that particular matter has not been brought to my attention. I should say to you that I am very strongly in favour of school based traineeships taking place throughout the employment. I have spent part of my time in public life trying to encourage both private and public employers to take on these types of traineeships.

Generally speaking over the last 15 to 20 years I do not think the public sector—generally at all levels of government—has enhanced their priorities with regard to apprenticeships and traineeships. If one looks back 15 to 20 years local governments, state government bodies and federal government bodies spent more time in their own areas in terms of apprenticeships and traineeships. I know of some excellent examples of state government departments that have done exactly the same.

I would be very happy to enhance that particular area. I have been informed by the Clerk that one of our existing staff started as a school based trainee. That person started as a trainee catering attendant and has now moved up to a 60 per cent position as a catering attendant. There is now a vacancy for a 40 per cent trainee catering attendant which we are currently trying to fill.

**CHAIR:** The time allocated for questions from non-government members has expired. I call the member for Bundamba.

**Mrs MILLER:** Further to your answer to a question on notice and also following up on Mr Horan's previous question on rainwater, I note on page 9 of the SPS that reference is made to rainwater harvesting tanks. Can you please advise what action has been taken in relation to these tanks and also the success of the program to date?

**Mr SPEAKER:** Adding on to what I was indicating in the answer to the question I was asked by the member for Toowoomba South I think what we have done in terms of rainwater harvesting has been done at a time when rainwater harvesting was naturally required out of every public body and private enterprise as well. I think the people of south-east Queensland should be congratulated on the measures they have taken.

I turn to the work that we have done in the rainwater harvesting area. As I was indicating before, this is largely dependent upon the weather conditions, particularly stormwater. At a time when we are looking for very good rains, frequent storms and rains that do not seem to be occurring in the south-east this is the time when we would be filling our tanks as well.

There are certain circumstances where the cooling towers would not need to draw on any town water. This occurred in the week ending 18 June. Because of the ideal climatic conditions—the low temperature and humidity—the cooling towers did not draw any town water for the entire week. Instead the cooling towers operated using 28,770 litres of harvested water only.

It is expected that the system will be at its most effective in summer when summer storms provide stormwater to the tank and when demands on the air-conditioning cooling towers are great. The main point I would make in looking at the rainwater harvesting system is that many of the things—it is a little bit like the debate we are having now with regard to climate change—we are looking at doing are things that we should have done decades ago. There are things we did decades ago—like having rainwater

tanks—that we got rid of. We have all been challenged to understand how much water we can harvest. I am quite willing to take on board—and I will get back to the member for Toowoomba South—issues like the square metres of roof. Again you have to look at the cost of doing that and the outcome you may actually get. All public buildings could do that.

We have brought into play a number of other initiatives such as outdoor gardening initiatives. The rainwater collection tanks at the rear of the annexe and also on level 7 of the annexe are being used to assist with the watering of indoor and some outdoor plants. We have seen the installation of ecobags to all external trees. This allows water to trickle feed over a long period. Soil wetting agents have been added to gardens and potted plants.

I know of a colleague of mine on Magnetic Island, in my electorate, who has used that sort of system all his life. Sometimes we come about using these systems in times of severe drought. There has been the use of the Wet Wheelie water delivery system for the recycling of water from the main kitchens. We see some pretty innovative things we can do.

**Mr HAYWARD:** Mr Speaker, I want to follow-up on a question that has been previously asked by the member for Toowoomba South. I refer to your answer to a question on notice in relation to emergency lighting and signage on level 7 of the Parliamentary Annexe. Mr Speaker, what other improvements have been made to this area and why were they made?

**Mr SPEAKER:** I think what we can show here is that over the last two years the Parliamentary Service has been listening to the needs of members and those who visit this precinct and making sure that it has programs to enhance the safety and security of visitors. Over the last two years a program of upgrades to level 7 infrastructure has been undertaken with a view to ensuring the safety of visitors, including children, when attending level 7 of the Parliamentary Annexe.

All of us know how popular that area is and how competitive it is at times to hire it. In my answer to the question on notice I outlined details of the emergency lighting and the signage improvements. However, there have been two other safety improvements implemented that I am pleased to advise the committee about as well.

This includes stainless steel handrails. In early 2005 a safety health risk was identified on level 7 of the annexe. On a number of occasions function patrons had been observed placing themselves and/or children on the parameter parapet wall to gain a better view of the activities either on the river or at South Bank. This presented a great safety risk given the distance to the ground level. Patrons have also left empty glasses and bottles on the parapet where they could easily fall on to level 3 endangering those who may be working or attending other functions.

The Department of Public Works was engaged to design a handrail that would reduce the degree of risk for guests and those in the Parliamentary Service. The handrail was approved and the installation carried out over two financial years. Some \$69,991 was spent in 2005-06 followed by \$100,588 in the next financial year.

There are new barbecues. The barbecue equipment on level 7 was originally made available to members and their families to hold small barbecues. Basic domestic barbecues were supplied for the intended application. Over time the frequency and the load on the barbecue area has increased to the current situation where this area is a Parliamentary Service function venue catering for up to 65 people per barbecue and at times in excess of these numbers.

Over the last several years there have been a number of incidents involving the use of barbecues on level 7. These incidents involved visitors and staff experiencing injury while attempting to light barbecues and/or operate gas bottles. It is possible there have been unreported incidents as well. Subsequent and regular equipment checks determined that, while the equipment was in good, safe working order, it was occasionally being operated by individuals who did not possess any general knowledge of the procedures required when utilising LPG bottles.

Following an investigation by the parliament's workplace health and safety coordinator the Workplace Health and Safety Committee recommended the purchase of new equipment that would reduce significantly the risk of injury. We see this area of workplace health and safety as an extraordinarily important area. In fact, we have a new staff member starting this year in a workplace health and safety full-time position. We know that with the number of people here and the number of people visiting there is a risk of injury. We want to make sure we reduce that.

**Mr LAWLOR:** Further to your answer to a question on notice in relation to the video broadcast of the parliament can you please provide the committee with some additional information about this project, including funding for recurrent costs associated with the broadcast and the extent to which the video broadcast has been accessed by the community since it went live in June?

**Mr SPEAKER:** I thank the member for Southport for the question that he has asked. As I mentioned in the answer to a question on notice, the project to provide a video broadcast of parliament was completed in the last financial year with the historic full broadcast occurring during the June 2007 budget sittings.

The initiative provides for the video broadcast of parliamentary proceedings held in the Legislative Assembly chamber and the Legislative Council chamber. This is the first time estimates has been afforded the opportunity to have live audio and live video going out on the internet. I suppose the real challenge now is to look, as New Zealand has done, at getting someone like Sky Channel to occasionally look at the opportunity of people linking into the broadcast of parliament. Whether there is an interest there, we will have to wait and see. Certainly there may be for question time. We will be looking at those opportunities.

The system delivers an external broadcast over the internet, an audiovisual feed to the media gallery, an internal broadcast on the closed TV network within the precinct to complement the existing panning vision which remains and an internal broadcast over our computer data network. As I noted in my answer to the question on notice, the capital infrastructure provided for the project was some \$510,000. It included six new broadcast quality digital cameras in the Legislative Assembly. That was increased after consultation with the media to ensure that the different perspectives we could get were adequate. It does include two new broadcast quality digital cameras being used for the first time in the Legislative Council chamber, a control room to allow technician control or different camera feeds, editing, captioning and archiving, various cabling and a computer server to process broadcast signals for distribution over the internet.

Funding for the ongoing recurrent costs of the project was approved by government as part of the 2006-07 process. The recurrent costs are estimated at something like \$111,000, including staffing for technicians to operate the broadcast console and an additional internet service provider cost to stream the web broadcast as well.

Broadcasting the parliament was a government election commitment back in 2001. We have now achieved that, first of all by audio broadcasting back in 2003. This year we have been able to achieve the video broadcast as well. I think this is really about bringing the parliament to the people of Queensland. Again if I could stress, it is important for people in rural, remote and regional Queensland who do not have the opportunity to come to Parliament House as those in south-east Queensland do.

It is an important part of parliamentary democracy—that is, participating and being able to observe parliament. I often feel that the media gives the rest of Queensland the perspective of parliament through question time which is a robust time from both sides of parliament. This gives people the opportunity to see legislators making law all hours of the day.

**Mrs MILLER:** Mr Speaker, I refer to page 2 of the SPS and plans for the development of a tabled papers database. Can you provide us with more detail about the background to this initiative and also the cost of the implementation?

**Mr SPEAKER:** I thank the member for Bundamba for that question. I am pleased to say that this is something that we won through the CBRC process. The tabled paper database will be a single repository of electronic copies of all papers tabled in the Queensland Parliament, accessible via the Queensland Parliament web site. The database will contain details of all tabled papers and also store an electronic copy of each tabled paper where is an electronic copy.

Each year, as you would be aware, thousands of papers are tabled in the parliament. In addition, numerous documents are incorporated in the official record—that is, the *Hansard*. Deficiency with the current availability of tabled papers includes that most tabled papers are only available in hardcopy which limits public access to the information, the process of distributing reports on request is labour intensive and costly and, because tabled papers are not always available electronically, they are not widely available to the public resulting in increasing incorporations in *Hansard*.

There is no single access point for electronic copies of tabled papers. There is no absolute privilege for reports published on department and agency web sites. Only the parliament and Goprint have absolute protection for publications. My budget portfolio statement has included the investigation of an initiative to provide access to all tabled papers on the parliament's web site. The database is expected to be implemented during this financial year for future tabled papers, with papers tabled over the last 10 years being added to the database over the next two years to provide an archival record.

Funding has been secured from government to cover the costs of a permanent administrative staffing position to manage the database, including scanning and entry of papers on the database and liaison with departments whose papers have been tabled. In addition, funding has also been provided to cover casual assistance over the next two years—\$50,000 this financial year and \$50,000 for the next financial year—to scan and enter papers relating to the past 10 years. I see this as a very good initiative for the parliament. Again, it improves the access the public has to the parliamentary records. It is certainly I think a very commendable project that we have won support for from CBRC, and I look forward now to the implementation of that project.

It is very important that I just update the answer previous to the question I have just answered. I stated that I believed that there would be two digital cameras installed in the Legislative Council chamber. I have now been informed by the Clerk that after testing it was decided to upgrade the number of cameras to three.

**Mr HAYWARD:** Mr Speaker, I refer to page 6 of the SPS and to the implementation of the One Record project. Can you please outline progress with this initiative and advise of the cost of that implementation?

**Mr SPEAKER:** I thank the member for Kallangur for the question. Again, this is really about improving not only for ourselves as a parliament but for members of the public the way that we record the important information of the parliamentary process itself and the outcomes of course of that process. One Record refers to a project to integrate the *Votes and Proceedings* and *Hansard* as a single document called the *Record of Proceedings*. The *Votes and Proceedings* currently records procedural events in the chamber whereas *Hansard* records what is said in the chamber. The new *Record of Proceedings* will provide one official record of all debates and proceedings—that is, an edited record of what is said in the chamber and a record of procedural events as well.

The *Record of Proceedings* has been produced in parallel with the *Votes and Proceedings* on a trial basis since 23 May 2006. Parallel running has been necessary for two reasons. First of all, there are administrative implications associated with combining records that have to date been produced by different organisational areas—namely, the Table Office and the Parliamentary Reporting Service. The trial period has enabled procedures to be developed and tested, roles and responsibilities agreed upon and a comprehensive form book to be developed. Secondly, the standing rules and orders will need to be amended before the *Record of Proceedings* can replace the *Votes and Proceedings*. This will require a resolution of the House.

It was anticipated that the *Record of Proceedings* would go live at the beginning of the 52nd Parliament. This was not possible due to the earlier than anticipated election. The financial implications are insignificant. Again, this shows enhancement of the parliamentary system as we have it. I think that you will find the One Record being far superior to the two records that we see on a daily basis.

**Mr LAWLOR:** Mr Speaker, further to your answer to a question on notice in relation to electorate office staff training, can you please provide any advice in relation to future electorate office staff training programs?

**Mr SPEAKER:** I thank the member for Southport for the question. I give a very high priority to the training of our electorate staff—our two electorate officers and of course the assistant electorate officer. As I have advised the committee in my response, in the last year we have run four different courses, all of two days duration, and again in 2006-07 those four different courses for two days duration have been run as well. In the 2005-06 financial year we had 71 staff afford themselves of that training and 65 staff in the last course we ran in 2006-07. The training courses have been conducted very much as part of the service's enterprise bargaining commitments. I think it can be well said that in the past we probably have not provided enough training. We have not provided enough training to staff in electorate offices in the metropolitan area or the regional areas.

All of us know how much our electorate staff desire that training and welcome the training that they are getting. The commitment to training is an absolute commitment. It is contained in both the current enterprise bargaining agreement and in the previous EBA, which expired in July 2006. To meet these obligations, a subcommittee of the Agency Consultative Committee—the committee responsible for implementing provisions of the enterprise bargaining agreement—was established. The subcommittee in conjunction with a company called Assure Corporate developed the training program for electorate office staff.

The actual curriculum for the program I think demonstrates where we are in electorate offices today with regard to the very hard work that electorate officers do not only when the member is there but when the member is not there. Day 1 of the course includes training on the following topics: dealing with strong negative emotion during client contact, strategies to manage our own emotions and reactions, communication strategies and tools, assertiveness strategies and tools, dealing with specific difficult situations, and learning how to switch off. I think that probably could be a role for parliamentarians as well, but sometimes we live for this job and sometimes our electorate office staff feel the same way.

Day 2 of the course includes training on the following topics: the Parliamentary Service Code of Conduct, the services of the Parliamentary Library, privacy issues, workplace health and safety, an orientation tour of the parliamentary complex, an overview of the parliamentary process, and a group panel discussion primarily focused on information technology issues. We have had excellent feedback from the attendees of the last two years. For example, in relation to the four courses that were held this year, some of the feedback about day 1 of the course was as follows: 96 per cent of the attendees evaluated day 1 of the program as either good or excellent, 100 per cent of attendees felt the content was relevant to their work needs and 99 per cent of attendees indicated that the course had contributed to their knowledge.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. The time allocated for questions by government members has expired.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM:** Mr Speaker, on page 4 of the SPS you talk about staffing levels, and Kev Lingard asked for a breakdown. Whilst I acknowledge that the total of full-time equivalent staff has increased slightly, I just seek a clarification. The number of Parliamentary Library staff is decreasing from 34.2 to 28.6, which is a significant loss, and also the Deputy Clerk's office is reducing from three to one. In particular, in relation to the library, what additional pressures do you think that reduction will place on staff? What services do you believe could be lost? I would also appreciate a comment on the reduction in numbers in the Deputy Clerk's office.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Can I just say that I am very satisfied that through the strategic planning sessions we held in December last year and also in February this year we have the balance right. When you look at the reductions in the Parliamentary Library we need to appreciate that those people have now gone to the Community Engagement Unit. When you look at the officers who have been transferred to the community engagement area, it is something like 4.6 staff members.

In terms of the Deputy Clerk's office, the multimedia officer was within the Deputy Clerk's office and has now gone to the Community Engagement Unit. So I think that we have the balance right here. I think it is important to ensure that the balance that is required in relation to looking after the needs of our members is an extraordinarily high priority—that is, that our members have the research requirements in the Parliamentary Library and indeed have all of the benefits that they have now continue into the future. We do not dilute that in any way and we will not be diluting it.

Basically what we have done here is look at how we can enhance our operations generally. For example, about six different staff members have been transferred from the Parliamentary Library and Education Services. They all are physically now being relocated to the third floor and they are part of community engagement. There are three new staff members—there is a manager, there is a protocol officer and an Indigenous engagement officer. The six members from the Parliamentary Library and Education Services have indeed gone to the Community Engagement Unit. Sorry, I am just being told that it is 4.6 from the library as I said before. The information I had here is not correct. So it is 4.6 to go to the community engagement area from the Parliamentary Library and one of course from the Deputy Clerk's office.

I feel confident that when we are running a business like the Parliamentary Service we need to absolutely ensure that our needs are changing, and the strategic development of the Parliamentary Service really showed this. If there are gaps in what we are doing now, we need to ensure that we are getting the best efficiency from the areas that we are working with. I feel confident that the balance that we have here is not diluting the Parliamentary Service or the Deputy Clerk's office. I think we are able to go forward in a very positive way.

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

**Mrs MILLER:** Mr Speaker, on page 6 of the SPS you refer to hosting a range of activities to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the 1967 referendum and Reconciliation Week 2007. Could you please provide further details. What was achieved by these activities?

**Mr SPEAKER:** I thank the member for Bundamba for the question. I was determined when I became Speaker that there seemed to me, as I said before, a real need to engage—not re-engage but to engage—with regional Queenslanders, young people and also Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. On 20 February I hosted a dinner at Parliament House for senior representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and members from across the political spectrum. Indeed, at that dinner was the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, the shadow minister and Independent Peter Wellington. From this dinner a working group was established which assisted staff and myself to plan a number of very special events to acknowledge the 40th anniversary of the 1967 referendum and Reconciliation Week 2007.

Some of the things we have done this year are one-off but they are very important one-offs. The 1967 referendum is often referred to as the first stage of the reconciliation movement in Australia and its 40th anniversary provided a significant opportunity to further encourage the Queensland community's interest in reconciliation. The lead that we have here is one that I have taken as the Speaker. I think if we look at the events that occurred from 20 May to 2 June, they included of course the flying of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags alongside the Australian and Queensland flags both outside Parliament House and in the Legislative Assembly chamber, the introduction of the acknowledgement of the traditional owners of the land at the beginning of each parliamentary sitting day, and a Speaker's reconciliation reception including a traditional smoking ceremony. Many of you who attended that—I know a number of you were at that smoking ceremony—were able to see that this is about reconciliation, this is about working together.

I am a member of parliament who represents a very large number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander constituents—about 10 per cent of my electorate is based on that—as are many other members like the member for Charters Towers, the member for Mount Isa, the member for Cook and the member for Gregory. Across the political spectrum of the parliament we can ask ourselves how well we have done in the outcomes that we are actually getting as governments and consecutive governments.

What we have here is a spirit of reconciliation across the parliament working together in a bipartisan way to get much better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Another highlight was the art exhibition held here in the Legislative Council chamber and the commissioning of a didgeridoo that was presented to me on the Thursday before NAIDOC week. That will be presented on the third floor of the parliament next to the mace. There will be the didgeridoo representing the symbolic association—a very important celebration. In many ways some of these things were overdue. I am very pleased that we have been able to initiate them.

**CHAIR:** Because of our slightly delayed start we might head back to non-government members for one question.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM:** I do not think there has been an estimates hearing in recent times when there has not been discussion about an audit of parliamentary articles that have gone missing. Do you have an update in terms of what strategies have been put in place to manage that and has that been stopped?

**Mr SPEAKER:** First of all, as Speaker of the 52nd Parliament, I can say that I do not have anything exciting to say to you with regard to things that may have been found. I am very pleased to advise the committee, further to what the previous Speaker had advised, that since last year's estimates hearing there have been a number of internal control improvements regarding stock control. That includes a subsequent comprehensive stocktake in July 2006 that recovered approximately \$35,000 in silverware previously deemed missing and written off, the introduction of card access security for the new storage facility on level 2 of the Annexe, relocation of a large volume of low-use items from individual trading venues to a centralised store and a number of other things that we have instigated as well.

The BDO Kendalls report was delivered in September 2006. While the BDO Kendalls report found that the internal control for asset management was satisfactory, the report did identify a range of recommendations to improve the accuracy and reliability of stocktake procedures. The recommendations of the BDO Kendalls report were implemented for an interim stocktake of catering silverware and crockery assets which was performed in January 2007. I indicate that the overall stocktake result for the 2006-07 year is a net addition of 180 items at a total value of \$572. To put this result into perspective, the stocktakes conducted in 2006-07 involved over 38,000 individual items of silverware and crockery. The stocktake variance is less than one per cent of total items held. That is well within any minimum threshold adopted in commercial catering environments. I feel very pleased with the conclusion as we have it now.

**CHAIR:** The time allotted for the consideration of the proposed expenditure for the Legislative Assembly has expired. On behalf of the committee, Mr Speaker, I thank you and your officers of the Parliamentary Service for your attendance. The transcript of the hearing will be available on the Hansard page of the parliament's web site within approximately two hours. The committee will adjourn for a short period before reconvening to examine the estimates for the portfolio of the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Thank you very much, Mr Chair. I thank all members of the committee for the courtesy that they have shown to me this morning and to the staff of the Parliamentary Service. I look forward to working with all of you over the next year. Thank you very much.

## ESTIMATES COMMITTEE G—PRIMARY INDUSTRIES AND FISHERIES

### In Attendance

Hon. TS Mulherin, Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries

#### **Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries**

Mr J Varghese, Director-General

Mr J Skinner, Deputy Director-General, Delivery

Ms L Lamb, Assistant Director-General, Corporate Capability

Mr B Turner, Executive Director, Strategic Policy

Ms B Woods, Executive Director, Innovation and Biosecurity Investment

Mr M Richards, Corporate Management Accountant

#### **Biosecurity Queensland**

Dr R Glanville, Chief Biosecurity Officer (Acting)

#### **Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority**

Mr C Holden, Chief Executive Officer

#### **Forestry Plantations Queensland**

Dr W Hoey, Chief Executive Officer

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**CHAIR:** The hearing of Estimates Committee G is resumed. The next matter for consideration is the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries. On behalf of the committee, I welcome the minister, departmental officers and members of the public to the hearing. I am Evan Moorhead, the member for Waterford and chair of the committee. Mike Horan, the member for Toowoomba South, is the deputy chair of our committee. The other committee members are Mrs Liz Cunningham, the member for Gladstone; the Hon. Ken Hayward, the member for Kallangur; Mr Peter Lawlor, the member for Southport; the Hon. Kevin Lingard, the member for Beaudesert; and Mrs Jo-Ann Miller, the member for Bundamba.

Today's proceedings are lawful proceedings and subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. I remind all visitors that, in accordance with standing order 206, any person admitted to this hearing may be excluded at the discretion of the chair or by order of the committee. I remind members of the committee and the minister that under standing orders the time limit for questions is one minute and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a double chime will sound at the end of each of these timings. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will sound two minutes after an extension of time has been given. The standing orders require that at least half the time available for questions and answers be allocated to non-government members. Any time spent when the committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between government and non-government members.

The committee has resolved that non-committee members be given leave to attend and ask questions during the hearing. The member for Hinchinbrook, Mr Cripps, will attend the hearing but has indicated he does not intend to ask any questions. To assist Hansard I ask departmental officers to identify themselves when they first come forward to answer a question if a question is referred to them by the minister. Those present are asked to turn off or turn to silent all mobile phones and pagers. The committee will examine now the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2007 for the portfolio of the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries. The time allocated is two hours and 45 minutes. The committee will examine estimates for the portfolio until 1 pm with a break in proceedings from 11 am to 11.15 am. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement?

**Mr MULHERIN:** Yes. Mr Chairman and members of the committee, all budgets are about priorities. When Deputy Premier and Treasurer Anna Bligh handed down this government's 2007-08 budget, this government's priorities—infrastructure, health and education—were clear for all to see. Individual portfolios also have priorities from wages and everyday operational expenses to infrastructure, research and development. A crucial means by which these priorities can be assessed and, if needed, finetuned is through an interaction at grassroots level with staff and stakeholders.

In Primary Industries and Fisheries Dialogues for Actions have become the norm rather than the exception. At these dialogues director-general Jim Varghese and I have firsthand contact with staff and stakeholders from across the state. The dialogues have resulted in actions which have not only taken place but then related back to those involved. The forums have included dialogues with groups including and on topics such as Cyclone Larry—and I make mention that the federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Peter McGauran, participated in that through that dialogue process—the thoroughbred racing industry, sugarcane smut, Traveston Crossing Dam, Queensland Farmers Federation, Fisheries Futures Forum and the Inshore Management Plan, investment bankers and Biosecurity Queensland stakeholders to name a few. The discussions have taken place across the state in places such as Brisbane, Mackay, Bundaberg, Gympie, Goondiwindi, Gladstone, Tully, Atherton Tableland and also Biluela.

These forums have been valuable forums at which, once again, the director-general and I, together or individually, have encouraged staff to raise issues, solutions or concerns with the workings of the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries. Discussions have been frank and beneficial. Action plans with specific strategies are developed and agreed to by participants. These plans include responsible officers and agreed completion dates for actions. They form the basis for practical steps to drive evaluation and excellent performance. At these discussions the vast majority of our dedicated staff and stakeholders have shown a willingness to change. Most accept that we cannot cling to the 'good old days' and that the DPIF as a department must evolve alongside the marketplace.

A clear example of DPIF's ability to adapt and of the consultative process in which Dialogues for Action have played a key role is the establishment of Biosecurity Queensland. Stakeholder groups, including industry peak bodies such as Growcom and AgForce, the Local Government Association of Queensland and conservation groups have been engaged in the establishment of Biosecurity Queensland. Queensland has a strong biosecurity record but a department expecting industry to adapt, grow and function better must do likewise. Our aim, with industry input, is to have a biosecurity service that becomes a template for other states, providing the highest possible standards of service to Queensland. It is a priority. It is a 2007-08 budget priority.

The year 2007-08 will be the first full year of the new agency Biosecurity Queensland, which brings together all of Queensland's biosecurity functions under one organisation. Its establishment is supported by an investment of \$82.5 million to secure our domestic and international markets, support the tourism industry and meet the community's needs for safe produce and a safe environment. Biosecurity Queensland is not just the result of an election promise, it is not just a new badge; its aim is to become an organisation fuelled by collaboration between the government and stakeholders to ensure ongoing profitability and sustainability of our primary industries and fisheries.

Mr Chairman, when I released the June 2007 Prospects Update, primary industries and fisheries' gross value of production for the 12-month period was estimated at \$10.485 billion. That figure cannot be ignored. Primary industries cannot be overlooked. As well as earning about \$6 billion in export income each year—about 23 per cent of total state exports—primary industries employ around 15 per cent of the workforce, or approximately 140,000 people statewide. There are clear goals and there are clear priorities. To ensure that those priorities are right, DPIF will continue to maintain contact with stakeholders at the grassroots level.

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

**Mr HORAN:** Minister, in your opening remarks you mentioned Anna Bligh's budget. I would also like to make the comment that for the first time ever the Treasurer did not mention in her speech the primary industries of Queensland. On page 1-2 of the MPS, the budget for total expenditure was given as \$332.5 million, which means there is a cut in the budget over five years of nearly six per cent from the \$352 million of 2002-03. When you also take into consideration your answer to question on notice No. 833 about a notional transfer of \$27.5 million from NRW and EPA to the new biosecurity division, it actually means that the cut is more like 13 per cent. Minister, do you confirm and agree with these figures, and can you tell us why the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries sees a cut every year, unlike every other department in the Beattie government?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I think there were about three questions to answer. I will address the first one. To be absolutely frank, I find it amazing, amusing and somewhat hypocritical that the key plank of the honourable member's public budget response was that the Deputy Premier and Treasurer had failed to mention primary industries and fisheries in her budget speech.

That must not have had such a profound effect on the member's parliamentary colleague the Leader of the Opposition, Jeff Seeney. Mr Seeney in his budget reply mentioned primary industries and fisheries not once, not twice, but not at all. So I find this really absurd. What you are saying is a reflection on Mr Seeney and the National Party's commitment to its so-called constituency. I do not think either side has the view that they do not care about primary industries. I will table for the information of the honourable member the speech by Mr Seeney so that he can acquaint himself with it.

You keep harping on about budget cuts. Let me say that our budget is \$332.5 million. It is a four per cent increase on previous years. It is also a fact that when the coalition occupied the treasury bench the department did not receive significant funding. In fact, in the two and a bit years that you were in power you cut 55 people from the department of primary industries.

It should also be noted that during the last election campaign the coalition proposed \$1.6 billion in savings. Regardless of the rubbery figures that were offered by the then coalition Treasury spokesperson, the former MP for Chatsworth, Michael Caltabiano, if you look at that \$1.6 billion in savings across all departments that would mean a funding cut of somewhere between \$19 million and \$30 million to the DPI portfolio. That would have had an impact on the R&D funding which it promised. I think what you have said is meaningless.

In relation to the budget, I would like to take this opportunity to clarify and explain the key reasons for the apparent reduction, as you see it, of \$19.6 billion in the budget allocation from 2003-04 to 2007-08. The major changes in DPIF funding from the 2002-03 estimated actual of \$351.2 million—

**CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Mr MULHERIN:** The honourable member asked three questions. He wanted to know about Anna Bligh making no mention of DPI in the budget. Can we have a ruling first up? If I am expected to answer three questions, do I get extensions of time?

**Mr HORAN:** I get a minute to ask the question and the minister gets three minutes to answer.

**Mr MULHERIN:** You asked three questions in one.

**CHAIR:** If we can have one question at a time.

**Mr HORAN:** My second question to you is about staffing. There have been almost 400 VERs provided to push out experienced DPI staff since the Beattie government came to power. Last May you announced that 100 new staff members would be recruited to offset the 121 VERs you were offering at the time. On *Country Hour* on 6 June you said that the 104 staff who had at that stage taken VERs were replaced by 442 people. That statement was deliberately misleading, because you knew that the VERs are being replaced under the workforce skills agreement by 100 people only. Can you provide us with accurate detail today about how many of those 100 staff to replace the 121 VERs have now been recruited?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the member for Toowoomba South for his question. I reiterate that during the time that the coalition occupied the treasury bench under the Borbidge government 58 people were removed from the department. Last year—in 2006-07—the department made 678 appointments. Therefore, almost 25 per cent of all departmental staff throughout the year were new appointments.

The department finalised 109 VERs during 2006-07. This means that for every one VER the department made more than six new appointments. Two hundred and eight of the new appointments were in the scientific and technical field. That is one in three appointments added straight to the research and development capability of the department. There were 140 permanent appointments made during the year—that is, there were 31 more permanent appointments than VERs made during the year. Five hundred and twenty-seven appointments—78 per cent of all appointments—were in regional locations. There were 42 new appointments in Biosecurity, there were no VERs; there were 277 casual appointments during the year and 25 of those were to support short-term emergency work associated with Operation Farm Clear and sugarcane smut. This is a department that is able to mobilise a large workforce appropriate to the type and location of emergencies.

We have just announced that we will have an alumni in which we will encourage former staff members who have retired to be part of the process to mentor new employees to the department. The department of primary industries is a flexible organisation. It has largely a regionally based workforce. We will continue to focus on the future, with active strategies to continually renew and refresh our workforce and make appropriate changes in response to changing demands and expectation. The department has, I believe, effectively introduced strategies to retain corporate knowledge through, as I mentioned earlier, the alumni process. I will ask the director-general, in the few seconds remaining, if he would like to comment more.

**Mr Varghese:** The alumni initiative is an important initiative. We have already some 60 former staff who have retired registering with the alumni initiative. It is designed so that we can have a group of people who can support the department to facilitate particularly the connection between retired staff and the department. Organisations such as universities have long recognised the significant benefits of retaining links with former employees.

**Mr HORAN:** I refer to page 1-8 of the MPS and a leaked email from the DPIF internet director-general chat line. The email is from a mid-level scientist concerned about the large number of senior scientists leaving Plant Science from high-priority areas of their own accord. When asked why, most say that the climate for scientists within the organisation has changed for the worse. I am talking about people who have many years of experience with the department and who have made strong international representations. These people are critical to attracting external funding and recruiting high-quality scientists. Why are large numbers of scientists leaving your department. What are you doing—

**CHAIR:** That is one question. Minister, three minutes.

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the member for Toowoomba South for his question. It gets back to the issue of the budget where I confirm that there has been a four per cent increase. We also rely on external funding for R&D as well as the core funding that we put into issues relating to scientists leaving the organisation. As scientists leave, we also recruit. It is like any organisation—it is always evolving.

I think the director-general's chat line is an excellent forum for allowing staff to comment on issues. It allows us to adapt to the ongoing changing nature of primary industries. If we have a look at the issue of attracting and retaining high-calibre scientists, we recognise the importance of these scientists in terms of R&D and the performance that we achieve in this area. The department is actively working with other Queensland government agencies to improve the attractiveness of money paid to senior scientists within the Queensland government related to the remuneration paid to scientists at universities and the top scientists at the CSIRO.

The salaries of our top scientists lag behind those in some organisations outside the Queensland government. Whilst higher salary opportunities are important to some scientists, it is by no means the only issue that affect scientists' decisions about their preferred work environment. Many former CSIRO and university staff have chosen to leave those organisations to work for DPI. In fact, we have Professor Beth Woods, who heads up one of the agencies within the DPI, as an example of someone who has left a university to come to work for the department. We really value the work of our scientists.

As I said, the government is looking at ways of attracting and retaining those people. People leave for various reasons: to seek other opportunities or to go overseas and further their studies. In recent months we have recently appointed a Fulbright scholar to the department, which I am immensely proud of. That shows the calibre of people whom we are able to attract. As I said, people leave for various reasons, but at the same time we attract highly qualified and internationally renowned people to come to work for us.

**Mr HORAN:** Page 1-8 of the MPS refers to the intensive animal section. My question is with regard to the intensive livestock environmental regulation unit, which covers all of Queensland, and assesses feedlots, piggeries, dairies, saleyards and so forth. The latest web site at the end of June from your department showed full staffing, and it was incorrect. There were actually only five of the operational staff still there out of the 10. The others had all left up to 18 months ago. There has been an over 100 per cent turnover of staff in that unit. They have not been able to service north Queensland. They have not been able to service dairies or saleyards due to the lack of staff numbers and the lack of staff experience, which is typical of your department. My question to you is: what have you done about the inability of your department to service the needs of the intensive livestock industry, which is an agreement under a memorandum of understanding with the EPA, and which you are clearly failing?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the honourable member for the question. I believe we are not failing. I believe that we are able to address the issues. DPI's role in relation to approvals for intensive livestock operations is as a concurrent agency. It is up to local government to approve that.

I do not on a day-to-day basis manage the microsettings of the department of where people are located. I think these operational matters are best dealt with by the DG and his regional directors, regardless of whether it is in the Toowoomba region, the south-west region or the north Queensland region. They are issues that should be dealt with appropriately by the department, not by the minister. The minister should never interfere in the day-to-day operations of staffing.

I will ask the director-general to comment about the specific nature of the allegation. Before I do that, I will just say that we have addressed all the issues that we have had to deal with across a whole range of biosecurity areas. In relation to the issue of intensive livestock operations, if someone has an application before local government our role is a concurrence agency. I have not had any complaints about the department not being able to provide that advice to local government but I will ask the director-general to address your specific issue.

**Mr Varghese:** As the minister has indicated, we are a concurrence agency. We very professionally handle this process. In fact my deputy director-general for regional delivery, whom I have asked to join me at the table, will take you through our professionalism and commitment in this area.

**Mr Skinner:** Resourcing levels in this area, like all our areas, are monitored on an ongoing basis. In this area, as the director-general has indicated, we have a concurrent agency role. We work very closely with local government on this issue about feedlots and intensive livestock, particularly in relation to piggeries. In this role, we are assessing environmental impacts of the application against the Environmental Protection Act.

Certainly we do monitor workloads and we monitor staffing. It is an area where we have addressed a number of those issues, particularly in the Darling Downs, in recent times. All the issues to my knowledge have been dealt with satisfactorily. This unit does operate across the state. Again, we monitor workloads in that area, but my feedback has been that the work of the unit has been done very professionally and effectively. Certainly local government have been very pleased with our cooperation.

**Mr MULHERIN:** I want to add to that. I know addressing feedlots is a complex issue for any community—

**Mr HORAN:** Minister—

**CHAIR:** I call the member for Toowoomba South.

**Mr MULHERIN:** We have had departmental staff—

**CHAIR:** Sorry, Minister. I have called the member for Toowoomba South.

**Mr HORAN:** Minister, in the output statements for biosecurity—

**Mr MULHERIN:** What page of the MPS?

**Mr HORAN:** That is page 1-25. You have targets of 100 per cent in accordance with defined criteria and you also have that for your estimated actual. You had the same thing last year. If you have a 100 per cent target in accordance with defined criteria, can you tell me why there were five cases in the beef capital of Australia in the Fitzroy shire of feeding swill to pigs—which is one of the most dangerous ways to transmit foot-and-mouth disease and completely banned under the Stock Act—and why there have been no prosecutions, despite the fact that T-bones, bacon and cheese rolls, chicken bones, meat and meat pies were found on five separate occasions in five different locations?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the honourable member for the question. Maintaining good biosecurity is important to protect our economy and the environment and to maintain a way of life that is free from pest and disease. As you rightly pointed out, foot-and-mouth and BSE would have a devastating impact on the beef sector in Queensland, which is worth about \$3.5 billion to the Queensland economy. Not only would it certainly wreck that sector, it would have a damaging effect on our clean, green reputation. With respect to the issues in the Fitzroy council area, I would ask Dr Ron Glanville to address that.

**Dr Glanville:** Can I just clarify which particular output measure you were referring to?

**Mr HORAN:** The output measure was 2.4.

**Mr MULHERIN:** Just ask him the question about Fitzroy. That was your issue, wasn't it?

**Dr Glanville:** The issue relates to swill feeding of stock. The measure in the MPS refers to us meeting defined criteria according to national performance standards. There are defined national performance standards for animal health. We assess ourselves against those standards. We did that recently and we performed well against those standards.

In relation to swill feeding, swill feeding is an offence under the Stock Act and if we receive any complaints we treat them seriously and we investigate them. I cannot comment on any particular investigation at this stage, but we do investigate all complaints against the swill feeding regulation. We take those very seriously. Swill feeding is one of our primary prevention methods against outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease in this country so we do treat that very seriously.

**Mr MULHERIN:** We are part of the national AusVet. We sit on those committees and we take these things seriously. As Dr Glanville indicated, we investigate all these matters. If there is a breach of anything, we will certainly prosecute. It is not in our interest to cover up those things. It is in our interest to make sure industry faces up to its responsibility because it is such a valuable sector of the Queensland economy.

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

**Mrs MILLER:** Minister, I refer to the fourth dot point on page 2-2 of the MPS. Given the difficulties encountered by primary producers and small businesses as a result of Tropical Cyclone Larry and the ongoing drought, what has the QRAA done to assist businesses in these circumstances?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the honourable member for Bundamba for the question. Last year was a particularly difficult one for many Queensland primary producers and small businesses. Weather conditions were extreme. There were those businesses which struggled with the aftermath of Tropical Cyclone Larry and Cyclone Monica where we had too much rain in the far-north, and those which battled with exceptional drought in much of the remainder of the state.

In its role as administrator of the financial assistance programs on behalf of the Australian government and the state government of Queensland, QRAA provided a record level of assistance to primary producers and small business people in 2006-07. Approximately 10,000 applications for financial assistance were received and approximately \$405 million in assistance was approved by QRAA. This level of assistance greatly exceeded the previous record set in 2005-06 of 6,000 applications and \$187.7 million in approvals.

In far-north Queensland, \$106 million was approved in loan and grant packages to businesses affected by Tropical Cyclone Larry and Cyclone Monica. Approximately 440 primary producer businesses received \$88 million of this assistance, and 115 small businesses received the remaining \$18 million. With the continuation of the drought across much of the remainder of the state—in fact I think 62 per cent of the landmass of Queensland is drought declared—assistance under our drought programs has increased to approximately 4,900 applicants receiving \$105 million in 2006-07, which is up from the 2,380 applicants receiving \$66 million in 2005-06.

Despite these seasonal difficulties, it is encouraging to see that a significant number of primary producers were still able to expand or diversify during 2006-07. Approximately 115 producers accessed more than \$20 million under QRAA's development loan schemes. It is also encouraging to see that 38 producers made their first entry into primary production through QRAA's First Start farm program, with loans worth \$12 million. Vegetation management assistance has also been a significant financial assistance program in 2006-07, with in excess of \$100 million in grants being approved mainly under the enterprise assistance component of the program. These grants were able to support a wide range of property development which will greatly benefit businesses into the future. Overall, QRAA has made a significant contribution to primary industries and businesses in this state.

**Mr HAYWARD:** Minister, I refer to the first dot point on page 1-11 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement. How did the government assist producers to remove debris caused by Cyclone Larry?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the honourable member for Kallangur for the question. The destructive winds of Tropical Cyclone Larry caused an unprecedented amount of windblown debris from trees and powerlines and destroyed infrastructure and buildings. This debris was identified as a risk to human and animal welfare and a key impediment to recovery. In fact when the director-general, Peter McGauran, who is the federal agriculture minister, and I visited the cyclone impacted areas on the Thursday after the cyclone, we identified before we even left Brisbane that one of the key components to ensuring an economic recovery would be the clean-up of debris. With the cooperation of other government agencies, we were able to take the appropriate people with us to look at what assistance could be given. Bernie Carlon, from the old Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, came with us. Out of that visit Operation Farm Clear was born.

Operation Farm Clear was something that we proposed as a department to the Premier and the Prime Minister as a way of addressing this issue. I think it is really important to recognise the level of cooperation between the two levels of government. It was through this NDRA funding arrangement that we were able to provide assistance in the form of Operation Farm Clear.

The Operation Farm Clear initiative has been highly successful. It has employed over 200 workers and reached a milestone by providing assistance to more than one thousand properties affected by Cyclone Larry. The properties included 306 beef producers, 220 cane farms, 134 banana farms, 142 other horticultural properties, 70 dairy farms, 87 forestry properties, 10 fisheries, one poultry farm and 70 mixed farming businesses. Operation Farm Clear crews have helped farmers return to production by removing broken and dangerous trees, reopening access to orchards and farm land, and assisting farmers to re-establish their enterprises. Operation Farm Clear played a key role in repairing boundary fences to restrict wandering stock and to ensure public safety on the roads.

Operation Farm Clear had a budget of \$10 million provided jointly from the state government and the Australian governments via the NDRA program. In addition to the NDRA, \$2.5 million under the Community Jobs Plan program provided workers with the appropriate skills in Operation Farm Clear and also for ongoing jobs within primary industries up in that area.

**Mr LAWLOR:** Minister, I refer to page 1-2, dot point four of the second paragraph of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement. What organisational development approaches are being implemented to sustain the new agenda for the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the honourable member for Southport for the question. My department has introduced a range of organisational development strategies and initiatives to ensure the delivery of profitable primary industries for Queensland. Key to these is building a highly constructive culture and strong, strategic change leadership capability. Initiatives include the use of organisational culture inventory which provides an opportunity for staff to identify areas for development.

To complement the organisational culture inventory, my department introduced a leadership impact program in 2006-07 for the two most senior levels of management. Leaders were provided with 360 degree feedback on the impact of their behaviour on the performance of business group staff. They were then equipped with a range of practical strategies to maximise their constructive impact on the workforce. Leadership engagement initiatives that utilise strategies learnt through the leadership impact program—such as industry dialogues—are used as part of our internal business process to meet with stakeholders to cocreate strategies and solutions to business issues.

In 2007 the department also introduced a senior leaders forum titled 'Critical Connections' to create a positive future for DPI comprising the two senior levels of management. The organisation has a new leadership culture initiative. Senior leaders work together to grow purpose and meaning with the core values of the organisation. They work together to link and take a strategic view to lead DPI, not just a functional view. They build a collective, strong relationship to harness the extensive knowledge, expertise and energy in the DPI's senior staff. Further, they create a constructive culture oriented towards achieving self-actualisation, creativity, participation, valuing people and one that places a high priority on healthy relationships between people to deliver the strategic value.

Not only are we doing that at a senior level; we are doing that in regional areas with achievement plans. The director-general and I go out into subregional areas. We get a cross-section of the department from the farm labourer through to the pointy end, be it market economists or a research scientist, and we review the achievement plans. Not only do we do that with our staff; we encourage stakeholders to participate in this very clear and transparent process. The DG and I both cofacilitate that. That enables us to look at what the issues are and how we can be a more effective and responsive organisation that deals with an ever-changing environment.

**Mrs MILLER:** Minister, I refer to page 1-1, paragraph 4 of the MPS. What initiatives is the department developing to boost and retain its smart science and emergency response capability?

**Mr MULHERIN:** The Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries plays a vital role in growing Queensland's diverse economy and protecting the environment for a sustainable future. DPI provides policy leadership, smart science and professional technical trade and business development services to Queensland primary producers. The staff are highly skilled and capable professionals, many of whom have dedicated their lives to primary industries in Queensland. In fact, almost 50 per cent of the department's staff have more than 10 years service.

DPI faces workforce challenges similar to any other agency competing in a global employment market—an ageing workforce, a limited applicant pool and the challenges of remote area employment. The member for Toowoomba South raised this issue about scientists, and it is an issue that confronts any organisation, but we are lucky that we have put in place ways of addressing these issues. As I said, many of our staff are approaching or have exceeded the usual retirement age. The department is keen to continue to use the expertise of these people who have since retired.

As the DG and I indicated earlier, we have now established an alumni, which was launched only last week, I think. We have already had 60 people signing up. Alumni are well used in the university sector, but we believe that this is an important initiative for our workforce. The alumni will provide networking, support and interaction for retired staff who want to maintain close links with their colleagues and work for the department. It will also allow us to keep connected with our generation Y staff, who typically make many career moves through their working life but who may look to return to the DPI in the future.

As I said, often young scientists will start off and then they will leave, go back to a university or go overseas, but if we can create the work environment and have this mentoring there then they will certainly come back with a lot more skills and a lot more to offer. As I said, this mentoring is really important for our young staff, but the alumni will assist us if we have a major biosecurity outbreak, for example, and we need flexible staff. We will be able to call on them to provide that knowledge, understanding and mentoring to these young people who will be required to deal with those issues.

**Mr HAYWARD:** Minister, I refer to page 1-13, paragraph 1, dot point 4 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement. Minister, how has the department's FutureCane project benefited the Queensland sugar industry?

**Mr MULHERIN:** FutureCane was the department of primary industries' three-year, \$5.2 million contribution to the state sugar package, which came out of the sugar industry reform. What was unique about FutureCane was its capacity to provide a suite of services to Queensland sugarcane farmers from farming systems and agronomy to business planning, marketing and economics.

The FutureCane project works across the industry servicing growers, millers, productivity groups, industry representative organisations and service providers to ensure that we maximise the productivity and profitability of the Queensland sugar industry. Over the last three years 12 FutureCane officers worked with individual farmers to design their particular farming systems, to maximise soil health through minimum tillage, controlled traffic techniques and by incorporating nitrogen-fixing legumes in crop rotation with cane. In my own area of Mackay I have seen cane growers now growing peanuts and supplying the industry with peanuts as a good legume. One of the advantages of fellow cane farmers using these practices is that they gain increased long-term profits by minimising their fuel, chemical and fertiliser input cost. This is a real win not only for the cane grower but also for environmental resource managers as well as the environment.

To date FutureCane has delivered more than 2,000 farm visits. One hundred special interest groups have formed and there have been 100 productive group meetings. It has had 15 field days and held 20 farming system workshops. Over 3,000 inquiries have been answered. The FutureCane team also developed a tool called FEAT, which stands for farm economic analysis tool. FEAT is user-friendly, economic decision-making software which assists growers to make informed farm management decisions. It has been used by more than 700 farmers and some mills, and is leading to enhanced profitability in the sugar industry. FEAT has proved especially useful to those growers affected by sugarcane smut, as they calculate their profitability and management strategies across a range and variety of planting scenarios. In 2006 an independent review of FutureCane reported that it was performing well, delivering benefits to the industry. It is seen as integral to the industry.

**Mr LAWLOR:** Minister, I refer to page 1-21, paragraph 1 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement. The Reef Water Quality Protection Plan was developed by the Australian and Queensland governments to address the sediment, nutrient and chemical issues that could affect the health and the future of the Great Barrier Reef. What is the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries doing to help achieve reef plan outcomes?

**Mr MULHERIN:** The Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries is committed to working in partnership with industry and government to achieve the objectives of the reef plan to halt and reverse the decline in water quality entering the Great Barrier Reef lagoon. The department is a lead agency and is responsible for what they call Action D8 of the reef plan, which is a priority action to address the threat that increased nutrient levels pose to the Great Barrier Reef.

In order to address this issue, DPI has contributed to the development of a technical report by the Australian Centre for Tropical Freshwater Research, which identifies nutrient management zones in the reef catchment. Nutrient management zones are priority geographic areas for minimising nutrient run-off such as fertilisers and mill mud. The highest priority nutrient management zones are located in the Wet Tropics—the Mackay-Whitsunday cane-growing region and the Burdekin coastal catchment area.

In conjunction with this technical paper, DPI recently released a discussion paper for public consultation which examines options to better manage nutrients in intensive agriculture, particularly in the reef catchments. Because of the diverse nature of the agricultural industries in the reef catchments, the discussion paper proposes an industry-led, voluntary approach to nutrient management, with solutions tailored to each industry and priorities given to the sugar and horticultural industries.

I think the best way to address this issue is through a voluntary approach rather than a regulated approach. Through requests for submissions and targeted consultation there has been a lot of support for this approach. The department will work with industry, producers and regional NRM groups to achieve the targets that have been set out in this plan.

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

**Mr HORAN:** Minister, I want to ask you a question about an agreement some 12 months ago between the department of primary industries and industry bodies, in particular QFF, regarding the provision of 20 property management officers. That was almost 12 months ago. The grand total of three have now been appointed. How much money do you have in the budget to put on the other 17 property management officers? What is your program in which to put these people on? Give us some time deadlines.

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the honourable member for Toowoomba South. The department is committed to working in partnership with industry to meet the growing community demands for a safe and environmentally friendly approach to farming. Property management systems are an approach designed to enable industry to manage, in particular, the environmental risk associated with primary production. The Property Management Systems Initiative is part of the state government's Blueprint for the Bush in assisting the government to meet its commitments under the memorandum of understanding signed by the Queensland Farmers Federation and the government relating to farm management systems and the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan.

Through the Property Management Systems Initiative, the DPI is redirecting up to 20 officers to help promote the development of PMS and related practices on-farm across a range of industries. The department's investment in the Property Management Systems Initiative will be met by realigning or funding new positions from existing resources within the department. Operating principles for the PMSI were agreed to by peak industry bodies and state agencies. An open and transparent bidding process was designed to allow eligible partners to participate in PMSI. Successful projects will fill the gap in critical service areas.

Following a rigorous assessment process which included considering comments received from peak bodies and state agencies, 13 industry and regional natural resource management groups have been invited to proceed to the second stage to submit full project proposals. I have already announced that the full project proposals from the Queensland Dairyfarmers Organisation, Nursery and Garden Industry Queensland, Mackay Whitsunday Natural Resource Management Group and Canegrowers Isis have been approved by DPI. While it is the responsibility of applicant organisations to develop a project proposal, DPI has and will continue to work with applicant organisations to develop project proposals for industries such as beef, grain and horticulture, and regional NRM groups. The department recognises that issues around the drought and water availability have delayed the development of project proposals by a number of applicant organisations.

Other project proposals have required lengthy negotiations to formalise true partnership approaches and involve key stakeholders to attract additional resources and expertise. For example, the department is working with AgForce to ensure consistency with DPIF's FutureBeef framework and PMSI to enhance FutureBeef extension services. More successful projects are expected to be announced in the coming weeks. PMSI is a transparent process through which DPI works in partnership with key stakeholders to achieve sustainable on-farm practices consistent with increasing profitability.

**Mr HORAN:** I think we all remember the case of the Mining Warden, Frank Windridge, from another department, who was, it was reported in the press, left for many years sitting with nothing to do and being paid. And we remember the industrial cruelty of the Goss-Rudd era where people were sat in the Gulag up on Gregory Terrace with nothing to do. Why do you practice industrial cruelty in your department, whereby people have been pushed out of a position for which they have the expertise into a position where there is nothing to do and are not given a VER despite the fact that you say in answer to a question on notice that you gave to this committee that a further five staff, on top of the ones that were offered, received and accepted VER offers as a result of their positions becoming redundant? There are people in the department who are in the position I have described. It is cruel and callous; why do you continue to do it?

**Mr MULHERIN:** The VER program was about aligning our department to meet future needs. Like any organisation we had to adapt. I stress the issue of realigning our workforce. It was of a voluntary nature. People were not forced to take voluntary early retirements. There were areas that were quarantined. No-one was forced to become redundant. The department actively assists staff to find alternative employment when their position changes or is abolished as a result of organisational change. We spoke earlier about the need to keep abreast with the changing nature of the DPI. It is interesting that I read in *Queensland Country Life* the other week that the National Farmers' Federation was saying the same things: that it has to change the way that it goes about its business to meet the challenges for primary producers in the early part of the 21st century. Likewise, DPI will address those changes.

As I said, with the Workforce Skills Alignment Scheme no-one was forced to accept VERs but there are times, when there are positions that are abolished or the position changes, where the department will work with those people employed who are affected by those decisions to find other areas within the department. I will ask the director-general to add comment to that in relation to that particular issue.

**Mr Varghese:** We actually pride ourselves on good staff management practices. I am not aware of any staff member that has been put in a Gulag type situation—far from it. In fact, we are in our next phase of the workforce renewal strategy with the recruitment of people with contemporary skills and knowledge and deployment of existing staff to strengthen our focus on important areas including sustainable production, science and research, industry extension and development.

Mr Chairman, in relation specifically to the VERs, under the Workforce Skills Alignment Scheme 117 VER offers were made to staff; 104 offers were accepted, with exits between 22 August and 28 February 2007. A further five staff received and accepted VER offers as a result of their positions becoming redundant. I make no apologies for the fact that biosecurity has been a no-go area, meaning that we do not offer VERs as it is, for me, a high-risk area and not suitable for this process.

#### **Proceedings suspended from 11.04 am to 11.17 am**

**CHAIR:** We will resume the examination of the portfolio of the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries. We have 13 minutes left in this session for non-government members. I call the member for Toowoomba South.

**Mr HORAN:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. I want to move to the feedback report that came from the recent staff surveys that reveals that the department's culture has moved from the preferred style of constructive to a passive, defensive approach in which staff try to avoid being blamed for mistakes, treat rules as more important than ideas and do not want to rock the boat. It is similar to staff surveys conducted in 1997, 1999 and 2002. It is common knowledge throughout the various agricultural organisations in Queensland and throughout staff in the DPI that there is a serious issue of staff being brought in who have little or no experience in DPI. They may well be very good at their own particular job, but that causes a difficulty for those staff in the DPI who have experience and want to do things and find it very difficult because of the lack of knowledge of those above them. As a result we have situations such as those examples I mentioned in the earlier session.

This has gone on for a long time and there is a need for a change to bring about a better approach, teamwork and higher morale among the staff. My question is: what are you going to do to bring that about?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the honourable member for the question. I think these organisational surveys are just one of the tools that management can use. I think for me the real tool, which I use, is to get out there and meet with departmental staff, with the director-general coming along. I have encouraged my director-general to get out there and have dialogues with the staff. But, more importantly, I really place a lot of value and gain much knowledge from the performance review with staff and stakeholders. As I said, we did one in Goondiwindi just before Christmas. I found that very encouraging because it was a frank and open dialogue. I had nothing to cover. I think some people would say that it is a bit risky sitting down with the staff and doing a review of their performance and allowing stakeholders to comment on the performance. I have done the same thing in Kingaroy. These things take about four and a half hours to work through, but we get a lot of information on how we can do things better.

I think I have one at Mount Isa coming up next week. I plan on having these five times a year in each of the regions—there are five regions within DPI. I also encourage the stakeholders to come up with a vision for primary industries in those regions so that out of that vision they come up with a business plan, because if we can work cooperatively together at that grassroots level I think we will get a better outcome for primary industries. I have given an undertaking to stakeholder groups and the agripolitical organisations that if they come back with regional business plans I will ensure that we will have the people on the ground to make sure that we can work together in a collaborative way to achieve the outcomes that have been identified in those business plans.

Getting back to the organisational cultural surveys, as I said, it is just one tool that is used by the department. We have given industry an undertaking that myself and the director-general going out and conducting these dialogues will be a continual thing. We will sit down with them and a cross-section of our departmental people in the regions to assess the performance and look at ways of how we can do it better.

As I said, our organisation is one that will muscle up and meet the changes that will occur because of the changing nature of primary industries due to climate change, biosecurity outbreaks or whatever. It is really about getting out there on the ground, hearing what people have to say and ensuring that we can meet the needs of the stakeholders.

**Mr HORAN:** Minister, I want to go back to some of the things that I see happening as a result of your budget cuts, staff shortages, lack of experience and the morale issues that I spoke about in the previous question. I refer to the 100 per cent compliance that I referred to earlier within the biosecurity outputs. Minister, recommendations that are made by the department that are important, such as piggery effluent washing into the Barron River or into Westbrook Creek, are not being followed up by your department due to the lack of resources that I have mentioned. What are you going to do about ensuring that these sorts of important recommendations are undertaken?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I do not know about the individual issues that you are referring to, but I have given a commitment to industry that if they have any issues in relation to performance, come and meet with us and we will work through it. That is why it is so important that I get out into those regions with the director-general, so that we hear firsthand what the ever-changing needs of primary producers are in the region. I cannot comment on those two particular issues. It has not been brought to my attention. One of the things that I am keen on is to sit down with stakeholders to make sure that we can provide the appropriate support so that they can carry on with their businesses in a profitable and sustainable manner. I might ask the director-general if he wants to comment on the specific two cases that you have raised.

**Mr Varghese:** As the minister has indicated, we have, in fact, had three regional evaluations of the department that have included stakeholders and addressed biosecurity issues. On a five-point scale rating—five being very good, one not being so very good—the average is about three and a half to four.

**Mr MULHERIN:** That is on service delivery.

**Mr Varghese:** Yes. When you go into issues like following up recommendations on effluent discharge, we do take those recommendations seriously. Our Chief Executive for Biosecurity Queensland and Dr Ron Glanville, our Chief Biosecurity Officer, work and examine those very closely from the regions. We have very good intelligence feedback. We have regional directors that meet on a weekly basis. They connect with our Deputy Director-General for Regional Delivery and with Biosecurity Queensland. We look at all the issues that come in daily and if there are recommendations of significance we implement them.

**Mr MULHERIN:** The other thing that I have set up is DPI ambassadors. That involves mayors and primary producers who I have contact with about two or three times a year. We sit down and have dialogue. They feed intelligence into me. Those dialogues with staff and stakeholders in the subregional areas are not just a talkfest. All the issues that are canvassed are actually recorded, action plans out of those discussions are developed and that information is handed back. I do not think that you can be more transparent than that. I think that is the correct approach: to get out there at the grassroots level, meet with them and understand their needs and bring about the change in the department.

**Mr HORAN:** My next question is regarding fisheries. I refer to page 1-34 where the expenses show that supplies and services, which were budgeted at \$11.1 million last year and were actually \$11.9 million, are down to \$10.5 million this year, a drop of about \$1.5 million. This area of supplies and services would cover fuel for the boats for the fisheries inspectors. Obviously with fuel prices going up tremendously and the budget being cut by that substantial amount, there will be a serious problem in the supply of fuel to vessels. Can you tell us whether the system of curtailing overtime and weekend work by fisheries inspectors will continue or increase this year because of your shortage of fuel for boats?

**Mr MULHERIN:** The Queensland government continues to be cognisant of the need to maintain a cost-effective fisheries and maritime safety compliance program implemented by the Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol. The Queensland government has ensured over a long period that the patrol is adequately funded so that it can deliver on the government's priorities around the state.

The Boating and Fisheries Patrol delivers on-water services for the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, Maritime Safety Queensland, the Australian Fish Management Authority and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. In 2006-07 the Queensland government provided the patrol with a total of \$13.6 million with an approximate operating budget of some \$5.7 million. The operating budget is used in part to maintain a modern, safe and efficient fleet of boat patrols. The Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol fleet comprises eight large offshore boats equal to or in excess of 10 metres and numerous other boats from three to eight metres.

The Boating and Fisheries Patrol, as you correctly pointed out, is not immune from the rising cost of fuel. From a fuel point of view, the strengthening of the dollar has curtailed any further increases but it has another impact—a negative impact for exporters, I suppose. Getting back to the increase in fuel costs, there is also improved pay and conditions for staff; in some cases reduced funding from external non-Queensland government agencies that have reduced sea patrols. I think that is more to do with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. We have carried out services for it. It has actually reduced the number of patrols that it uses. Also to combat these rising costs and improve compliance, the Boating and Fisheries Patrol applies risk management principles to all the fisheries. This involves an initial risk assessment that identifies and prioritises compliance risk associated with each of Queensland's fisheries. A fisheries compliance plan is then developed from the risk assessment. These plans are implemented via an operational planning process. Ultimately this process will enable the most efficient and effective use of the patrol.

I think more important is the increased use of technology. The vessel monitoring system gives extremely accurate information about the location of the state's trawl fleet. It also means that patrol vessels can now be utilised in more strategic ways. In a nutshell, we have all the issues with rising input costs but we use technology and risk management plans to ensure that we can carry out the functions that we are required to under legislation.

**CHAIR:** The time allocated for questions from non-government members has expired. I call the member for Bundamba.

**Mrs MILLER:** I refer to page 1-32 paragraph 2 dot point 4 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement. The MPS highlights that a new rights based fisheries licensing and fees system was introduced. Can you outline the advantages to the commercial fishing industry from the new fisheries licensing system?

**Mr MULHERIN:** Extensive reforms to the Queensland fisheries legislation came into effect on 1 July 2006. I believe this has resulted in a much simpler licensing system and a fairer fee structure. The new arrangements have given commercial fishers greater business security and have provided them with opportunities to streamline their operations and increase efficiencies. The major changes include: the requirement to renew commercial, charter fishing and buyers' licences has been removed; licence fees are payable quarterly in arrears rather than up-front; some licence types, including separate tender boat licences, crew and assistant fishers licences and charter fishing licences other than for offshore charter fishing have also been removed; minimum quota holding requirements and other restrictions and penalties on quota transfers have been removed; penalties on effort unit transfers and boat upgrades in the east coast otter trawl fishery have also been removed; and individual fishery symbols can be traded between existing commercial fishing licences.

In order to provide the functionality to allow commercial fishers to take full advantage of the reforms, a new computer licensing system—the register of authorities—was developed rather than undertaking major modifications to the previous computer system. A feature of the register of authorities includes an ability to interface with other departmental systems such as the quota monitoring system, the vessel monitoring system and the fisheries catch and effort system and the government's financial system for the purpose of generating fee payment invoicing and updating client details. It holds details of all quota holdings as well as licences which are required for the calculation of fees. It allows easier access by the Queensland boating and fisheries patrol officers and it requires less complex and costly modifications to implement future changes to management arrangements.

Specific details about licences and quota holdings in the register of authorities will soon be accessible online via the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries web site. This will assist fishers who are considering making future adjustments to their licence or quota holdings to make contact with other authority holders. Commercial fishers have generally welcomed the simpler and less restrictive licensing as evidenced by high activity in transactions such as quota and fisheries symbols trading.

**Mr HAYWARD:** Minister, I refer to page 1-14 paragraph 2 dot point 6 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement. What is your department doing to minimise the impact of ticks and tick fever on Queensland's cattle industry?

**Mr MULHERIN:** The Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries provides an extensive range of services to the primary industries of Queensland to minimise the impacts of ticks and tick fever. This includes inspection and clearance services, the manufacture and supply of world class tick fever vaccines and cutting edge research into the design and manufacture of improved tick fever vaccines and tick control methods.

The Queensland cattle industry is well protected through cattle tick inspection and clearance services provided across the state. The biosecurity inspectors work in collaboration with a system of third party providers along the tick line to provide these services. As the member for Southport would know from a couple of his visits to the west and his look at the beef industry, there are currently 13 third party provider arrangements in place across Queensland providing clearance services at 19 centres. Biosecurity Queensland officers provide cattle tick inspection services at the remaining centres across the state.

Recent audits of the third party provider system have confirmed service delivery to be of a high standard. The audit determined that the approved operators and their staff are maintaining a high-quality service to both the department and industry. It is the intention of Biosecurity Queensland to transfer certain cattle tick inspection and clearance services to third party providers at all centres along the tick line.

Biosecurity Queensland's tick fever centre manufactures and markets a quality assured commercial range of vaccines to the Queensland cattle industry. Up to seven million animals in the northern and eastern parts of Australia are at risk of tick fever. The range of tick fever vaccines manufactured by the centre is the most reliable and practical tool for long-term control of the disease. Between 700,000 and 900,000 doses of vaccine are sold each year. To the end of May 2007 a total of 768,965 doses of vaccine have been manufactured and distributed by the centre.

The centre is also actively conducting research and development into improved vaccine technologies and production capability. This includes the development of a new type of vaccine with funding from the meat and livestock authority that will offer significant benefits to producers in the supply, storage and handling of tick fever vaccines.

**Mr LAWLOR:** It brought back fond memories you talking about cattle ticks. I refer to page 1-30 paragraph 1 dot point 2 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement. Can the minister provide details of the level of success that is being experienced in the freshwater fish restocking program through the Stocked Impoundment Permit Scheme.

**Mr MULHERIN:** I was pleased that you remember those trips to places like Hanging Rock Station, Cunnamulla and Charleville. I think it was called the educating Peter trip, from memory.

**Mr LAWLOR:** It was very successful too.

**Mr MULHERIN:** Being the member for Southport, you might have thought the west was Ipswich. All jokes aside, the member for Southport has a keen interest in primary industries. He and I recently visited Cunnamulla. I get back to your question in relation to freshwater fish restocking.

The Stocked Impoundment Permit Scheme was introduced to support the development of freshwater recreational fisheries throughout regional Queensland. Most freshwater fish cannot reproduce in dams therefore there is a need to regularly stock these dams with native fish. The Stocked Impoundment Permit Scheme has proved to be very effective and has raised over \$2.9 million since its introduction in 2000 to improve the quality of freshwater recreational fishing.

The funding is distributed to community based fish stocking groups for the purchase of fish fingerlings for stocking into dams associated with the scheme as well as other activities aimed at enhancing the local fishery. The scheme involves 30 dams throughout the state. To date funding from the scheme has resulted in the release of more than 8.5 million native fish including barramundi, Australian bass, golden perch, Murray cod and silver perch.

An allocation of \$500,000 was distributed to stocking groups in June. The Stocked Impoundment Permit Scheme provides access to quality recreational fishing opportunities throughout Queensland which has resulted in the support of tourist infrastructure and provided economic benefits to regional economies like Richmond. You remember having a look at what the council has done out there in terms of stocking that waterway. They have a lot of grey nomads that go there every year.

The recent economic study of two impoundments in the permit scheme demonstrated that recreational fishing contributes strongly to those local economies. That is what the mayor John Wharton backed up when we met with him. The recreational value of the two impoundment schemes in 2006-07 was \$1.1 million for the Bjelke-Petersen Dam and \$3.2 million for the Boondooma Dam.

**Mrs MILLER:** I refer to page 1-29 paragraph 2 dot point 3 dashes 1, 2 and 3 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement. Minister, the MPS highlights that the Fish Habitat Areas program aims to ensure that fish habitats are sustained for long-term fisheries production. Can you advise the status of the department's program of declaring fish habitat areas and also the benefits of that program?

**Mr MULHERIN:** The declared fish habitat areas are specially defined areas that protect critical fish habitats and fishing grounds required to sustain Queensland's fisheries and provide places for education, research and community use. The Fish Habitat Areas program is an integral component of the government's strategy for achieving the long-term sustainability of fish stocks and maintaining viable commercial, recreational and traditional fisheries into the future.

The program meets the government's priority of protecting the environment for a sustainable future through a network of more than 70 fish habitat areas protecting over 800,000 hectares of coastal and estuarine fish habitats in Queensland. Approximately 75 per cent of commercial and 60 per cent of recreational fishing catches rely on such habitats. Two major new fish habitat areas are proposed for 2007. The Cleveland Bay fish habitat area in Townsville and the Fitzroy River fish habitat area in Rockhampton will increase the protection provided by fish habitat area networks to approximately 850,000 hectares. The network protects key fish habitats in both remote and heavily populated areas—the latter in recognition of the right of people in urbanised regions to have access to sustainable fish stocks.

Development activities in the fish habitat areas are restricted to prevent impacts on key fish habitats while community use such as legal fishing and boating are allowed. Fish habitat areas are declared under the provisions of the Fisheries Act 1994 and the regulations of 1995. Those declared as management A areas provide the highest level of protection to fish habitats critical to supporting the Queensland fisheries while providing for public structures such as boat ramps, jetties and pontoons. Those declared as management B areas provide more flexible management arrangements to also allow for existing and proposed uses such as limited work associated with private jetties or pontoons.

To declare a fish habitat area the department conducts comprehensive assessment with a stakeholder engagement process. This is all done in accordance with the department's policy. The department fosters research into fish and fish habitats within the fish habitat areas through the urban fish habitat research program and the department's marine fish habitat scholarship program. Community awareness and understanding of the fish habitat areas networks is promoted through a communication strategy that includes an ongoing media awareness campaign.

**Mrs MILLER:** Minister, I refer to page 1-31 paragraph 4 dot point 1 of the MPS. Minister, the MPS identifies the importance of developing and implementing the Queensland East Coast Inshore Finfish Management Plan. Can the minister explain the process being used in developing a management plan for inshore finfish fisheries and whether industry has been given an appropriate opportunity to be involved?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the honourable member for Bundamba for the question. The East Coast Inshore FinFish Fishery is the largest in Queensland, stretching from Cape York to the Queensland-New South Wales border. It is the most diverse fishery we have. Its coastal and estuarine waters are home of the widest range of fish species in Queensland. The fishery has a large number of users, including more than 750,000 recreational users who target a wide range of finfish species and approximately 500 commercial operators. So it is a complex fishery. The fishery is an integral part of the community in many areas with numerous businesses and organisations relying on it for their continued viability. The fishery must be sustainably managed for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations. To meet this challenge, my department has been working with fishers, industry, Indigenous people, the community and other government agencies to develop a management plan for the fishery.

Since commencing the inshore finfish fishery review, I have endeavoured to ensure that it is the most consultative process ever undertaken for the development of a fisheries management plan. The Inshore Finfish Management Advisory Committee remains the principal source of advice on the fishery. However, my department has gone to great lengths to canvass a wide range of views. In addition, the public will be advised of the recommendations made by the management advisory committee and where this advice was not followed why it was not accepted. The first step in the review process was to undertake a series of public consultation meetings along the length of the east coast. A total of 45 meetings was held to identify the issues that needed to be addressed—that is, we met with recreational, environmental and commercial sectors and Indigenous communities at these 45 meetings.

A summary of those meetings was made available on the internet. Following the public meetings, a questionnaire was released seeking more feedback on the identified issues. Again, a summary of the feedback was made available to the public. Six working groups were then established to provide specialist advice to the management advisory committee on the key issues identified. Each of the working groups met at least twice. Like the management advisory committee, the working groups had representatives from major stakeholder groups. These issues dealt with fish bag and size limits, fishing closures, sustainable management of shark and rays, commercial and recreational netting arrangements, dugong protection areas, and performance measures of the plan.

**CHAIR:** I call the honourable member for Southport. Minister, you only have two minutes to answer this one.

**Mr LAWLOR:** Minister, I refer to page 1-21 paragraph 2 at the end of the first section of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement, and I ask: is the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries adequately prepared to deal with an outbreak of avian influenza?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the honourable member for Southport for the question. Australia has recorded five outbreaks of avian influenza—one in Lowood in 1994—and successfully eradicated each outbreak. Queensland has an excellent record of effective response to emergency animal diseases. There remains a heightened state of awareness regarding the risk posed by avian influenza. The recent

formation of Biosecurity Queensland has further increased our preparedness by increasing the skilled resources that can be diverted to an avian influenza outbreak should one occur—touch wood. In the event of an emergency animal disease outbreak such as the highly pathogenic avian influenza, Queensland implements the nationally agreed strategies to manage emergency diseases known as the Australian Veterinary Emergency Plan, or AUSVETPLAN. The AUSVETPLAN is a series of comprehensive technical response plans that describe the approach to an emergency disease incursion. The doctrine provides guidance based on sound analysis linking policy, strategies, implementation, coordination and emergency management plans.

The AUSVETPLAN is recognised as a best practice system internationally. The national AUSVETPLAN for avian influenza has recently been reviewed with input from DPI&F experts in the control and management of the disease. Several Biosecurity Queensland officers have extensive experience in managing avian influenza in affected countries overseas. As the lead biosecurity agency for Primary Industries, Biosecurity Queensland has the responsibility for responding to all suspect cases of avian influenza in poultry and birds. As part of the ongoing continuous improvement program within Biosecurity Queensland, all avian influenza contingency plans are regularly reviewed and updated. The key consideration for avian influenza response is the need for specialist personal protective equipment for officers dealing with potentially infectious birds. Biosecurity Queensland has obtained and supplied this specialist equipment for its first-response officers. The equipment includes assisted breathing apparatus and protective masks.

**CHAIR:** Thanks, Minister. The time for questions by government members has expired.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM:** Minister, pages 1-21 and 1-22 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement deals with the department's response to fire ants. Whilst last year there was a significant amount of money, there is no indication of what has been allocated to the ongoing control of fire ants not only in south-east Queensland but in the Yarwun area. Is there any money allocated for that?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the honourable member for Gladstone for the question and her cooperation in matters relating to my portfolio. I still recall the assistance you gave me with the oil spill in Gladstone harbour and more recently with the outbreak of red imported fire ants and how you worked with the department in relation to that area in Gladstone. Red imported fire ants are a serious pest which were detected in Queensland in 2001. They inflict a painful sting and if not eradicated will certainly affect our lifestyle. They are probably the greatest ecological threat to Australia since the introduction of the rabbit and are potentially worse than the cane toad. As you know, the Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program is a national program. As a consequence of the fire ant program, the money is allocated under a national scheme where Australian governments, states and territories have agreed to fund this program.

Just recently the states and territories and the Commonwealth government have agreed to two more years of funding in this program. In 2007-08 there is \$13.594 million and in 2009-10 there is \$10.377 million. The Queensland contribution to the national cost-sharing arrangement is \$1.332 million in 2007-08. When we look at the Gladstone area, in 2007-08 we have allocated \$578,910 towards the eradication and in 2008-09 we have allocated \$533,280—that is, a total of \$1,112,190. If you look at 2007-08 and 2008-09 in the south-east corner, we have \$13.594 million, as I said, in 2007-08 and in 2008-09 we have allocated \$10.37 million, making a total of \$23,971,000. So for Gladstone and the south east it is \$25,083,190 over the next two years under this national program.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr MULHERIN:** Can I just make a comment before you ask the next question. The member for Toowoomba South raised the intensive livestock environmental regulation unit in relation to feedlots and piggeries. I have been advised that two staff were appointed two weeks ago to that unit and one more is to be employed in the next week. That is the advice I have received from my department.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM:** Thank you, Minister. At page 1-31 of the MPS you talk about future developments in the fisheries policy and legislation. I know that the number of fishermen in Queensland has reduced dramatically, partly because that has been the targeted desire of new regulations and legislation. But you also talk about statutory reviews of a number of regulations and implementation of the east coast inshore finfish management plan for Queensland. Minister, can you see any of these reviews increasing the number of fishermen and fishing families who are going to exit the industry? What funding has been allocated to support the industry to ensure Queenslanders can still buy Queensland sourced fishing product?

**Mr MULHERIN:** There are a number of issues that affect the fishing industry, and I think the one that had the most devastating effect was the Commonwealth's representative area program. I suppose if you look at state waters, we make up about two per cent of the fishery. Rising fuel costs, as the member for Toowoomba South correctly pointed out, and also overseas imports particularly in the area of prawns and other fish products have an impact on the clean green wild catch. You made mention of the inshore finfish fishery. The member for Bundamba asked a question in relation to that. We have gone out and extensively consulted on the development of that. I am hopeful that in the very near future I will be putting out the regulatory impact statement where people will have a further say before we finalise the

management plan. Another area that we are looking at to assist the development of fisheries is in the area of aquaculture. We are pursuing in conjunction with the Department of State Development a marine aquaculture plan for the Great Sandy region. We hope to release that in the near future.

The department undertakes a quarterly review of its performance in the fishery area. The aim of a program called the fisheries sustainability audit program is to demonstrate that our Queensland managed wild fisheries are sustainable. In 2006-07 approval was given by the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Water Resources for continued export of products from the spanner crab fishery until 2012. Performance measurement systems for mud and blue swimmer crabs, eel and stout whiting fisheries have been implemented. We regularly do this comprehensive scientific monitoring of our fish stocks to ensure that we have a sustainable fishery. If you have a look at any of the fisheries over time, yes, the numbers are decreasing. The fisheries management reforms that we have done have enabled fishers to have a property right on their fishery, and I think that is really important because that has enabled them to have something that is tradeable. I think over time you will see probably further consolidation in this fishery. As with all things, things do change. We will continue to work with the local seafood industry. We have had recent meetings with it about how we can get a local branding for things like the banana prawn to raise consumer awareness. I think one of the biggest threats are the cheap imports from overseas. They have a lot of issues to deal with, but I will continue to work with them.

**CHAIR:** Minister, did you want an extension?

**Mr MULHERIN:** No, that is all right.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM:** Page 2-3 of the MPS deals with QRAA issues. You noted in a question on notice to me that as a result of financial institutions no QRAA applications have been refused. It has been passed on to me though that Queensland in total has missed out on some allocations from the federal government in relation to these grants because of noncompliance with requirements by the federal government either in the implementation of the QRAA process or noncompliance in other areas. Has Queensland missed out in the past and will we miss out in the future in the allocation from the federal government for drought grants?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the member for Gladstone for the question. I believe QRAA does an excellent job. I spoke earlier in answer to a question from the government side about the support that QRAA provided under NDRA to primary producers following Cyclones Larry and Monica. In relation to those specific programs that you are talking about, I think it would be best if I get the CEO of QRAA, Colin Holden, to address that specific issue. I want to reiterate before he comes up that approximately 10,000 applications for financial assistance were received by QRAA. We provided \$405 million in assistance—this is under state and federal schemes. The level of assistance has greatly exceeded the previous record set in 2005-06 of 6,000 applications and \$187.7 million. I think it does an excellent job, but I will get Colin Holden to respond to those particular issues you raise.

**Mr Holden:** In terms of the issues raised, I am certainly not aware of any funds that Queensland has missed out on. The program you referred to—exceptional circumstances drought—is demand driven and the arrangements that are in place are that, as applications come in and are assessed and approved, we then acquit to the Commonwealth government for the funds that we have expended. There is absolutely no rationale that I am aware of to suggest that the state has, in fact, missed out on any funding.

In terms of the process that we go through with respect to viability, that is quite a lengthy process. It is documented in the actual guidelines that we must determine the viability of an individual applicant. In doing that we assess their past three years financials together with their forward cash flows to determine if there are any discrepancies between those; what is impacting on the operation, whether it is seasonal, commodity pricing, management changes et cetera. Then from that we also take into consideration crop yields, stock gains, weight gains et cetera. Through that process we make a determination ourselves as to whether or not a business is viable. Given that it is and they have met the other criteria, we will then approve assistance. As I said, that is then acquitted on a monthly basis to the Commonwealth for the funding.

**Mr MULHERIN:** The other thing is that under NDRA funding the Commonwealth uses QRAA to deliver its programs. I think that says a lot about the confidence the Commonwealth has in QRAA as an agency.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM:** Minister, I want to refer back to an answer that you gave to the member for Toowoomba South. You said that for every VER that is allocated six appointments have been made in relation to Biosecurity. I wondered, though, whether that ratio that you just highlighted took into account things like resignations and transfers. If you do take those matters into account, what is actually the replacement of staff? Overall there is a reduction in your staff numbers. Despite the fact that there has been quite a significant appointment from other government portfolios, you are still 75 staff short in biosecurity.

**Mr MULHERIN:** All I can work on is the facts that the department has provided me. The department made 678 appointments in 2006-07. The department finalised 109 VERs, or voluntary early retirements, during 2006-07. If you look at those figures, it means that for every one VER the department made more than six new appointments. Of the new appointments 208 were in the scientific and technical fields which back up Biosecurity. That is one in three appointments that add strength to the research and development capability of the department. There were 140 permanent appointments during the year—that is, there were 31 more permanent appointments than voluntary early retirements made during the year.

When you look at a further breakdown of those figures, 527 of the 678 appointments, which represents 78 per cent, were in regional areas. Of those 131 new appointments in Biosecurity and 42 in the science and technical field, there were no voluntary early retirements in Biosecurity. It was one area where we quarantined the VERs. As we have made mention of the fact, we have to have a flexible organisation to deal with all sorts of things that come our way from time to time like sugarcane smut, Cyclone Larry and red imported fire ants. During the year, 277 casual appointments were made and 205 of them were to support those things that I said—Operation Farm Clear, Cyclone Larry and sugarcane smut. We try to meet all the needs of industry. If you look at things like citrus canker, the Gladstone oil spill, Cyclone Larry, sugarcane smut and red imported fire ants you will see that we have risen to the occasion. I would like to congratulate my department and its staff for their dedication to duty.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM:** I would not in any way denigrate the staff there. I think they work brilliantly.

**Mr MULHERIN:** You do not get too many opportunities to put it on the public record or to congratulate your staff. I know that you are very supportive of them.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM:** The one area of statistics that is missing—and you have talked about VERs and appointments—is what were your staff turnovers in terms of retirements, resignations and transfers?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I will take that one on notice under standing orders if you do not mind.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM:** Can I ask a question a little bit more local to my electorate? I was concerned to hear only a couple of days ago that some of the recreational people who live on board in the marina were out of pocket significantly after the oil spill. Their insurance did not pay up and they had no other recourse. I, like you, believed that that intermediary group—the representative company, the insurance company that had a rep up there—was going to take care of all that sort of stuff. Do you know if there has been any alternative recourse for members of the public who were disadvantaged by the oil spill and, indeed, the fishing industry? Are there any matters outstanding in that area regarding the oil spill in Gladstone?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the member for Gladstone for the question. My understanding at the time is like yours, that the insurance companies sent the loss assessors into Gladstone where you and I both encouraged anyone who was impacted by that oil spill to make a claim or seek advice on how to go about making a claim. I have not seen any correspondence from any individual in relation to that. All I can do is take the question on notice and get back to you. If you have some specific details about an individual, I will see you afterwards and we will try to work through the issues. You were at all the meetings with me. You participated in the weekly telephone hook-up or the on-the-ground meeting where we kept updating people. It is news to me.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM:** It was news to me, too.

**Mr MULHERIN:** I would be keen to get the details and provide you with an answer so we will take it on notice. If you have any specific stuff we will deal with it afterwards. I have been advised that we did help fishermen work with the local insurance companies. Both you and I were aware of that. What the member for Gladstone was on about was the people who were caught in the marina, who live on those boats—more recreational activities.

**Mr HORAN:** I have one quick question to the minister. I would like to thank Andrew Cripps, the member for Hinchinbrook, for being here. He represents an area that grows 90 per cent of Australia's bananas. I congratulate him on the excellent submission he made to the import risk analysis being done by Biosecurity Australia. My question to you is: due to the importance of this industry, particularly to north Queensland, has the department made a submission to the draft import risk analysis?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the member for Toowoomba South and I acknowledge the passion and the commitment that the member for Hinchinbrook has in the area of primary industries and also in representing his area. It is good to see his passion.

In relation to bananas, on 1 March 2007 Biosecurity Australia released the revised draft import risk analysis report for bananas from the Philippines. Stakeholders had till 29 June 2007 to provide comment on the report. The revised draft report proposed permitting the importation of mature, hard, green bananas from the Philippines subject to strict management measures. Biosecurity Queensland compiled a departmental submission to the revised draft report. All scientists in the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries with expertise in banana pests and diseases were asked to put

substantial effort into reviewing and commenting on the report. The science based response focused on the biosecurity risk which would result from the importation of bananas from a country which is affected by pests and diseases which do not currently affect the Queensland banana industry, ensuring that any proposals fully address these risk issues. Biosecurity Queensland also met with the banana industry to discuss general issues with the IRA report and respective responses. DPI remains committed to supporting the Queensland banana industry and working with industry to address its ongoing biosecurity priorities and to maintain its long-term viability.

This is an issue I raised with Peter McGauran, the federal agricultural minister, during our dealings with the impacted areas up there. He gave me a commitment that there would never be—and my director-general was there—imported bananas from the Philippines coming into Australia. I found it quite amazing—and I think the Prime Minister was caught on the hop, too—that that this thing has raised its head. If these bananas are allowed into the country it will have an impact certainly on the local economy up there. I think at a state level the Queensland government was really amazed when we read that. I think the Premier was on record making similar comments that after Cyclone Larry we were given that sort of assurance.

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

**Mr MULHERIN:** Just before I take the question, in relation to permanent turnover levels, I have been advised that permanent turnover levels are consistent with the 2005-06 level at approximately 3.5 per cent, which is well below the established target of five to 10 per cent. If you look at the total terminations, permanent employee initiated terminations were 108, in the casual area they were 70, temporary were 80 and the total was 258. This is excluding VERs. If you look at external secondments and attachments, in the permanent category there were 39; casuals, none; temporary, 34; and the total was 73. In relation to cessations in the permanent area, there were five; casuals, 595; temporaries, 162; and the total was 762. If we look at a total of the terminations, in the permanent category there were 152, casuals—

**CHAIR:** Thanks, Minister.

**Mrs MILLER:** Minister, I refer to page 1-22 dot point 4 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement. How is the department dealing with the electric ant incursion in north Queensland?

**Mr MULHERIN:** In relation to the electric ant incursion in north Queensland, the Australian government states and territories gave in-principle support for \$6.883 million for a four-year cost-shared eradication program for electric ants at the recent Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, which was held in Brisbane in April of this year. The program will be managed by my department. The presence of electric ants was confirmed on 11 May 2006 in the northern Cairns suburb of Smithfield. The electric ant is regarded as one the worst of the 100 invasive species by the Invasive Species Specialist Group of the World Conservation Union. This is the first known incursion of the species into Australia.

The eradication program is based on surveillance by trained field staff, engaging the community and business to look for and report any ant that they suspect may be an electric ant, applications of bait treatment through the infested area and at high-risk sites such as landfills and transfer stations as a precaution against movement of the ant, containment through the implementation of movement controls, and other community engagement and training activities. The significant expertise of the department's Fire Ant Control Centre and the systems developed in response to the detection of red imported fire ants are being applied to the response. The use of existing knowledge and systems allowed for a quick and efficient response to the pest.

The surveillance conducted to date around Smithfield and targeted sites throughout the Cairns region indicates that the distribution of electric ants in Cairns remains predominantly in the Smithfield area with only one small additional area of infestation in the nearby suburb of Kewarra Beach. Two bait treatments have been applied to the infested areas in Smithfield. This has resulted in a drastic reduction or total elimination of electric ant numbers at monitoring sites in the infested area. This is a great result that gives confidence that the ant can be eradicated. An initial round of treatment has also been applied to the infested area at Kewarra Beach. Ongoing treatment and surveillance will occur in this area.

The speed with which this response was implemented really highlights the capacity of the Queensland government to quickly and effectively assess and deal with new incursions of invasive species. With the creation of Biosecurity Queensland, all of Queensland's current tramp ant incursions have been managed under a single program. This will certainly create significant synergies and efficiencies in the way we manage and eradicate these pests from Queensland.

**Mr HAYWARD:** I refer to page 1-11 paragraph 3 dot point 1 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement, and I ask: how is your department proposing to strengthen its collaboration and better integrate its science effort with other Queensland based and national science agencies?

**Mr MULHERIN:** The department is Queensland's largest provider of state government funded research, which really underpins the long-term economic viability of primary industries and fisheries. There are a number of other research providers in Queensland supporting the sustainable development of primary industries and fisheries. These include other state government agencies, CSIRO and the universities.

To better collaborate with these other research providers and to integrate Queensland's science effort, the department has developed a strategic partnership with the Department of Natural Resources and Water, the Department of Mines and Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, Queensland Health and CSIRO. We plan to develop an eco-science precinct at Boggo Road and a health food science precinct at Coopers Plains.

This initiative, with a \$290 million state government commitment, is led by the department of state development. It is also known as the knowledge based research and business initiative. The eco-science precinct at Boggo Road will bring together DPI along with Queensland's other major researchers to tackle issues such as climate change to protect our natural resources and environment and grow our farming, mineral, forestry, marine and tourism industries so that they can be competitive and sustainable.

I think this integrated approach certainly puts us on an international footing. More than 1,000 scientists and support staff will be located in these international centres of excellence. This will help Queensland become a global leader in finding the balance between developing strong industries, lowering the impact on our natural environment and enhancing our quality of life. The eco-science precinct will be a world-class facility for research into plant and animal production as well as disease and pest control.

**Mr LAWLOR:** I refer to page 1-10 paragraph 2 dot points 1 and 2 and to page 1-14, dot point 6 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement, and I ask: what is the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries doing to cement food export opportunities in the Middle East?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I am pleased to say that the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries has been really proactive in assisting Queensland's food and agribusiness clients to capture the many significant opportunities that exist in the booming Middle East region. The department recognises that Dubai in the United Arab Emirates is a major engine room of trade and international business in the region. This is clearly illustrated by the 18 million passengers who utilise the Dubai airport each year and the flow-on demand for a wide variety of high-quality food and beverage products and related services.

This year the department facilitated a trade mission for 15 innovative Queensland companies to the 12th Gulf Food, Hotel and Equipment Exhibition and the Emirates International Salon Culinaire in Dubai. This is the second year in a row that the department has targeted this premier food event in the Middle East. I want to place on record the work that our trade commissioner, the Hon. Mike Ahern, does in this area.

Gulfood attracts buyers from the food services, retail and manufacturing sectors of the Middle East, north Africa and south Asia. It plays a key role in the United Arab Emirates—being, as some observers call it, the Singapore of the desert. In addition to the trade show, the department organised an extra itinerary of meetings in Dubai, Oman and Saudi Arabia in order to build the commercial linkages and market knowledge that is required to do business in the Middle East region.

The mission was highly successful, with all of the 15 Queensland participating firms achieving their key objectives. Approximately \$1.6 million in export sales have already been reported from the 2007 Gulfood mission. Over time, by working with industry and identifying these niche markets, we will see this value of export grow. I think the Gulfood expo is on again in February. No doubt the department will be leading another trade mission to capitalise on the last two. Over time we will see more and more Queensland exporters participating and gaining valuable markets in this very wealthy part of the world.

**Mrs MILLER:** I refer to page 1-10 paragraph 2 dot point 2-3 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement. What is the department doing to support Queensland's trading opportunities in Korea?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the member for Bundamba for the question. Korea has been a priority market for the department of primary industries for several years. A market development program commenced with the Queensland Government Trade and Investment Office in Seoul in 2001. We have developed a close working relationship between the department and the Queensland government's Trade and Investment Office along with some short-term placements that have enabled the department to define the Korean market as a major growth sector in regard to food and agribusiness products.

A senior departmental officer commenced working in Seoul in February 2006. In the time that he has been based in Korea there has been a significant increase in the information flow between the market and Queensland companies. In June last year, the department launched the GrowKorea project. There are currently 28 Queensland companies involved in this market entry project. The activity includes gathering and disseminating market intelligence, developing a suitable strategy for the appraisal of product samples and the facilitation of business matching. These companies are at different levels of export maturity and the department's trade officers are working closely with them to develop target market entry strategies for their products.

The departmental officer who is based in Korea plays a vital role in this GrowKorea project, liaising with the Korean importers on their product specifications, providing feedback to Queensland companies, providing market information and assisting with business itinerary development for visiting companies.

The GrowKorea project has elicited interest from Korean companies in a range of shelf-ready food products, food manufacturing ingredients and other agribusiness products from Queensland. Samples have been assessed as a result of the GrowKorea initiative. Many products are now successfully entering the food market.

I am very pleased to report that this project has already achieved a strong increase in export dollars from the Korean market. The trade sale figures for the project from January 2006 to April 2007 are \$A4.5 million, or \$A 2.97 million to date for the current financial year. I really believe that over time this initiative will gain momentum and really assist Queensland agribusinesses to develop further in this market.

**Mr LAWLOR:** I refer to page 1-10, dot point 3 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement, and I ask: how has Queensland's agricultural position fared after prolonged drought and overseas competition?

**Mr MULHERIN:** The drought has persisted throughout this financial year. Certainly, it has taken its toll on many Queensland primary industries, particularly livestock and cropping. As I said earlier, two-thirds of the state is drought declared, or 62 per cent of the land mass. This really impacts on the agricultural regions of the state.

The drought has had a two-pronged effect. We have had poor pasture growth, particularly in the southern region of the state, which has resulted in less feed available for livestock, thus increasing producers' dependence on feed grains. At the same time the drought and the lack of irrigation water has resulted in a lower production of crops, including feed grains resulting in higher prices.

Livestock slaughter numbers have been high throughout 2006-07 as producers have offloaded stock in response to poor feed availability. Due to the effect of the drought, high feed grain prices in some areas reduced the quality of stock. Livestock industries, particularly Queensland's cattle industry, are also vulnerable to competition from the overseas market, where the strong Australian dollar is making Australian exports less competitive. Buyers in Asian markets are holding out for a return of the cheaper US beef, which is also adding pressures to Queensland producers.

Queensland's cotton industry has been affected by the drought and international price pressures. The gross value production of cotton is forecast to decline by a massive 70 per cent—from \$395 million in 2005-06 to approximately \$120 million in 2006-07. Drought and lack of irrigation water has really had a major impact on the industry, with some producers opting to destroy parts of their crop to preserve any remaining cotton.

Cotton producers face the added pressures of falling international cotton lint prices. However, because of increased demand for feed from the livestock industry and lower production, cotton seed prices have risen. Production of both summer and winter cereal grains is forecast to fall, thus placing upward pressure on prices. Overall, it says a lot about Queensland primary producers when, with the prospects that I released a week or so ago, the gross value production in Queensland for primary industries is in the vicinity of \$10.4 billion. The drought has had an impact on a lot of individuals and our sympathies are with them.

**CHAIR:** I call the honourable member for Bundamba. Minister, you only have two minutes to respond to this question.

**Mrs MILLER:** Minister, I refer to page 1-3, paragraph 2 and the second dot point and also page 1-15, paragraph 2 and the second dot point of the MPS. Minister, we hear a lot about new facilities for medical and animal biotechnologies, but what is the DPI&F doing to improve facilities to develop and evaluate plant biotechnologies?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the member for Bundamba for the question. The department is embarking on a major revitalisation of its research facilities that will change the way it operates. I mentioned earlier some of the stuff we are doing at the old Boggo Road gaol site and Coopers Plains. It will give us world-class research facilities which will deliver excellent science and industry development outcomes for primary producers.

One example of this revitalisation is the Queensland Crop Development Facility to be built at DPI's Redlands Research Station by the end of 2007 at a total project cost of \$8.6 million. The new glasshouse facilities on which the Queensland Crop Development Facility is based are a strategic collaboration between the department, the University of Queensland and the Queensland University of Technology. This facility will become south-east Queensland's centre of excellence for developing and evaluating plant biotechnologies aimed at improving food supply, quality and sustainability.

**CHAIR:** Thanks, Minister. I call the honourable member for Toowoomba South.

**Mr HORAN:** Minister, my question follows on from the one from the member for Bundamba. I note in the MPS the concern expressed by the DPI about the difficulty in getting grants. The Northern Australian Soybean Industry Association put a submission into the DPI for joint funding for research into breeding with the CSIRO. It was squashed in your department. That submission was to the Grains Research and Development Corporation for outside funding. Meanwhile, New South Wales DPI went ahead with CSIRO and got the money. This is an example of where you have missed out on a real opportunity and the Queensland soya bean industry and the soya beans in the cane industry, which is important, as a result has missed out. Why is this happening?

**Mr MULHERIN:** Each one of these research programs is assessed on its merit. We have a process of dealing with that. The department continues to support the cropping industries, including the soya bean industry, through a range of R&D activities. The R&D investment is targeted to maximise the economic potential of Queensland's primary industries. Queensland on average has grown approximately 12,700 hectares of soya beans annually since 1998, with a production average of 23,000 tonnes. Over the last four years, mainly due to the drought, the average area has dropped to 8,300 hectares, with production down to 17,000 tonnes.

In recent times, the majority of soya bean production has occurred in the coastal regions of Queensland, as legumes such as soya beans and peanuts have both been incorporated as rotational crops. As you rightly pointed out, that is in the sugar industry under the sugar farming systems. Both peanuts and soya beans are demonstrating major benefits of profitability and sustainability when done in rotation.

With respect to the soya bean R&D, the level and approach of investment by DPI take into account that CSIRO is responsible for leading the soya bean improvement program nationally, with supporting R&D activities conducted by the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries as well as DPI&F. The department's investment is to enhance the incorporation of soya beans and peanuts in coastal sugar production systems and to provide an integrated approach to overcoming the agronomic issues in these coastal regions. As I said earlier, each one of these investment programs is assessed on its merit. I will get Professor Beth Woods to comment further on this particular issue that you raised.

**Prof. Woods:** The question of investment in a national soya bean program is primarily and firstly a decision for GRDC which decides where it is going to allocate its external funds. In this particular case, the breeding expertise for soya beans has been firmly established in CSIRO for some years. Our position is really to make use of that expertise that is in CSIRO and then look at how we can apply their expertise for the benefit of Queensland producers. This is entirely consistent with the national R&D framework.

**Mr HORAN:** Thank you. Minister, under 2-2 with regards to the drought, the Drought Rate Rebate Scheme has been welcomed. It took about four months before the money started to flow through. I am interested in whether that scheme can be extended. The particular issue I want to bring up with you is the trouble that some producers have in getting the travelling rebate when they take stock away on stock routes paying drovers. In a number of cases, they come into shires where, due to the drought, the stock routes are closed and they then have to put the cattle on to trucks and transport them back somewhere else. There are many variations of this but basically they are paying drovers and they have to pay for stock transport. Can this be addressed so these bona fide applications can be funded?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I will deal with that in a minute. I want to make a further comment on that soya bean R&D. What we will see in the area of R&D and primary industries is an increased specialisation. A lot of the research and development that is done in agriculture is done under a national framework so we are going to see more and more of that.

In relation to QRAA and that particular issue, I will have to take that on notice. I can give you a general run-down on our drought relief assistance scheme, but I will take those particular issues that you have raised on notice.

**Mr HORAN:** Thank you. Minister, under 3-2 and Forestry Plantations Queensland, in February 2004 the then primary industries minister announced plans to plant 29 million trees on 34,500 hectares by 2009 to maintain future timber supplies for housing. As we are some 18 to 19 months away, how many hectares of trees has the department planted and how many acres do you expect to plant in 2007-08?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the member for Toowoomba South for that question. We have been talking about the drought and it certainly has had an impact on forestry. Forestry Plantations Queensland, as you rightly pointed out, has a strategic objective of expanding its plantation softwood and hardwood estate. Suboptimal plantation scale has been identified as an impediment to achieving acceptable softwood plantation financial returns in central and north Queensland, while in south-east Queensland existing projects and the demand for timber products have produced a favourable climate for investment.

Through FPQ we have budgeted \$11 million to secure a further 2,000 hectares of plantable land for softwood plantations in 2007-08. In 2006-07, the softwood plantation goal was to secure up to 3,000 hectares of plantable land in north, central and south-east Queensland. As at mid-May 2007 approximately 800 hectares of plantable land for new softwood plantation had been secured, bringing the total for the state purchase of softwood expansion since 2000 to about 9,300 plantable hectares.

Land acquisition in support of Forestry Plantations Queensland's future direction in the western hardwoods plantation program is also underway with a mix of land rental, equity crop sharing and land purchase. Since 2000, Forestry Plantations Queensland has purchased approximately 4,850 plantable hectares of hardwood plantation. During 2006-07, \$2.1 million was committed to acquiring almost 740 hectares of plantable area, with a similar investment in 2007-08. So it is a combination of purchasing land, land rentals and crop sharing that will achieve these targets. I will ask the CEO of FPQ, Dr Warren Hoey, to add further to that.

**Dr Hoey:** The minister has outlined the targets that we are attempting to achieve. We sometimes achieve those and we sometimes do not. We are in competition with other purchasers for land, as the honourable member would be well aware. We are very particular about the type of country and the climatic conditions that we need for forestry for both hardwood and softwood, and naturally we are in competition with other purchasers of agricultural land.

**Mr HORAN:** Thank you. Minister, the fishing industry, as the member for Gladstone pointed out, is under extreme pressure up and down the coast of Queensland, and perhaps no more so than in Moreton Bay where, like other areas, there has been cutbacks and restrictions. Some excellent work has been done by the Moreton Bay Seafood Industry Organisation on environmental management plans, but the fishers in that area find they are unable to get financial support from your department and have had to go to the federal government for support for some of their plans. An alliance has now been put together of recreational and commercial fishermen in Moreton Bay who are endeavouring to maintain a reasonable position in the bay for the people they represent with the EPA plans to introduce a marine park into the bay or to cut the amount accessible to fishing. Can you tell us what the DPI&F is doing to maintain profitability and sustainability, which is the motto of the department, for Moreton Bay fishers?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I am aware of the alliance that has been formed that has come about because of the Moreton Bay Marine Park Zoning Plan. As you are aware, the zoning plan for Moreton Bay expires on 1 September 2008 and must be reviewed before this date. The Environmental Protection Agency is responsible for this review, which commenced on 23 February 2007. My department is working closely with EPA. It is important that the two agencies work closely with the proposed marine park zoning plan scenarios so that we are in the best possible position to determine the economic and social impacts from a fisheries perspective. As you rightly pointed out, we are about profitable primary industries.

The EPA is coordinating an extensive public consultation process, and the group you referred to is active in putting forward its views in that process. As part of that process, there is an expert advisory panel and a stakeholder reference group. The stakeholder reference group was established to provide information on the marine park users group to the EPA and to pass on information about the review to groups they represent.

My department is also represented at that stakeholder group by senior fisheries resource management officers. I think through collaboration and consultation that process is running smoothly, with my department providing a range of data to the Environmental Protection Agency, including fisheries catch and effort data and vessel monitoring system data. This will allow the EPA to identify the key fishing areas and associated impacts any proposed marine park plan will have.

The consultation process has also allowed my department to update the EPA on the inshore fish management planning process, which will have some impact on recreational and commercial fishing activities within Moreton Bay. Fishers can also access assistance through PIPES, the Primary Industry Productivity Enhancement Scheme. These are loans that are provided through QRAA to assist in the profitability and sustainability of fishers.

**Mr HORAN:** Minister, under 1-24 of the MPS there is a proposal for new fees for property and brands registration. Until now these services have not had a fee attached to them. Why are you doing this? Is it because of the budget cuts that are coming into the department? I think we are all aware that industry has had to face up to the extra cost of NLIS. To now put fees on property and brands registration is just another impost coming from a department that has had its budget cut.

**Mr MULHERIN:** The Queensland government has foreshadowed the introduction of a new system for managing the registration of livestock brands and properties. Where livestock are held the system will, I believe, provide significant enhancements to the animal biosecurity program capability and capacity within Biosecurity Queensland. Animal Biosecurity Queensland program activities protect the \$15 billion Australian livestock industry to which, as I said, Queensland contributes well in excess of

\$3 billion in gross value production. The program achieves and maintains an animal health status, it delivers a competitive advantage to the Queensland and Australian livestock industries, and minimises the state's animal health status.

While the introduction of a fee to support the system was foreshadowed in the Ministerial Portfolio Statement, the timing of this implementation and any public consultation is currently under consideration by the government. Biosecurity is expensive and poses big challenges to the department. We will be continuing to have discussions with AgForce about the implementation of this program. This is not new to AgForce. This has been foreshadowed in the past. I have spoken to Peter Kenny in relation to this issue and we are sure that there will be extensive consultation when we implement these fees.

**Mr HORAN:** Minister, there have been previous questions about biosecurity, and in particular avian influenza. If there were an outbreak detected tonight or tomorrow of a very serious disease such as foot-and-mouth or mad cow, one of the most important things that needs to be done immediately is the implementation of the stop movement system. Can you guarantee this committee that all is in readiness and your department is fully prepared for the implementation of stop movement?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I think you have to judge the department on its past performance in dealing with these types of biosecurity incursions. If you look at its performance over the last 18 months, we have risen to the occasion. We have had to deal with a number of issues from citrus canker, sugarcane smut, cyclones Larry and Monica, oil spills and tramp ant incursions in various places around the state. We are continually in a state of preparedness for foot-and-mouth and BSE. As I said earlier, we have the AusVet plan. We have a set national program that we would operate under if there were such an incursion. Our scientists are constantly researching and keeping up to date on how we would go about this. In relation to the specific issues of stock movement—

**Mr HORAN:** 'Stop' movement.

**Mr MULHERIN:**—we will deal with those issues in accordance with legislation and the plan. I will ask Dr Ron Glanville to provide you with a further update. As I said, we have scenario mapped what would happen if we had an outbreak. I call on Dr Glanville to add to that.

**Dr Glanville:** The livestock standstill is an integral part of the national preparedness for foot-and-mouth disease. We have established a stock standstill management group with players and stakeholders from a range of agencies including Queensland Transport, police et cetera and we have developed guidelines. In fact, Queensland is leading the way in terms of developing guidelines nationally for this. We have been discussing these guidelines with our stakeholders and developing them in conjunction with our stakeholders, so we believe we are well prepared to implement such a standstill.

**Mr HORAN:** Minister, I have a question regarding the NLIS for sheep and for bobby calves. There is concern in the sheep industry because of the relative value of the animal compared to the cost of the NLIS tag. It is a similar situation for dairy farmers, who now have the impost of NLIS tags on bobby calves that sometimes can be worth fairly little. What is the department doing with those two industries—the dairy industry and the sheep industry—regarding these NLIS tags and their cost? We do not have any subsidy or assistance schemes like other states have had for their producers.

**CHAIR:** Two minutes, Minister.

**Mr MULHERIN:** I know the issue with subsidy schemes, but I think the approach that we have made, which is to make an investment in R&D to bring down the cost at the point of manufacture, will pay dividends not only for Queensland primary producers but for primary producers overall. I recently put out a media release about a certain company that has indicated it will provide tags at least 60c cheaper than what is currently on the market. In the longer term I think the innovation grant that both Peter McGauran and I announced at an AgForce conference over 12 months ago will pay dividends for primary producers. Subsidies can come and go, but if you can get investment in the manufacturing side to bring the costs down I think that has far better outcomes.

With respect to NLIS overall, at 30 June there was little difficulty. I am aware of the issues relating to sheep and dairy. One of the things that we did set up was QNIC, the Queensland NLIS Implementation Committee. Any issues that dairy and sheep people have brought to me I have referred back to that committee for advice and guidance as an independent body that looks at it.

With regard to bobby calves and the dairy industry, I have been advised that a further three-month extension of the transitional period for the industry to manage the changeover to electronic identification has been agreed by QNIC. QNIC was requested to consider this matter and report back to the director-general. The director-general may want to comment on those discussions.

**CHAIR:** Briefly.

**Mr Varghese:** I can confirm that the director-general has extended the period for three months and that the matter is in discussion with QNIC.

**CHAIR:** The time for questions from non-government members has expired. I call the honourable member for Kallangur.

**Mr HAYWARD:** Minister, I refer to page 1-3, paragraph 2, dot point 1 and page 1-15, paragraph 2, dot point 1 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement, and I ask: with the need for Queensland's livestock industries to improve productivity to maintain global competitive advantages and also the ever-increasing threat of bioagents, what is your department doing to upgrade its research facilities to enhance Queensland's livestock industries?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the honourable member for Kallangur for the question. Queensland's livestock industry was worth an estimated \$4.6 billion in 2005-06. My department is embarking on a major revitalisation of its research facilities that will change the way that DPIF operates, giving it world-class research facilities, some of which I have outlined. Much of this revitalisation is being done in collaboration with other Queensland research agencies and universities. One example is the Centre for Advanced Animal Science to be built as a joint project with the University of Queensland at its Gatton campus. The department's large animal research will be relocated from Yeerongpilly to the Centre for Advanced Animal Science as part of this initiative by 2008.

The centre will be a new world-class biosecure facility strategically located at the university's main agricultural and veterinary campus, about one hour from Brisbane and about 30 minutes from the department's major biosecurity diagnostic laboratories at Toowoomba. Multidisciplinary scientists working at this centre will undertake research to improve livestock productivity and will maintain Queensland's capacity to respond to animal disease incursions—for example, as the member for Toowoomba South raised, the potential of BSE or foot-and-mouth outbreak. Preparedness is crucial in dealing with anything like that.

The centre will also undertake research to increase profitability for this sector and to maintain market access for our livestock products. Research at the centre will be particularly important in addressing the ever-present threat of bioagents with the potential to compromise the biosecurity of Queensland's livestock industries. The centre will be flexible in design so that it can be configured to accommodate a wide range of contemporary and future research to maximise the potential of Queensland's livestock production industries.

**CHAIR:** The time allotted for the consideration of the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries has expired.

**Mr MULHERIN:** Mr Chairman, before we conclude can I ask the member for Toowoomba South—

**CHAIR:** Are you clarifying one of your previous answers?

**Mr MULHERIN:** Yes. I took a question on notice in relation to drought and the movement of livestock. Would the member be able to clarify exactly what the question was, please?

**Mr HORAN:** It was about stock that are out on stock routes well away from their home, where people are paying drovers and the stock get trapped because the stock routes are closed. As they move on to other areas the councils close the stock routes due to the drought and they are trapped. The cattle are weak and they have to truck them back. There are some different scenarios but basically that is what is happening in a number of cases. So they are paying a lot of money and it is not only for the drovers. They normally do not get any rebate for bringing back cattle under the control of a drover, but in these cases they have to put them onto livestock transport because they are trapped by the sudden closure of routes, and sometimes there is no water.

**Mr MULHERIN:** Thank you, member for Toowoomba South.

**CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, Minister, I thank you and your departmental officers for your attendance today. The transcript of the hearing will be available on the Hansard page of the parliament's web site within approximately two hours. The committee will adjourn now and resume at 2 pm to examine the estimates for the portfolio of the Minister for Communities, Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships and Minister for Seniors and Youth.

**Mr MULHERIN:** Mr Chairman, I would like to thank you and the deputy chair, the member for Toowoomba South, for the way that you have conducted this inquiry. I would also like to thank the other members of the committee. I thank Hansard and all the Parliamentary Service staff who have provided support for the estimates hearing. In particular, I would like to thank my staff and departmental staff for the amount of work and effort that goes into preparing for these estimates. I think it is an important process that we embark on each year.

**Proceedings suspended from 12.59 pm to 2 pm**

**ESTIMATES COMMITTEE G—COMMUNITIES, DISABILITY SERVICES,  
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PARTNERSHIPS,  
SENIORS AND YOUTH**

**In Attendance**

Hon. FW Pitt, Minister for Communities, Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Minister for Seniors and Youth

**Department of Communities and Disability Services Queensland**

Ms L Apelt, Director-General

Ms C Murphy-Clarke, Manager, Strategic Planning

Mr B Elder, Director, Finance and Administration

Ms S van Schagen, Assistant Director-General (Acting), Corporate and Executive Service

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**CHAIR:** The hearing for the Estimates Committee G is resumed. The next matter for the consideration of the committee is the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Communities, Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Minister for Seniors and Youth. On behalf of the committee, I welcome the minister, departmental officers and members of the public at the hearing today.

I am Evan Moorehead, the member for Waterford and chair of the committee. Mr Mike Horan, the member for Toowoomba South, is the deputy chair. The other committee members are Mrs Liz Cunningham, the member for Gladstone; the Hon. Ken Hayward, the member for Kallangur; Mr Peter Lawlor, member for Southport; the Hon. Kevin Lingard, member for Beaudesert; and Mrs Jo-Ann Miller, member for Bundamba.

Today's proceedings are lawful proceedings and subject to standing rules and orders of the parliament. I remind all visitors that, in accordance with standing order 206, any person admitted to this hearing may be excluded at the discretion of the chair or by order of the committee. I remind members of the committee and the minister that under standing orders the time limit for questions is one minute and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a double chime will sound at the end of these time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will sound two minutes after an extension of time has been given.

The standing orders require that at least half the time available for questions and answers will 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 resolved that non-committee members will be given leave to attend and ask questions during the hearing. The member for Gregory, Mr Vaughan Johnson, and the member for Currumbin, Ms Jann Stuckey, will attend the hearing and seek the leave of the committee to ask questions. To assist Hansard I ask departmental officers to identify themselves when they first come forward to answer a question if a question is referred to them by the minister. Those present are asked to turn off or turn to silent mode all mobile phones and pagers.

The committee will examine now the proposed expenditure contained in Appropriation Bill 2007 for the portfolio of the Minister for Communities, Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Minister for Seniors and Youth. The time allocated is three hours and 30 minutes. The committee will examine estimates for the portfolio unit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships until 3 pm, with a break in proceedings from 3 pm until 3.15 pm. The committee will then examine estimates for the portfolio units of Communities, Seniors and Youth until 4.15 pm. Then from 4.30 pm to 6 pm the committee will examine estimates for the portfolio unit of Disability Services. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement?

**Mr PITT:** Yes, I do, Mr Chairman. In my opening statement I want to highlight how the communities and disabilities services portfolio has grown significantly since last year's estimates committee hearing. This increase means we now rank as one of the government's largest human service portfolios. Total portfolio funding has grown by more than 50 per cent or \$626.5 million to almost \$1.8 billion. That increase is a combination of expanded funding in key areas and newly acquired functions arising from machinery-of-government changes that followed last year's election.

The portfolio's major new responsibilities are the areas of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, now part of the Department of Communities, and the Home and Community Care program transferred from Queensland Health to Disability Services Queensland. The portfolio's operational budget is in the order of \$1.65 billion, whilst investment and infrastructure through capital expenditure is close to \$130 million.

That is the global picture, if you like, for the portfolio. I would like now to draw the committee's attention to some of the significant and important initiatives that are being funded this financial year in my portfolio. Funding for the Department of Communities includes an allocation of up to \$100 million for a redress scheme for former child residents of institutions who suffered abuse and neglect. This initiative, which completes the government's response to the Forde inquiry, is an important step in helping bring some closure to former residents and their families.

As well as dealing with issues from the past, the Communities budget also looks towards the future with its focus on children and early years development. This year's budget includes more than \$12 million to buy six decommissioned preschools in Ayr, Mackay, Nanango, Toowoomba, Beenleigh and Beaudesert and convert them to early childhood education and care centres. A further \$10.6 million has been allocated this year to complete four early years centres at Nerang, Browns Plains, Caboolture and Cairns. Another \$2 million will be spent this year to strengthen the department's role in monitoring and licensing child-care centres.

The department will also start the review of the Juvenile Justice Act to ensure that Queensland's youth justice system is based on a robust and sound legislative framework. Today I am releasing the terms of reference and an issues paper relating to the review and urge anyone with an interest in this area to make a submission. I can reassure the committee that the government is committed to the Blueprint for the Bush which is our 10-year plan for a sustainable, livable and prosperous rural Queensland. The blueprint comprises more than \$150 million in new funding. Some 170 projects have been started and many have already been completed. I am confident that the blueprint, which continues to receive funding in this year's budget, will deliver real and lasting benefits for regional and rural Queenslanders. I am also confident that the addition of the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships to my portfolio will result in progress being made on advancing the welfare of Indigenous Queenslanders. We are close to finalising an historic Indigenous partnership agreement with discrete Aboriginal and mainland Torres Strait Islander communities. For the first time we have also prepared, and I am releasing today, a package of budget related information that highlights the breadth and depth of government initiatives relating to Indigenous Queenslanders.

The good news also applies to the other side of my portfolio, Disability Services Queensland. Part of the record DSQ funding this year includes \$12.8 million to start implementing a package of reforms worth a total of \$113 million. This money will improve the lives of people with an intellectual disability who exhibit severely challenging behaviour. These reforms, introduced by the government in response to the Carter report, will result in a new centre of excellence, purpose-built accommodation, new legislation and policies and the recruitment of 188 new front-line staff. Today I am announcing details of approvals for more than 50 of these new positions. Preliminary work on recruiting these staff is underway. A further \$5.1 million has been allocated to start implementing the *Growing Stronger* initiative which will result in the improved delivery of contemporary disability services for clients in Queensland.

Capital works spending will also be one of my focus areas this year as a result of the increase to DSQ's capital budget and the need to improve our performance in this area. I intend ensuring that the department has the capacity to deliver this important program of works. Given the time constraints, I have touched on only a few of the many projects and initiatives being funded this year across my portfolio. The vast scope of government spending within Communities and DSQ reinforces both the government's and my commitment to ensuring we have a fair, safe and inclusive society in Queensland. I now welcome questions from the committee about my portfolio.

**CHAIR:** The first period of questioning is allocated to non-government members. I call the member for Gregory.

**Mr JOHNSON:** I refer you to MPS page 1-2 of the 2007-08 budget papers. Your budget provides \$21.3 million over four years, inclusive of \$6 million recurrent and \$1.1 million equity funding in 2007-08 to enhance existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander diversionary services to reduce ATSI people coming in contact with the criminal justice system.

With Queensland prisons housing some 5,400 persons, of which 25 per cent are of Indigenous origin, and our juvenile detention centres, of which 70 per cent are young people of an Indigenous origin, how is this amount going to keep the vulnerable people safe when your government is building more prisons, not diversionary centres for the vulnerable?

**Mr PITT:** The Beattie government has allocated \$21.3 million over four years to improve alcohol diversion services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Diversion services include diversionary centres, cell visitor services and other diversionary measures. The government's suite of innovative diversionary measures provides services and support for our clients who are recovering from intoxication or are in police custody for offences relating to public intoxication.

The first of these services is diversion centres which have been established in key communities. The centres play a crucial role in reducing the risk to Indigenous people being held in police custody for public intoxication related offences by providing them with a safe and monitored environment in which to recover. In order to provide support for Indigenous people to remain in police custody for offences relating to public intoxication, the government also funds a cell visitor program to provide support and to reduce the incidence of suicide and self-harm.

Diversion centres and the cell visitor program operate in Brisbane, Rockhampton, Mount Isa, Townsville and Cairns. As part of the specific response to the Townsville community, the government funds the Townsville Community Patrol Service. The patrol provides outreach support, transport and referral services to intoxicated and homeless people in public places such as parks, gardens and identified hot spots. Playing a key role in linking with other service providers, the community patrol also provides information about what is happening out on the streets. The appropriate management of public intoxication is considered a key issue by the Beattie government and in 2007-08 we will continue to address this issue with a specific focus on integrating services.

In respect to youth justice, the overrepresentation of Indigenous young people in the criminal justice system is an issue I take very seriously and I know you share that concern with me. The complexity of the issue and the multiple causes of overrepresentation means that there are no simple solutions. During 2006-07 I committed to a range of initiatives. These included the development of an Indigenous policy framework and Indigenous youth justice strategy and youth justice program of improvement strategies. In addition, the government will provide \$2.43 million in 2007-08 to fund evidence based initiatives targeting Indigenous young people in the youth justice system.

These funds will be allocated in this way: about \$0.56 million for six positions in six locations to encourage increased participation and completion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in youth justice conferencing; \$0.44 million for five positions in five locations to support culturally appropriate service provision to young people on supervised orders; \$0.08 million for supporting the participation of Indigenous elders in youth justice conferencing; \$0.65 million for providing, purchasing and adapting programs to address offending behaviour; and \$0.5 million to establish a new non-government service in far-north Queensland to provide culturally appropriate activities, support and intervention services. There were a couple more there as well as.

**Mr JOHNSON:** As stated on MPS page 1-31 in relation to the \$6 million and the \$1.1 million equity, also specifically mentioned in the coronial and Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody recommendations, I draw your attention to the fact that the Deaths in Custody Monitoring Unit of the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Legal Service has been disbanded and reporting was to have occurred through Partnerships Queensland. However, since there has been no report since the 7th edition of the Which Way report in June 2005 by the Deaths in Custody Monitoring Unit, can you tell the committee how this process is being monitored and what reports have been made public?

**Mr PITT:** The government has made significant achievements in implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody with major reforms in policing, courts, corrective services, juvenile justice, coronial law and many other areas to reduce the opportunities and risk of deaths in custody and to address their causes. Times have moved on. We now have a criminal justice system that is much more responsive to the needs and circumstances and risk for Indigenous people in communities. Of course, we all agree that any death in custody is a tragedy and even one death is one too many. However, we must acknowledge the complicated issues and situations surrounding these tragic events. Of the royal commission's 339 recommendations, 290 were found to be relevant to the Queensland government. Only one was not accepted by the Queensland government. Over the 16 years since the commission's report, 258 recommendations have been fully addressed and 32 are ongoing or substantially addressed. It must be noted that some recommendations, such as those that deal with community capacity and self-determination, reconciliation and land issues, pose continuing and somewhat open-ended challenges.

The Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships continues to follow up implementation of outstanding recommendations. In relation to particular responsibilities of the Department of Communities in relation to juvenile justice, the royal commission's findings have significantly influenced the legislative programs, standards and practices of Queensland's juvenile justice system. The Queensland Police Service is also proposing to allocate 15 police liaison officer positions to these communities to further enhance the relationship between the police and community members. As a result of negotiations with the federal government, this government has secured a further \$12 million from the Commonwealth for police accommodation at Woorabinda, Hope Vale, Lockhart River, Pormpuraaw and Aurukun. The government is also contributing \$3 million immediately to these projects.

The RCIADIC reporting will be part of the Partnerships Queensland reporting in future. The next report will be finalised at the end of 2007. I have made a commitment to Indigenous Queenslanders that I believe the Aboriginal deaths in custody issue is one that requires ongoing monitoring. I am in the process of putting together a working group that will continuously monitor progress and make

recommendations to me as to any additional work we need to do and perhaps revisit some of the work we have done already as to its effectiveness. I believe that is an appropriate way to involve Indigenous Queenslanders in an ongoing assessment and monitoring process.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Minister, I refer you to the MPS at page 1-36 and the statement that the department provides whole-of-government leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partnerships. You have been silent on the issue around policing in Aboriginal communities yet quick to stand up and say that Queensland's Aboriginal children are not in the same state as Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory. With rising numbers of sexual abuse cases reported to both the police and Child Safety in 2005-06 how can you honestly make these claims without any real strategies to address sexual abuse?

**Mr PITT:** I really think the premise on which you have based your question is not correct. No-one has ever suggested that there is no problem or ever suggested that we should diminish our concern in respect of the issue. Policing is only one part of the attack on child abuse. This government is very keen to ensure that we put in place as many mechanisms as possible to build stronger communities and stronger families.

The Commonwealth may think the shock and awe approach used by it in the Northern Territory is appropriate there. I draw the committee's attention to the 'Our children are sacred' report. I believe there were some 94 recommendations—the number may not be quite right. My department has done an exercise where we have looked at the issue and looked at each of those recommendations. We will make that available to you, if you wish. It indicates that in terms of the vast majority of those 94 recommendations not only are we implementing the recommendations, and have been doing so for a number of years now, but we are well and truly ahead of anything the Commonwealth is suggesting.

The issue of child abuse, as you know, rests largely with the Minister for Child Safety but is a matter of great concern for me in terms of my portfolio responsibilities. Members of the committee can be assured that we continuously work on the programs that we have now. Anything the Commonwealth brings to us that will help us carry out our work in a more effective manner we are prepared to enter into engagement on.

Through the Meeting Challenges, Making Choices response and the Crime and Misconduct Commission's report into child safety and subsequent reforms the Queensland government has already introduced alcohol management in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We have established community justice groups, the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, a child safety directors networks and improved policing levels. The Department of Communities will continue to implement targeted prevention and early intervention initiatives with focus on high-quality early childhood education and care, parenting, family support and strengthening community capacity.

For example, to reduce the impact of domestic and family violence on children and young people safe havens are being established at Cherbourg, Coen, Palm Island and Mornington Island. To provide families with a one-stop shop for child care, parenting support, child health and education services, child-care and family support hubs have been established in six Indigenous communities. In addition, my department will also be piloting counselling and support services for victims and child witnesses of domestic and family violence in select communities.

The Best Start initiative will further improve services for Indigenous children and their families in the crucial early years. The initiative includes expansion of the coverage of parenting programs and the collocation of community based early education and child-care services at or near state schools.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Minister, I refer you to page 67 of the Capital Statement where \$48.3 million in capital grants is allocated for upgrades to existing and new properties. I refer you to the Capital Statement at page 69 where there is only \$1.038 allocated for construction in the northern region plus various amounts that are ongoing for construction improvements for existing dwellings. Bearing in mind that the cost of a bag of cement in the far north is \$6.30 for a 20 kilogram bag, it costs \$6 in freight, the cost of building a house is \$2,100 per square metre and the cost in the south-east corner is about half of that, how many homes do you envisage will be built in Cape York and Torres Strait Island communities for \$1.038 million?

**Mr PITT:** As the member well knows, the responsibility for construction of public housing rests with the minister for housing. I agree totally with you about the costs of delivering not just services but capital works in remote and Indigenous communities. I would not be able to give you the exact figure. We have done a far bit of work on the upgrades of departmental housing. In terms of refurbishments we have put \$0.11 million into two houses at Bamaga, \$0.16 million into four residents at Doomadgee, \$0.09 million into two houses at Kowanyama, \$50,000 into one house at Woorabinda, \$0.28 million into one house at Pormpuraaw, \$0.25 million into a house at Lockhart River and \$0.11 million into a house at Thursday Island.

Again, I must say that I agree with you, it is very expensive. One of the things I believe we should be asking our Commonwealth colleagues to do is engage with Queensland in ensuring that we fund adequately the construction of public housing in our Indigenous communities knowing full well there is very little you can do about the cost of construction. That is something that is driven by market forces. Minister Swarten was very successful in gaining something like half a billion dollars in funding for public housing in this year's budget. A substantial amount of that is targeted at Indigenous housing in remote communities. I will be working closely with Minister Swarten as he rolls that program out.

Coming back once more to the question you raised, you have detailed one of the great challenges we have in providing public housing in these communities. It is very important that housing remains a priority issue. Overcrowding in houses and a lack of housing generally is one of the issues that has a flow-on effect when it comes to other areas of social dysfunction. It is something that we all need to be exercising our minds with. But I would love for you to be able to give me some way of bringing down the costs of these houses because the government is prepared to responsibly fund the houses. On the other hand, it is not a bottomless bucket.

I do have here a fact sheet, which I will table for your information, which is drawn largely from the Department of Housing which would indicate the sort of work the Queensland government is doing in this area. I seek leave to do that.

Leave granted.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Minister, I turn to page 1-40 of the MPS 2007-08 and refer to the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council and the Palm Island Community Company. It was in August 2005 that the Palm Island Select Committee exhausted its findings and made 65 recommendations to the Queensland parliament. That is now two years ago. Will you inform the committee how many of these recommendations have been implemented?

**Mr PITT:** I know very well that the member asking the question was a member of that committee. At the time I appeared before the committee in a formal sense. A number of committee members, including Mr Lawlor, spoke to me in private about my long association with Indigenous communities, including the Palm Island communities, and sought my input in that respect. I do appreciate the courtesy shown to me at that time.

The government has been and remains committed to working with the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council and community to implement the recommendations of the Palm Island Select Committee. As a result, the Palm Island community is benefiting from this reinvigorated relationship and the strong focus on responsive service delivery. As you indicated, the select committee released its report containing 65 recommendations in August 2005.

One of these recommendations called for the government to report in 12 months time on its progress. This requirement was met and a 12-month implementation report was tabled in parliament in November 2006. A significant number of the recommendations have been completed. While some recommendations are no longer relevant or have been superseded by new priorities all recommendations accepted by council and the government are underway. It has been paramount that the government agencies work with the council and community at a shared pace to progress these recommendations.

I think something that the member would know is that I am absolutely committed to working in partnership with councils. It is all well and good for the committee to come up with the recommendations but, at the end of the day, we must work with the people on the ground and gain their support to ensure that we can carry them through.

Some examples of the achievements and ongoing projects include: two MOUs have been signed between the council and the Numburra traditional owners resulting in improved understanding and communication between the groups when dealing with land and cultural heritage issues on Palm Island; further workshops are being facilitated by government; and standard leasing documents have been approved by the council and a key lease signed enabling government to progress essential infrastructure.

The Palm Island Housing Improvement Plan has been developed and endorsed by council. The Department of Housing is providing ongoing support for the council to manage their housing program. This strong partnership is resulting in the improved management of community housing. Similarly, improvements to the maintenance program and a number of housing upgrades have provided council with increased revenue for tenants.

The Department of Education, Training and the Arts has supported the community's desire for young people to remain on Palm Island to achieve their senior certificates. A senior phase of learning focusing on literacy, numeracy and vocational training commenced in 2007. Some 43 students enrolled in this program which significantly exceeded our expectations. Queensland Transport has negotiated and supported an improved ferry service to the community. A return ferry service from Townsville now operates three days per week with prices for passengers significantly reduced.

The work of the select committee was valuable work indeed. Its recommendations have sparked action. We are working closely with the community to ensure that those recommendations are progressed where possible.

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

**Mrs MILLER:** Page 1-13 of the MPS refers to a child-care program for Indigenous communities. Can you outline what investment your department has made towards child-care services for Indigenous children?

**Mr PITT:** I thank the member for the question. The Queensland government is committed to ensuring that Indigenous children and families living in remote areas of north Queensland have access to child-care services that are culturally appropriate and give their children a good start in life. I have had the privilege of visiting 18 of the 19 MCMC communities. In those places where child-care facilities are operational I must say that the concept of culturally appropriate delivery of child-care services is being carried through. It is producing results for the young individuals concerned and their communities in general.

In 2006-07 the government provided \$2 million to rural and remote Indigenous services to support them to upgrade facilities and to meet the building requirements under the Child Care Act 2002. In addition, the Department of Communities allocated funds totalling \$1.7 million in 2006-07 to 39 remote area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child-care organisations to provide a range of child-care, family support and advisory services to Indigenous community organisations in north and far-north Queensland.

The Remote Area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care program is a Queensland government initiative that was originally developed in response to the expressed need for suitable child-care services within Indigenous communities. It has expanded to include family support services. These services are located in communities across the cape and the Torres Strait islands.

The Remote Area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care program responds to the needs of Indigenous communities in regional and remote areas by embracing a wide-range of local community approaches, participation in decision making around child-care services, including centre based child-care services, play groups and children's activity services and family support services including child and family support hubs. Something I have learned in the process is that no one size fits all. You cannot template what we would call mainstream services into Indigenous communities and expect that they would be instantly successful in bringing the outcomes that we want. It is very important that we learn new methodologies but still maintain the same high standards that are required right across the state.

The program's philosophy views child care and family support in a holistic way and includes programs that encourage the personal, social, developmental, recreational and cultural wellbeing of children and their families. It provides Indigenous children with a safe place and assists employers seeking to recruit and retrain staff and add to community infrastructure and resources.

Funding for child and family support is also provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children through the child and family support hubs program with funding totalling \$0.33 million. A hub, for the benefit of the committee, is a multifunctional service that may take the form of a network of services that work together to ensure seamless access to a range of different services. All hubs focus around the provision of child-care services as the universal platform for the delivery of family support services, parenting support, child health care and education services.

**Mr HAYWARD:** Minister, the MPS at pages 1-14 and 1-16 refers to domestic and family violence initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Minister, I ask: can you outline the purpose of these programs?

**Mr PITT:** I thank the member for the question. Over \$3 million in the 2006-07 budget was allocated to fund a child witness counsellor and domestic and family violence support worker in the Torres Strait, Cooktown and Cherbourg communities. These domestic and family violence counselling services will be piloted over three years. It is anticipated that these services will be established by January 2008 after a period of consultation and development with each of the targeted communities. Consultation and development work has already commenced in the Torres Strait and Cherbourg and it is anticipated that work will begin in Cooktown in July 2007. Both the child witness and victim counsellors will work alongside other human service agencies in the area to build a strong connection with other services that provide support to victims of domestic and family violence. The aim of these counsellors is to provide support to those women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence.

A women's refuge is based on Thursday Island. There is a significant access issue for female victims from the outer islands due to the high risk involved in travelling via boat. This is the basis on which Thursday Island was selected as a location for which outreach could then be provided to the outer islands. Anyone who has been to the straits would understand how difficult it is to move between islands and at times it can be downright dangerous. Cooktown has good infrastructure from which to base wide outreach to three high-needs communities within close proximity. Cherbourg was selected on the basis that it already has the social capital and the support of much of the community to address domestic and family violence. This principle also underpinned the selection of the other locations.

These communities will provide outreach to the following Indigenous communities. The service at Cooktown will outreach to Hope Vale, Wujul Wujul and Laura; the service on Thursday Island, as I said, will outreach to other islands within the Torres Strait; and the Cherbourg service is expected to primarily deliver services within that community but also nearby Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in other townships. In relation to coordinating the work of these councils with related service delivery in these communities, in the Torres Strait the councils will work closely with the Indigenous Healing Service funded by the department and other relevant services and in Cherbourg the councils will support the work of the new Safe Haven for children who are victims of family violence which is to be established shortly.

The Indigenous family violence counselling initiative further enhances the \$28.89 million triennially that the Queensland government commits to supporting victims of domestic and family violence. For the first year departmental officers have been recruited to undertake community development processes, the primary outcomes of which are to encourage the community to recognise the problem and engage in help seeking behaviour so the service will be sustainable, to ascertain an appropriate auspice for the service to develop a service model and framework in consultation with the community, and to determine what the optimal form of procurement should be.

**Mr LAWLOR:** Minister, page 1-20 of the MPS refers to leadership programs for young Indigenous people. Can you please outline the benefits of investing in these programs?

**Mr PITT:** Can I say at the outset that being a former chalkie—a former schoolteacher—I have great faith in young people, Indigenous and otherwise. I believe that anything we can do to invest in strengthening their capacity and their capabilities is an investment in the future. Youth development programs for young people contribute to making communities stronger, more enjoyable places to live in and also provide improved support networks and opportunities for our young people. By investing in Indigenous leadership programs, the government is ensuring Indigenous young people are provided with an opportunity to engage in positive personal development including enhancing teamwork and leadership skills, strengthening connections with Indigenous role models and peers, and encouraging contributions to their communities.

The Department of Communities delivers two young Indigenous leaders forums each year in Cairns and Brisbane which provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people with an opportunity to learn about leadership, develop networks, connect with mentors and gain knowledge of business in the private, public and community sectors. As a key initiative under the government's Reconciliation Action Plan, the forums help to foster future Indigenous leaders to the benefit of the young participants and their communities and to promote their positive contributions to the broader Queensland community. Forums have included high calibre participants, including 2007 Young Australian of the Year Tania Major who participated in a 2003 leadership forum delivered by the then Department of Employment and Training. Participants from the recent Brisbane Young Indigenous Leaders Forum are actively engaged in a range of initiatives such as establishing local youth forums and preparing for a presentation at the forthcoming Queensland Youth Conference.

Feedback we receive from participants involved in the Young Indigenous Leaders Forum is consistently positive. The department is developing a strategy to build on this success and foster long-term developmental opportunities for participants. In addition to the Young Indigenous Leaders Forum, the department is expanding access to the Duke of Edinburgh's award through trials in the Indigenous communities of Cherbourg, Mornington Island, Weipa and Inala to ensure that access to such positive youth development programs is open to all young Queenslanders. Programs such as these contribute significantly to outcomes such as enhancing employability and business development opportunities and building links between young people around their shared experiences and solutions in their communities. Such outcomes are critical to the development and the advancement of Indigenous people and in empowering young Indigenous people to improve social and economic outcomes for their communities. I believe we will begin to see the real benefit of these particular programs in the years to come, although it is quite obvious that if you look at some people, their achievements thus far and the contributions they are making it is already having some significant impact.

**Mrs MILLER:** Minister, page 1-37 of the MPS refers to the Indigenous wages and savings reparations process. Can you inform the committee how much has been paid in reparations and what will happen with the remaining funds?

**Mr PITT:** The historic reparations offer was based on the Queensland government's determination to make reparation payments as expeditiously as possible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who previously had their wages and savings controlled by the state. The payments were part of a reparations package that included a written apology from the government, a statement in parliament to publicly recognise past injustices and a commitment to commence official government business with an acknowledgement of the traditional owners of the land. The money was never intended nor offered as compensation; it was a genuine gesture of reparation acknowledging the pain caused by previous governments who controlled the wages and savings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Since the Indigenous wages and savings reparation process commenced in February 2003, 5,553 eligible claimants have received payments totalling \$19.528 million from the fund of \$55.4 million. The reparations payment process concluded in March this year, leaving \$35.872 million in unspent funds. The Department of Communities is currently working with the Queensland stolen wages working group, a group which comprises elders, claimants and other community members affected by the control over their wages and savings, to resolve the matter of these unspent funds. A statewide workshop will be held in Cairns in late July. At this workshop 20 members of the stolen wages working group will come together with government representatives to discuss possible options for the disbursement of the unspent funds and to plan a consultative process with the broader Indigenous community. I am confident by working in partnership with Indigenous Queenslanders we will resolve this matter. As I have said in a number of places on a number of occasions, the money is destined to improve the lot of Indigenous Queenslanders and I intend to work with them to make sure that they can help me target the spending of the so far unallocated funds to the betterment of their people as a whole.

**Mr HAYWARD:** Minister, page 1-38 of the MPS refers to alcohol management plans. Can you outline what strategies are in place to deal with alcohol issues in Indigenous communities?

**Mr PITT:** I think it is fair to say that Queensland has led the way in tackling the scourge of alcohol abuse in Indigenous communities, and we intend to do so into the future. But no-one should ever underestimate the challenge of changing what has become deeply entrenched. As members will appreciate, violence and other crimes are a product of complex interactions of which alcohol is only one part. I think it is important to note that alcohol is only one part of the cause of many of our problems; it is not the only issue that needs to be addressed. It is the Beattie government that commissioned the Fitzgerald report and it is also the Beattie government that is implementing a suite of reforms and interventions that are making a difference. This government commenced introducing alcohol supply and demand restrictions and other measures starting in 2002-03, and these included alcohol management plans and stricter licence conditions; an enhanced alcohol, tobacco and other drug service and alcohol and other substance demand reduction programs; diversion from custody and court diversion programs; and community information and education initiatives.

Alcohol supply restrictions include carriage limits imposed for alcohol management plans as well as stricter conditions on licensed premises in or near the discrete communities. Alcohol management plans are now in place in 19 communities and they are being progressively reviewed. Licence conditions are frequently adjusted and tightened to deal with evidence of poor practice and harm. The \$12 million Queensland Indigenous Alcohol and Other Substance Demand Reduction Program commenced providing grants in 2005-06. The \$36.4 million Queensland Indigenous Alcohol Diversion Program commenced this month. The Meeting Challenges, Making Choices communications strategy is ongoing with the cooperation of the Liquor Licensing Division of the Department of Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development and includes a 24-hour information hotline, pamphlets for each community and fold-out Z-cards for people travelling to Cape York, posters and a radio campaign.

Recently the Premier announced a joint student and community education initiative with the Northern Territory Chief Minister. At my instigation, well before the Australian government's intervention in the Northern Territory, I instigated a whole-of-government review now underway led by the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships into all aspects of policy and programs relating to alcohol and other drugs in the Meeting Challenges, Making Choices communities. The outcome of this review will inform future policy and program settings for addressing alcohol and other drugs related issues, including alcohol management plans, to be considered by the government later this year. A hallmark of the Queensland government's approach is not only to make alcohol supply and demand reduction a priority but to endeavour to work with communities in the process. I acknowledge that this is a very complex and contested matter. The Queensland government remains determined to reduce the levels of alcohol related violence and disruption in the 19 Meeting Challenges, Making Choices communities.

**Mr LAWLOR:** Page 1-1 of the MPS refers to effective service delivery to improve the outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Minister, could you please set out what these initiatives are?

**Mr PITT:** They are a wide range of initiatives which the Department of Communities is developing and implementing in partnership to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. To drive these initiatives, we have strong leadership and dedicated teams. The government coordination office, Indigenous Service Delivery, is an arm of the Department of Communities improving outcomes through effective service delivery. This office was established to drive urgent and sustained service delivery interventions across government for the 19 discrete Indigenous communities in Queensland. The office works, through local and regional staff in the Department of Communities, closely with communities and other agencies, particularly in relation to substance abuse, child abuse and family violence. The office has also initiated a range of projects to further encourage coordination and improve service delivery, including establishing a Child Wellbeing Task Force. The Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships has been established as the Indigenous policy and strategy arm of the Department of Communities. OATSIP is driving whole-of-government

implementation of the Partnerships Queensland framework in order to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders. At a regional level, the Department of Communities now has extra positions and is putting in place dedicated ATSIP teams to drive improved engagement services in each of the department's 10 regions.

One of the initiatives OATSIP is leading is the cross-agency Partnerships Queensland Alcohol and Other Substances Task Force. This task force is currently reviewing alcohol policy, program and services and will develop integrated innovative service models around substance abuse to the 19 discrete communities. As part of its Meeting Challenges, Making Choices response to the Cape York Justice Study, the Beattie government introduced innovative mechanisms to engage with Indigenous communities. These include negotiation tables and government champions. These have improved relationships and services and infrastructure at a local level and will continue to make these mechanisms work better.

The government will also build on them through an Indigenous partnership agreement and local Indigenous partnership agreements that drive action on the ground as well as further policy and program reforms.

I would like to point out to the committee that for the first time as part of the state budget we have also produced a comprehensive summary of what the Queensland government is doing to address Indigenous issues. This detailed package reflects the Queensland government's commitment to transparency and accountability and to working in partnership across the portfolio areas to make a real difference for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The package collates information on initiatives and investments emerging from the 2007-08 state budget. It includes 10 fact sheets that cover a range of topics that cover more than \$500 million in expenditure. I seek leave to table this package for the information of the committee.

Leave granted.

**CHAIR:** That concludes the time for questions from government members. I call the member for Gladstone.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM:** Minister, it is good to see you looking well. I refer to page 1-39 of the MPS. It notes that the department is going to progressively divest itself of its retail stores at Doomadgee, Kowanyama, Lockhart River, Palm Island, Pormpuraaw and Woorabinda. My concern is that while the government has control of these stores there is certainty in terms of access and affordability. If you divest yourself of the stores, how are you going to guarantee access—that is, that the stores will remain in those locations—and also affordability?

**Mr PITT:** As the member would know, what is basically a general store in each and every community is a vital part of the fabric of that community. It is very important not only that these stores are kept in place but also that they operate in the best interests of the community; that they, as best we can given the circumstances of remote locations, ensure that the pricing structure is within reach of the capacity of individuals who live in those communities to pay; and that the fare at the stores is such that it leads to positive outcomes in terms of good health.

We have historically owned and operated those six retail stores at Doomadgee, Kowanyama, Lockhart River, Palm Island, Pormpuraaw and Woorabinda. In providing this crucial service, the government aims to ensure that basic necessities and healthy foods are accessible to residents at the best possible price and quality. The Retail Stores Unit, a business unit within the Department of Communities' Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, continues to deliver service improvements. It has achieved four years of solid financial performance, enabling important investment in the premises, plant and equipment, and fixtures of retail stores. So we are putting that money back into the stores themselves.

It is pleasing to note that sales have grown by more than four per cent per annum over the last four years, while tight controls have been maintained over gross profit margins to improve affordability for customers. Queensland Health conducts biennial surveys to assess changes in the cost and the availability of a standard basket of healthy food items—we call it the healthy food access basket—in Queensland over time. The most recent healthy food access basket survey demonstrates that the department's stores compared favourably with other remote stores in price and range of goods supplied. A key policy of the retail stores' operations provide a broad range of healthy food at affordable prices. Fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as milk and bread, are freighted in weekly and sold at prices comparable to those in Cairns.

The government is mindful of the importance of services provided by retail stores to community residents and the local economy. Therefore, new ownership and management arrangements will be structured to ensure sustainability and good governance. Further activity to divest the stores will be considered once the results of the current review of local government boundaries are known. I think it is important that we accept that the local government boundary review may or may not have some impact on the direction we are all embarking upon right now. I have spoken at length with the mayors of each of those communities and given them an assurance that we will consult closely with them as we move down this track.

There is probably two ways you can go in respect of this. The stores, if we are going to divest of them, as we have indicated, could go to private enterprise or they could go into some sort of corporate entity that has direct return to the community itself. My personal view, I must say, is that I favour local empowerment. I think it is very important that jobs be there for local people, not just jobs at the front counter but jobs in running enterprises such as this. To answer your question, just wrapping up, we are mindful of the points you have made and we will be taking steps to make sure that we get positive outcomes for the communities.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM:** Thanks, Minister. On page 1-36, you outlined the past achievements in the Partnerships Queensland program. What do you propose for the Partnerships Queensland program for the forthcoming year? How much is allocated to it and what projects are contemplated?

**Mr PITT:** The government remains committed to making lasting improvements to the quality of life for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders, as demonstrated by our ongoing support for Partnerships Queensland: Future Directions Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy in Queensland 2005-10. The government's vision, as outlined in Partnerships Queensland, is that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders have their cultures affirmed, heritage sustained and the same prospects for health, prosperity and quality of life as other Queenslanders.

The member would know that we did bring that report down. The report, quite frankly, was stark and indicated that life outcomes for Indigenous people in Queensland were not the same as the life outcomes that the majority of the population enjoys. That poses a severe challenge, the challenge to close the gap in respect of those life outcomes. That is a challenge for me as a minister but also a challenge for my other colleagues around the cabinet table to work together to improve those life outcomes as we continue to monitor them in years ahead.

The Partnerships Queensland strategy funds initiatives aimed at enhancing the quality of life for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and features two components: first of all, integrated planning among agencies that aligns with negotiation table processes and the goals and performance measures of Partnerships Queensland; and, secondly, a pool of incentive funds allocated for initiatives which advance the goals of Partnerships Queensland and align with the Council of Australian Governments principles for Indigenous service delivery and priorities.

As at 30 June 2007, over \$1.027 million has been provided under the Partnerships Queensland budget strategy for initiatives including the Puchi-Wu fishing enterprise in Lockhart River—that is a very good project and has won a Premier's award for its activities. It supplies crayfish and other seafood to the Cairns market, where we have a big international tourism market. Other initiatives include the construction of an emergency services facility at Cherbourg; the Baas Yard renovation at Pomppuraaw; Giringun negotiation table in Cardwell; a bus for whole-of-government use at Doomadgee; the Centre for Indigenous Cultural Policy; the Centre for Aboriginal Independence and Enterprise; Reconciliation Queensland Inc.; the 50th anniversary celebrations for the 1957 strike on Palm Island; and the Cape York to Parliament project. I think you would have taken great pride, as I did, in the Cape York to Parliament project when we brought those young children down from Coen and Hope Vale to see what the big smoke looked like and not only to take part in activities in and around parliament but also to connect with significant Indigenous leadership role models here in the south-east corner.

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

**Mrs MILLER:** The Indigenous partnership agreement is referred to on page 1-38 of the MPS. Minister, can you state what is the intention and also the benefits of this agreement and how do the local partnership agreements complement this process?

**Mr PITT:** In February this year the Premier and I met with the 19 mayors of the MCMC communities at the community cabinet at Atherton. At the meeting it was decided that an Indigenous partnership agreement was needed to provide an overarching framework to support communities to address those key challenges and disadvantages affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This came hot on the heels of a sense I was obtaining from Indigenous communities regarding the whole concept of partnership.

I have been saying to these communities that government policy in many ways has really not been up to scratch. For too long governments of all persuasions, both state and federal, have had a tendency to do things to Aboriginal people and sometimes we do things for them in a misguided fashion. I think the time has really come for us to do things with Indigenous people. Therefore, the concept of partnership to me is a central plank in the way in which I will be discharging my duties as minister in this portfolio. The overarching Indigenous partnership agreement concept is the first step. The overarching agreement will set down basic principles and we will underpin those by a series of bilaterals, one on ones, with each of the Indigenous communities initially starting with the 19 MCMC communities, with the prospect of moving beyond those later on.

With the local Indigenous partnership agreements, it has been our intention to work closely with those communities to gain a shared sense of where we want to go, to set targets that are achievable. We are not in the business of looking at huge programs that may or may not succeed, as has been the want more recently of the federal government. It is our intention to use building blocks to steadily, step

by step, work towards good outcomes. So therefore each of those local Indigenous partnership agreements will have at its core achievables. They will be signed up to by the government champions and by the communities themselves, and we will set targets that we can achieve in a 12-month period. If we succeed, all well and good. If we have less success than we want, they go on the agenda for continued work.

The mayors of these communities are excited by the prospect of the government finally sitting down and allowing them to help set the targets for themselves and to work with them towards their achievement. I am sorry if I went over time, but I do get excited about this because I think it is the way forward.

**Mr HAYWARD:** Minister, page 1-37 of the MPS refers to the underpayment of award wages to former mission workers. Minister, can you outline what the government has done to address this issue?

**Mr PITT:** The Beattie government is committed to working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders. Our determination to build a better future includes the healing that is necessary in dealing with historical injustices. The Queensland government has been working over recent years to address a number of areas of injustice including the underpayment of award wages, reparations for past control of wages and savings, and the Aborigines Welfare Fund. Former employees of the predecessor departments of the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships participated in the underaward wages compensation process which paid compensation to each of the 5,729 former employees. Persons who were employed in mission communities were not included in this scheme as they were not directly employed by the state and the state held no employment records for them.

In November 2006, the full Federal Court found in a test case that the Queensland government had discriminated against eight former mission workers from Hope Vale and Wujal Wujal who had not been paid award wages for work they had done in these communities between 1975 and 1986. The government at the time paid grants to the missions which included components for wages. These components were not calculated at award rates. The full court found that the calculation of these grants was discriminatory under section 9 of the Commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act 1965.

The Queensland government has settled with eligible applicants immediately following the decision. Commencing in early 2007, the state government actively sought settlement with the remainder of the 170 former mission workers from Hope Vale, Wujal Wujal, Aurukun, Mornington Island and Doomadgee who had commenced actions in the Federal Court. Settlement conferences have been conducted for the Hope Vale and Wujal Wujal claimants and confidential settlements have been negotiated with the majority of these former workers.

The Department of Communities officers have arranged mediation sessions for claimants from Doomadgee, Mornington Island and Aurukun, involving these claimants and their legal representatives. Confidential settlements have now been obtained with all eligible claimants. The Queensland government has also provided a statement of apology to those claimants expressing regret for any distress, personal hurt or humiliation suffered as a result of the non-payment of award wages. It is anticipated that all current matters which can be resolved through mediations and settlement conferences will be finalised by September 2007. However, there may be some delay in finalising claims which involve estates of deceased persons.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. The committee will adjourn until 3.15 pm. At that time the hearing will resume with the portfolio units of communities, seniors and youth.

#### **Proceedings suspended from 2.59 pm to 3.15 pm**

**CHAIR:** The committee will continue its examination of the portfolio of the Minister for Communities, Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Minister for Seniors and Youth. In this session the committee will examine the department's organisational units of Communities, Seniors and Youth. I call the member for Beaudesert.

**Mr LINGARD:** There is a concern that separating the Department of Child Safety has meant that your department now needs more family support and more wellbeing measures, because neglect has become more significant than abuse. We now have more vulnerable families needing early years centres and prevention and early intervention services. I also have a concern that you are now shifting the emphasis from high-need areas in 2006-07, where you built structures, to high-growth areas in 2007-08. My question relates to page 1-15. It shows your commitments in this area. How can you claim that committing just \$3 million for these important initiatives for the second consecutive year is any kind of achievement? Surely this delay is having an impact on vulnerable children and vulnerable families?

**Mr PITT:** As members are aware, my portfolio has a particularly important function to assist among the most marginal and vulnerable people in our communities. We provide many services in your electorate. I believe that it is appropriate that the government provides effective support and intervention at times when people who are vulnerable are at risk. My department, for example, funds services for people subject to abuse and violence, people who are homeless, people who intoxicated in

public spaces, and for families who are at a significant risk of adverse child safety outcomes or where adverse outcomes have already occurred. These and other social services are vitally important to keep people safe and in most cases provide an important opportunity for individuals to become more self-sufficient in the longer term.

For me, it is a mark of good government that we provide support for the most needy and disadvantaged in our communities. The Department of Communities currently allocates funding to non-government organisations across the state to provide a broad range of prevention and early intervention services, including child care, family support, and domestic and family violence protection. This funding supports the whole-of-government priority of protecting our children and enhancing community safety. It is in line with the Crime and Misconduct Commission's recommendation that a separate department be established to focus on prevention and early intervention responses.

This recommendation has been addressed through the following initiatives. The Queensland government has demonstrated a significant commitment to providing child and family support services through early years centres, the best start in a variety of prevention and early intervention initiatives. The government's vision is the enhanced integration of universal services, such as health, early childhood education and care and family support services, and developing stronger links between these universal services and the intensive services that are provided to families of children with special needs who are at risk.

Funds of \$32 million have been committed over four years to establish early years centres at Caboolture, Nerang, Cairns and Browns Plains. These one-stop shops for early childhood services will offer families with children up to the age of eight high-quality support and integrated early childhood education and care and health services. An additional \$8 million was committed over four years to boost funding to existing prevention and early intervention services for families with children up to eight years of age. In August 2006 a further \$54 million over four years was committed under the Best Start initiative to further improve services for children and their families in the crucial years, representing the foundation for a comprehensive early years strategy.

The Queensland government has committed the remaining \$10 million per annum instalment of Future Directions funding to improve prevention and early intervention services for vulnerable families. This includes \$1.5 million for specialist counselling services and \$8.5 million for referral for active intervention services. These RAIs are being established in 10 locations across Queensland. The intent of the referral for active intervention initiatives is to reduce the number of notifications and progressions into the child protection and statutory system through the provision of intensive family support services to vulnerable families. The state budget also includes increased funding of \$8.6 million recurrent over four years, including \$2.5 million recurrent in 2007-08, to upgrade six decommissioned preschools.

**Mr LINGARD:** Obviously, the emphasis of my question was, as you spent only \$2 million last year and you are going to spend \$3 million this year on something like prevention and early intervention—which I am saying has become more and more important—why have you spent only that amount of money on something which is so important?

**Mr PITT:** I refer the member to my previous answer. I think if you have captured all the information provided there you will see that the figure that you quote is only part of the whole process. Early intervention and prevention per say is one issue, but to strengthen families generally to provide support right across-the-board is the real investment. Our early years strategy is a whole-of-government strategy, which my department is leading. I think to suggest for any reason that only \$3 million is being applied to this thrust to ensure the safety and wellbeing of young people and their capacity to reach their potential is not correct.

**Mr LINGARD:** According to the government sponsored juvenile sex offender treatment provider, Griffith University's Youth Forensic Service, which is mentioned at page 1-21, only the most high-risk and high-need juvenile sex offenders now receive treatment because of limited funding. They say that the average age of a juvenile sex offender is now 14.5—

**Mr PITT:** Excuse me, I hate to interrupt but you are quoting someone. I do not know who you are quoting. I am just wondering where it is in the MPS.

**Mr LINGARD:** Page 1-21 and, if I can remember, it is the fourth or fifth dot point down. They say that the average age of a juvenile sex offender is 14.5 years. They say that 35 per cent of juvenile sex offenders are ATSI. They say that 85 per cent of juvenile sex offending clients are outside Brisbane, with the bulk in the far-northern region, yet more services are available in urban Brisbane. I am asking: what funds are there in this budget to address the specific problems, especially among ATSI children—the specific problems being that the average age is 14.5 years and that 35 per cent of sex offenders are ATSI.

**Mr PITT:** I hate answering a question with a question but I am just wondering who the 'they' are that you are referring to. You have quoted a whole lot of statistics there. Can you go back and explain the source of those statistics for me, please?

**Mr LINGARD:** Griffith Youth Forensic Service, which is a government sponsored body, and which is mentioned on page 1-21, dot point 4.

**Mr PITT:** I appreciate the committee's concern about juvenile sex offenders. I welcome the opportunity to outline the steps that the Department of Communities is taking to address the needs of a small but significant group of offenders and their communities. Sexual offences represent about two per cent of all offences committed by young people in Queensland. The international research and practice literature shows that around 90 per cent of young people convicted of a sexual offence are not reconvicted of any further sexual offending. The recidivism rates are the lowest for young people who have received appropriate specialist treatment. Queensland has an evidence based approach to ensuring that treatment is appropriate. This method includes two dedicated treatment services and practices and practice guidelines for staff working with young sexual offenders.

The group you have referred to, the Griffith Youth Forensic Service, formerly known as the Griffith Adolescent Forensic Assessment and Treatment Centre, was launched in 2001 in response to concerns raised by the judiciary about the need for treatment for adolescent sexual offenders. The service is a joint initiative of the Department of Communities and the School of Applied Psychology and the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Griffith University. During 2005 the service was reviewed by an external consultant who identified a number of options to enhance service delivery. Partly as a result of those recommendations departmental funding of the service in 2006-07 was almost doubled to \$2.49 million per annum.

The service operates statewide and performs a number of functions including presentence specialist assessments and court reports, specialist intervention services for young offenders and their families, training for departmental officers and related service providers, and advisory services for staff in the Department of Communities.

Last year, I also approved pilot funding of \$0.5 million over two years for the Mater Face Up service, which is operated by the Mater Children's Hospital, to provide treatment and support to young offenders, victims and their respective families where a sexual offence is referred to a youth justice conference. These services include initial assessment and intervention to ensure people's readiness to participate in the conference process, attendance and support for the clients at the conference, post-conference therapeutic engagement and treatment and the development of appropriate service exit plans. This pilot will operate in the greater Brisbane area for two years after which it will be evaluated and decisions will be made about the application of this model across Queensland.

So to respond to the member's question, there has been an additional investment in youth justice for Indigenous young people. I point out to the member asking the question that this is a difficult area. The government is applying, in my view, adequate resources. I indicate that I could always use more in any part of my portfolio. As you know, the portfolio deals with some circumstances where money would help, but quite often it is not the money that is the key factor; it is the way in which we apply that money to produce those services that are required to produce the outcomes that we are looking for.

**Mr LINGARD:** Page 1-13 of the MPS and non-government question on notice No. 2 refers to a \$10.9 million underspend by your department. That \$10.9—almost \$10 million—would have delivered desperately needed programs to vulnerable families, specifically, \$4.366 million for safe havens in Coen, Cherbourg and Mornington; \$1.37 million for the referral of the active intervention information system; \$3 million for remote ATSI; and \$1.3 million for non-government provision of child care, family support, community support and domestic violence. What assurance can you give that the department will actively manage these important programs—and indeed all programs—funded in this budget during 2007-08 to actually deliver much-needed services to Queensland's most vulnerable families?

**Mr PITT:** Government peak organisations and service providers have a critical role to play in ensuring that services for children promote their safety and wellbeing and optimise the opportunity for children to grow and develop to their full potential. There is overwhelming evidence that experiences during early childhood can impact on adult health and wellbeing. For example, low birthrate, recurrent illness, abuse and neglect can contribute to poor health outcomes and intellectual, social and behavioural disadvantages in later life.

The Department of Communities allocates funding to provide a broad range of prevention and early intervention services, including child care, family support, domestic and family violence prevention. This funding supports the whole-of-government priority of protecting our children and enhancing community safety. It is in line with the Crime and Misconduct Commission's recommendation that a separate department focus on prevention and early intervention responses.

I note that, yes indeed, you asked a question on notice and a detailed response was provided. Do you want me to repeat some of the material contained in that response?

**Mr LINGARD:** No. All I am concerned about is that \$10.9 million was underspent.

**CHAIR:** That is not an opportunity for another question.

**Mr LINGARD:** I thought we were both asking a question, to be quite honest.

**Mr PITT:** I am quite happy to take a further question on it.

**Mr LINGARD:** I am just concerned that \$10.9 million—\$10 million—could have been spent on vulnerable families. The recent Auditor-General's report to parliament No. 2 for 2007 stated that there was no whole-of-government framework or coordinated approach to funding and maintaining relationships with the non-government organisations. It stated that the systems used for the financial and accountability processes appeared to imply that the programs were more about buying service delivery capacity rather than investing in the non-government organisations. What is the Department of Communities doing to show how your different accountability measures fit into a whole-of-government approach?

**Mr PITT:** I have to say that that is an excellent question. It really is something that I am starting to grapple with since we have had discussions with the Auditor-General. There is a growing feeling within the government that my department should lead a whole-of-government framework in respect to our interaction with non-government organisations.

As you would know, over the last couple of years we have been engaged in, I guess, the precursor to something like this through our strengthening non-government organisations projects.

One of the interesting things pointed out by the Auditor-General, as you say, is that we have to be very clear in our mind about what we are spending public money on. Are we actually buying a service, are we actually making a contribution to an existing service to enhance their capacity to do things, or in areas where no service exists should we be investing public moneys into creating a service to meet the need? As I said, I have had a meeting already with the Auditor-General who has pointed this out, and I take on board exactly what they are saying. Over the next several months, the department will be coming to grips with this and trying to ensure that there is some sort of division between what our expenditure may be in terms of what our aims are for the outcomes in that respect.

**Mr LINGARD:** I asked the question because your department is obviously bringing in the needs based planning and resource allocation framework. You say that the communities statistical information system enables easy and immediate access to collections of demographic, social and economic statistics for the department's regions and subregions. However, the Auditor-General in his report, which I read in June of this year, states that the existing information systems across departments relating to funding administration to the non-government sector cannot support robust performance monitoring, reporting and evaluation practice, therefore limiting useful and timely information. So my question is obviously what are you doing to ensure you have effective information systems?

**Mr PITT:** My department, the Department of Communities, funds over \$200 million worth of grants each year. These funds contribute to supporting the social infrastructure and local community needs across Queensland. I am therefore committed to ensuring this money is spent wisely with appropriate systems in place to ensure transparency and accountability, and that is what the Auditor-General is saying we need to come to grips with.

In May 2007 the Audit Office reviewed the management of funding to non-government organisations and its report stated that the Department of Communities has demonstrated leadership potential for driving future whole-of-government solutions, as I indicated earlier, through its collaboration with Disability Services Queensland and the non-government sector. I have been supporting a program of systemic improvements to the management of funding for several years through both the DISQIS project in Disability Services Queensland and the Grants Management System project in the Department of Communities. The Grants Management System project was one of 10 projects under the Strengthening Non-Government Organisations strategy which was approved by cabinet in early 2005. It recommended the development of a more effective and efficient grants and services performance management and information system to underpin the business relationship within the department and the funded non-government sector. At this time, cabinet approved \$0.5 million to commence preliminary work on mapping the current business systems used.

Building on this initial analysis, the Queensland government will provide funding for a range of projects in 2007-08. These projects will transform current grants management practices not only in the Department of Communities but, over time, across government. These projects include an interim solution for the Department of Communities to immediately address some of the Queensland Audit Office recommendations.

An online system will be piloted with the non-government sector to reduce the time and cost associated with reporting on grants. Additionally, a whole-of-government solution for grants management will be explored which will provide the capability to access more complete and timely grants information across the state. The system would include an online component which will be accessible to funded organisations; this would reduce government and non-government overheads.

The Beattie government supports a whole-of-government grants management system as it will further strengthen relationships between the Queensland government and funded organisations and will ensure that Queenslanders continue to receive quality community services. You will note that the

Auditor-General has indicated that we have begun work in this area and realises that we have a role to play as a department, as a portfolio, in engaging other portfolios across government to ensure the systems we put in place are as modern as they need to be to carry out the duties that are charged to us by the public of Queensland.

The committee will recall that I introduced the Community Services Bill 2007 into parliament on 13 March this year. That bill has been designed to meet community expectations about the quality, safety and accountability of community services and it will give greater transparency and certainty to community organisations about how the Department of Communities gives funding and other assistance.

**Mr LINGARD:** Minister, can I ask you how your department deals with the differentiation between a social capital approach for grants and a shopping for service approach?

**Mr PITT:** The department has well-established purchasing arrangements in place when we enter into funding agreements. But I come back to my original comment: the Auditor-General has indicated that there needs to be greater clarity and greater transparency, and that is something which we will be continuing to work on.

Every Queenslanders will access a community service during their lives in this state, and many of these vital services are delivered through non-government organisations, or NGOs. The Strengthening Non-Government Organisations strategy being undertaken is a partnership between the Queensland government and the community services sector and is aimed at achieving our mutual goal of high-quality services for clients. This is not something that will be the responsibility of government; this is something that befalls both government and non-government organisations to work together to establish a framework whereby those issues that you have raised are best met. I am very mindful of the fact that we need to partner non-government organisations to come up with systems that meet not only my needs or the determination of the Auditor-General but also the capacity of non-government organisations to discharge their duties in such a way that does not place a burden on them which they are unable to meet.

The member has raised an important question. We are working on it. We are mindful of the Auditor-General's comments. I can just give you the assurance that we will work very closely with the sector in the time ahead to come up with those frameworks.

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

**Mrs MILLER:** Minister, page 1-5 in the MPS refers to an increase in spending on child care. Can you please outline how this will be spent and how this will improve child-care services?

**Mr PITT:** As someone who is a grandfather and about to become a grandfather for the second time, child care is a matter of great interest to me. I am pleased to announce that in the 2007-08 state budget the government has increased funding provided in the area of child care by \$2 million. These additional funds will improve child care through enhanced regulation and an increased capacity to do so. The safety and wellbeing of children using licensed child-care services is of paramount concern to this government. Enhancing the capacity of the Department of Communities to license and monitor child-care services is a priority to ensure the provision of safe, quality child care.

Recognising this, and acknowledging the continual growth in licensed centre based child-care services, the state budget provides an additional \$2 million recurrent and \$0.26 million equity funding in 2007-08 as part of an \$8 million recurrent funding program over four years for increased staffing. This additional funding will be aimed at meeting the growing demand for child-care statutory services. This funding will improve child-care services through the establishment of 13.5 full-time equivalent new regional positions to boost the department's child-care licensing and monitoring capacity, building on the 55 full-time equivalent child-care community support officers employed throughout the state. Community support officers visit services and monitor compliance with child-care legislation and promote hygiene and safety standards in child-care services.

The funding provided in the state budget for child-care services complements the funding allocated for child and family support services. This includes a total of \$14.3 million to be spent establishing early childhood education and care services which will include the purchase and upgrade of six decommissioned off-site preschools, as I announced in my opening statement. Funding of \$5 million in equity was allocated in the 2007-08 budget for the completion of capital works at the four early years centres located at Nerang, Caboolture, Browns Plains and Cairns. This funding builds on the \$27 million committed over four years in 2006-07 to establish early years centres.

To further support and improve child-care services, the department will undertake a review of the Child Care Act 2002 during 2007-08. The review will ensure that contemporary legislation supports the delivery of quality and accessible child-care services that are responsive to the diverse and changing needs of families and protects the best interests of children receiving child care.

The department will also participate in the development of an intergovernmental agreement aimed at a national approach to quality assurance and regulations for early childhood education and care. The intergovernmental agreement is to be developed by 2008 and is included in Queensland's plans to address early childhood education and care reforms, which was developed as part of the Council of Australian Governments national reform agenda deliberations. Funding provided in 2007-08 will build on support already provided by the government through school-aged care programs, limited hours care programs, rural children's programs and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child-care programs.

**Mr HAYWARD:** Minister, page 1-15 refers to The Best Start, which was an election commitment. It allocates \$20 million to capital grants. Minister, can you outline how this \$20 million will be spent?

**Mr PITT:** The Best Start election commitment was announced to support Queensland families during the early years. This significant funding commitment of \$20 million includes capital grants to assist community based providers in the establishment of early childhood services on or near school sites. We all know that parents want access to child-care services that are either close to where they live or close to where they work and which they can incorporate into their daily routine in some way—for example, close to schools attended by perhaps older siblings. There is no doubt that the double drop-off can be stressful for both the parents and their children. The establishment of early childhood services on or near school sites will provide improved access for families and also provide quality and integrated education and child-care services to improve the outcomes for children, enabling a smoother transition to school.

Firstly, funds amounting to \$14.3 million in The Best Start funding will purchase and refurbish six selected decommissioned preschool sites by the Department of Communities to establish early childhood education and care services near school sites. I am pleased to inform the committee that the locations for these six centres have now been finalised. The locations are as follows: Ayr, at the site of the former Ayr State Preschool in Macmillan Street; Mackay, at the former Victoria Park State Preschool on Shakespeare Street, Mackay; Nanango, at the former Nanango State Preschool in Drayton Street, Nanango; Toowoomba North, at the former Toowoomba North State Preschool on the corner of Mort and Taylor streets, Toowoomba; Beenleigh, at the former Beenleigh State Preschool in Elizabeth Street, Beenleigh; and Beaudesert, at the former Beaudesert State Preschool in Birnam Street, Beaudesert.

All of these preschool sites will be refurbished to meet the compliance requirements of the Building Act and will be expanded to increase the range of services that are available in the local community to support children and families. These services give families more child-care options to make life easier during early childhood. It will also make it easier for working parents to better align their working hours with child-care services. In the near future, community based providers will be invited to operate the services and the Department of Communities will continue to work with local communities to determine the final service models. It is likely that service models will be based around a licensed child-care service and will include a range of family support services depending on the needs of the individual community.

Secondly, capital grants totalling \$5.7 million will be made available to community based organisations to establish early childhood education and care services on school sites from 2008 to 2009. Services provided will include licensed child care and elements of family support. Specific support services that meet the needs of children and families will in due course be identified following consultation with proposed community based providers and other stakeholders in the area.

**Mr LAWLOR:** Minister, page 1-22 of the MPS refers to the review of the Juvenile Justice Act 1992. Can you please explain why such a review is necessary?

**Mr PITT:** The Queensland government is committed to a world-class youth justice system which not only deals effectively with individuals who commit offences but also responds properly to the victims of these offences and their families. It is now timely to review the Juvenile Justice Act 1992 to ensure that features such as youth justice conferencing continue to keep pace with developments in other parts of Australia and overseas.

Amendments made in 1996 and 2002 introduced expanded youth justice conferencing to better take into account the views of victims and to encourage all parties to become involved. The satisfaction ratings for people involved in Queensland's youth justice conferencing continue to yield outstanding results. The very high levels of satisfaction are reported not only by young offenders and their parents but also by victims, their support people and police. The review will also help to ensure that Queensland's youth justice system has the capacity to adequately respond to the challenges faced in a way that uses effective and best practice models. It provides an opportunity to assess current legislation to gauge how effective our existing laws are in addressing juvenile crime and other aspects of the youth justice system.

The review will examine the effectiveness of the current legislation and will focus on issues such as the naming of young offenders, the existing range of sentencing options, the causes of high levels of young people on remand and how to address these, and the transition of young people from detention into the community. The review will also explore options aimed at reducing the rate at which Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander young people come into contact with the juvenile justice system. I am particularly interested in options to increase the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in youth justice conferencing given the very high satisfaction rate previously mentioned.

As I mentioned earlier, the issue of naming young offenders crops up from time to time. Some people would like to see this provision widened to permit the naming of greater numbers of young offenders, whereas others believe that the law is fine as it stands. All these issues will be considered, although I should say that preference in the final analysis will be given to those that are backed by some evidence to indicate they are likely to work.

All members of the public, non-government organisations and government agencies will be able to make a submission to the review. This will be supported by an issues paper which will be sent to major stakeholders and be available online. The review findings will be guided by research and evidence as well as feedback from government agencies, non-government stakeholders and the public. I seek leave to table the issues paper which has been released today.

Leave granted.

**Mrs MILLER:** Page 1-22 of the MPS refers to the bail support program. Minister, what are you doing to address recidivism?

**Mr PITT:** The government continues, I believe, to demonstrate its commitment to reducing youth offending in Queensland. The 2007-08 state budget has allocated an additional \$106 million over four years to the Department of Communities which will significantly enhance the government's response to youth crime. This investment is on top of the initiatives funded in 2006-07 that resulted in an expansion of programs for young sex offenders. A case management inventory risk and needs assessment tool that is now being used in all youth justice service centres was also implemented.

I recently announced that \$22.5 million over a period of four years including \$4 million in 2007-08 has been allocated to expand youth justice and youth justice conferencing services to address youth offending. Specific examples include the provision of an additional \$1.3 million in 2007-08 to meet the demand for youth justice conferencing as well as \$0.56 million to enable Indigenous staff to be permanently appointed in areas of high need.

Addressing Indigenous overrepresentation is critical, and I will be making a further \$0.44 million available to fund five identified positions to support statutory intervention services and youth justice centres in Cairns, Mount Isa, Rockhampton, Brisbane and the Moreton region as well as providing resources to enhance the participation of elders and community justice group members in youth justice conferencing.

This expansion is based on the demonstrated success of youth justice conferencing in diverting young people from the justice system and the research evidence that clearly demonstrates that the involvement of skilled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff improves the outcomes for Indigenous young people. I am committed to ensuring that youth justice service centres provide high-quality, evidence based programs that provide statutory interventions designed to address criminal behaviours and encourage young people to make positive choices.

In 2007-08 this government has allocated \$0.65 million to enable the Department of Communities to implement custom designed offender programs which have been shown to successfully reduce and address the problem of recidivism. The government has committed an investment of \$0.72 million in 2007-08 for innovative strategies and funding for the non-government sector to deliver programs that have proven effective in assisting young people to satisfactorily transition from detention and reduce the risk of continued offending. This includes a pilot service which will be located in far-north Queensland and funding for the delivery of an innovative range of evidence based interventions to young people.

This investment also includes funding for bail accommodation support services in far-north Queensland and enhanced funding for the successful service operating in south-east Queensland. Research clearly indicates and demonstrates that maintaining young people in the community on remand with support and intervention that reduces the risk of breaches of bail are likely to have significant benefits in reducing future offending.

**Mr HAYWARD:** Page 1-14 of the MPS refers to prevention and early intervention services. Minister, can you please outline the programs that your department funds to keep children and families out of the child protection system?

**Mr PITT:** The Referral for Active Intervention program provides intensive family support for high needs families who are expecting a child or who have children up to eight years. It aims to reduce statutory interventions. The program has been allocated \$8.5 million per annum in triennial funding. Of this funding \$7.6 million per annum is allocated to referral for active intervention services in 10 locations across Queensland.

Parallel to this, action network teams comprising members of key government agencies have been established in each location to assist in the development of local networks, local protocols and referral pathways. Funding of \$0.9 million per annum is currently being allocated to enhance prevention and early intervention services and each referral for active intervention service.

Evaluation of this initiative has commenced in parallel with implementation. A full evaluation will be completed by the end of 2008 and will determine the next steps. A joint Queensland and Australian government initiative, Safe Haven aims to reduce the impact of domestic and family violence on children and young people. The initiative is being implemented in four Indigenous communities—Cherbourg, Coen, Palm Island and Mornington Island. Safe Haven will allow for an immediate place of safety to be provided to children and young people witnessing or experiencing violence, together with a range of outreach family support and community capacity-building activities. In addition, the services will promote integration of existing service responses.

Achievements to date include the development of local community project groups in each community, mapping of local services, initiation of forums to update and inform community members, the establishment of interim services on Palm Island and a night patrol in Cherbourg. A total of \$3.8 million has been allocated over two years for the provision of interim services in Coen, Cherbourg and Mornington Island and a further \$2.6 million for an initial six months of service provision on Palm Island. Three departmental officers have been employed to establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander domestic and family violence counselling services in far-north Queensland, north Queensland and the Wide Bay-Burnett regions.

In 2006-07 funding of \$2.6 million per annum was committed to support the development of early years centres in Nerang and Caboolture. A total of \$32 million over four years will be invested to establish four early years centres in the high-growth locations of Cairns, Browns Plains, Caboolture and Logan. The early years centres will be places where expectant parents and families with children aged up to eight years can access integrated early childhood education and care, family support and health services.

I must say that this concept of early intervention is one that I think will bear fruit over the years ahead. I recently had the opportunity to go to Contact House Cairns, where we have one of those services. In the few months that it has been operating it has put in place successful intervention processes that have already begun to produce real, concrete outcomes.

**Mr LAWLOR:** Minister, could you please elaborate on the scheme that has been established for the benefit of former child residents of government institutions who experienced abuse and neglect that is referred to on page 1-3 of the MPS?

**Mr PITT:** On 31 May this year this year the honourable Treasurer and Deputy Premier, Anna Bligh, announced the introduction of a redress scheme to provide ex gratia payments to victims of abuse in Queensland children's institutions. I have to say to the committee that in all my political life if there is one thing I will look back on with great pride it is the fact that this government was able to embark on this redress scheme. If members of the committee had been present at the time to see the outpouring of genuine emotion from the individuals and their families, their hearts would have been warmed to know that finally a serious injustice that had occurred over a period of time under successive governments was now being put right.

The scheme completes the government's response to recommendation 39 of the Forde inquiry and complements existing services and support for former residents such as the Forde Foundation Trust Fund and Lotus Place, a one-stop shop service hub. Up to \$100 million in funding is available to eligible applicants for ex gratia payments, legal and financial services, and practical assistance in completing applications.

Eligibility for the scheme is limited to people who experienced abuse and neglect in institutions covered by the terms of reference for the Forde inquiry and who had been released from care and had turned 18 years of age before 31 December 1999. Under the scheme, former residents can apply from 1 October this year until June 2008 for one of two levels of payment—namely, a first-level payment of \$7,000 to applicants who meet basic eligibility criteria and a second-level payment of up to \$33,000 for approved first-level applicants who believe they suffered more serious abuse or neglect.

The total maximum payment available to any individual is \$40,000 inclusive of both first- and second-level payments. Level 2 payments will be assessed on a case-by-case basis by a panel of three experts who will be appointed under the provisions of the government's significant appointment process. Consistent with the government's commitment to ongoing dialogue with victims of abuse, aspects of the scheme such as the process and the criteria for assessing level 2 claims are currently the subject of consultation with the Historical Abuse Network.

On 13 July 2007 staff of the Department of Communities met with approximately 200 former residents at a forum in Brisbane. Smaller forums are being planned for Rockhampton and Townsville. Ex gratia payments will be dependent upon the applicant signing a waiver releasing and indemnifying the

state from any current or future legal claims. To assist applicants to make informed decisions about the conditions for a payment, all applicants will be required to access independent legal advice before accepting a payment. Independent financial advice will also be available to successful applicants upon request.

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

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM:** Minister, in answers to previous questions much has been highlighted about what is being done in the south-east corner for community support, early intervention and assistance for at-risk families. Being parochial, in my electorate in the last month there have been two announcements which will result in 6,000 construction jobs and 500 permanent operational positions, and I cannot see too much in the budget for areas like mine outside of the south-east corner where there are going to be huge family pressures. I am asking what is available for areas like Gladstone where there is targeted growth and there is going to be need.

**Mr PITT:** As the member would know, I am also a regional Queensland. It has been my determination from day one in this portfolio to ensure that the services we provide in the south-east corner are as best as possible replicated right across the state. As you know, that is a huge challenge and that is not always the way in which these services have been implemented on the ground. The director-general and I are determined to ensure that the 10 regions that comprise our department and the centres within those regions receive their fair share of funding.

I am pleased to provide information to the committee about the amount of grant funding allocated to community services in each electorate across Queensland. Many of these services are provided not only to those living in the electorate where the organisation is located but also to individuals and families in neighbouring electorates. So quite often it is a regional or subregional approach. I am happy to table the following document, if you wish, which outlines grant funding by electorate provided by the Department of Communities in 2006-07. As I go down the list looking for Gladstone, \$1,454,315 has been provided by the Department of Communities in 2006-07.

The department currently funds two services in Gladstone to provide generalist family support services. They are the Roseberry Community Services Inc. and the Gladstone Neighbourhood Centre. The Gladstone Neighbourhood Centre program operates a centre based and outreach service coordinated on two sites. The program provides a range of support services to families and individuals in the Gladstone area and this includes free face-to-face counselling and mediation to families and individuals. The target group is any community individuals experiencing personal, social, financial or emotional difficulties which impact on their wellbeing or safety. A total of \$0.87 million per annum is provided for three years to 30 September 2009.

Roseberry Community Services Inc. is funded to provide four support services in Gladstone. There is the Branch-Out service funded to the tune of \$.24 million; prevention and early intervention family support funding of \$.059 million to Roseberry House; and \$292,421 again to Roseberry House to provide short-term support and crisis accommodation for 15-19 year olds. I say to the member for Gladstone that when supplying services in the human services area the ground shifts and things occur. It is the responsibility of my department to monitor those very closely. One thing about yourself, member, is that you are never frightened to come forward and stand up for your electorate. If there is a need there I am the first to hear about it. If you wish to engage me personally at the conclusion of the committee hearings regarding any shortfall you may see in your electorate please feel free to do so because I will do my very best to meet those needs—within budget, of course.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM:** My last question is a general one and I do not mean it to sound as insulting as it is going to. Under the portfolio of Seniors you have listed seven future developments and they are to achieve goals such as reducing social isolation, broadening social participation and improving health and wellbeing. But only one is a tangible spend and that is \$.13 million for organisation for Seniors Week events. The rest, with respect, are motherhood statements. In the Seniors budget, what money is actually going to be expended to tangibly help older people—not print brochures, but actually help them?

**Mr PITT:** Let us go to the Seniors Week issue first. People have to understand that much of what seniors access by way of services is through a whole range of agencies. My portfolio is not the one-stop-shop for all services for seniors. In many ways we are there to coordinate the government's response to the issues of ageing, but we do have some targeted services we respond to. The other thing, of course, is that Seniors Week is very important. It raises the profile of the valuable role played by seniors in our community and that is money well spent.

I think you may have actually missed the mark when you say there is nothing tangible coming out of it. I have announced in the budget this year \$1.9 million to establish the Seniors Legal and Support Service. It is a one-year pilot program for older people at risk of experiencing elder abuse or financial exploitation. There are a number of centres that will be established to deliver these services—Brisbane, Hervey Bay, Cairns, Townsville and Toowoomba—and they will be under the auspices of community

legal centres in those areas. I have had a chance to speak with officers from one or two of them who are setting up now and they tell me that it is already quite popular to the extent that people are contacting them to receive professional legal advice that may assist them not to become the subject of either financial or other abuse.

We have provided money for grandparents who are playing a role in raising their grandchildren. The Premier placed this issue on the national agenda by raising it at the COAG meeting in 2004. In 2006-07 funding of \$.28 million was provided to Lifeline, increasing to \$.58 million per annum, to continue and further refine the Time for Grandparents respite program. That program is really important because, as you know, there are many grandparents who are seniors in our society who are raising a second family through whatever circumstances it may be. It is very important that their capacity to do so and to maintain an even keel themselves is maintained. Therefore, the Time for Grandparents program, which allows them to have some respite from those caring duties, is quite important. I could perhaps at some other point in time explain all the iterations of the Time for Grandparents program which I think are quite innovative and will be and are being well received by grandparents at this time. The 24 to 60 and Better program services have transitioned to the Department of Communities with an annual budget of \$1.2 million. These services are funded to promote the health and wellbeing of seniors by providing physical activities within group settings. I guess in short what I am saying is that there is real money going out for real services.

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

**Mrs MILLER:** Page 1-23 of the MPS has a number of references to youth justice conferencing. Can you inform our committee as to the success of this initiative?

**Mr PITT:** Youth justice conferencing is one of the real success stories in the juvenile justice arena. It continues to provide a successful response to youth offending in Queensland. It is based on a restorative justice approach to crime. The program allows for those people most affected by a young person's offence to meet and reach an agreement about how the young person can make amends. I think that it is really important for us to accept the fact that not only is it important for young people to be held to account for what they do, but also it is vital that they face up to the consequences of their offending action and that they take the next step. The most important step in their rehabilitation is to do something to atone for whatever they have done or make amends for whatever they have done.

Youth justice conferencing is a program that is highly successful. It is only recently that we have had visits from delegates from a couple of jurisdictions in South East Asia who have looked at our youth justice conferencing program and are now going to embark upon similar programs back in their own jurisdictions. Queensland is in many ways being seen as a leader in this area and I am proud to be part of that. It is vital that when a young person offends and if the offence is extremely serious that they, as people say 'do the time for the crime'. That is important. The vast majority of offences committed by young people are not at the serious end of the spectrum and those offenders are able to be turned around in their lives. In parliament you might have noted that I have quoted on more than one occasion that 97 per cent of young people never come into contact with the criminal justice system. Three per cent do. Of the three per cent who do, 85 per cent of that three per cent, once faced with the reality of their crime and brought to account for it, cease the activity and get on with their lives. You only have to look across our society at many high profile people to see those who have had at some stage a blip or a glitch in their lives where they have offended in some way but have gone on to lead wonderful lives and made magnificent contributions to our society. Youth justice conferencing is something that really is making an impact there.

There are 14 youth justice conferencing services and three youth justice conferencing outposts in Queensland. The 2007-08 budget for youth justice conferencing is \$8.746 million including \$1.861 million for recently announced initiatives. Rather than being a soft option, conferencing brings young offenders face-to-face with their victims and encourages them to accept responsibility for their actions. The benefits for victims and families who attend a conference may include an opportunity to tell their story directly to the person who has caused them harm and be involved in the decision-making process.

A successful youth justice conference results in the participants reaching agreement about how the young person may make amends. The program continuously experienced high rates of success with over 97 per cent of conferences resulting in agreement being reached during 2006-07. Overwhelmingly, as you would expect, the offender is quite happy with the outcomes, but the interesting point is that the victims themselves endorse this process and give it the overwhelming thumbs up.

**Mr HAYWARD:** Minister, page 1-47 of the MPS refers to Our Place, Our Future, a Blueprint for the Bush initiative. Can you provide details of this initiative and what it has delivered since June 2006?

**Mr PITT:** Can I say at the outset that the Blueprint for the Bush is an excellent initiative. It is in many ways the brainchild of AgForce Queensland and the government has become a partner in this process. It is already delivering results to rural and regional Queensland. I notice that Minister Fraser

was at the AgForce conference in Goondiwindi yesterday and was able to reaffirm to the participants of that conference that the Blueprint for the Bush is on track, it is delivering, it will continue to deliver and is making a genuine impact on livability, sustainability and prosperity in regional Queensland.

The Our Place, Our Future initiative provides the resources for rural and remote communities to build and strengthen their capacity to shape their community's future. The initiative includes enhancing community strengths, incorporating leadership networks, organisational infrastructure and relationships within the communities and with other areas. The Queensland government has provided \$7.4 million over three years for the Blueprint for the Bush and the Our Place, Our Future initiative. Through this initiative, local community organisations are able to access two categories of funding to support activities in their area. Planning and engagement funding is available to assist local communities to work together to identify, plan, coordinate and prioritise local strategies that will help build the capacity of their community and develop relationships within the community or between clusters of communities. Project implementation funding is available to support local communities to carry out projects that will increase their capacity to improve the livability and sustainability of their communities. This is done through social, cultural, environmental and economic development activities.

This innovative funding was announced on 5 December 2006 and two funding rounds have since been completed. To date 50 projects have been funded across the Blueprint for the Bush regions, a total value of \$1.45 million, with \$.41 million allocated to 21 community planning and engagement projects. This includes the Stanthorpe Shire Council which received \$20,000 for the Partnering for a Positive Future—Stanthorpe Community Plan. This project, in partnership with Community Development Services Inc, will develop a 10-year community plan that addresses the needs of older people, youth and the general Stanthorpe community. There has been a further \$1.04 million allocated to 29 implementation projects. Just as an example, there has been \$130,000 allocated to the Central West Queensland Remote Area Planning and Development Board for the Outback Opportunities project. This project will involve 11 shire councils, local communities and the Central West Queensland Remote Area Planning and Development Board. The funding will enable the production and distribution of a regional promotional compact disc and complementary media campaign to showcase the benefits of living, working and investing in outback Queensland.

The upshot of all this is that that money through that program is being taken up—it is well and truly oversubscribed. Councils and communities taking up the opportunity are now turning that into good outcomes for their own people.

**Mr LAWLOR:** Page 1-47 of the MPS refers to the Strengthening Rural Non-Government Organisations funding program. Can you please provide a update on this initiative and the benefits it is providing to rural non-government organisations?

**Mr PITT:** The Strengthening Rural Non-Government Organisations funding program provides a range of funding initiatives to support shared and collaborative projects between rural organisations and workforce development activities and to support organisational training and development to build the capacity of Indigenous non-government organisations.

The Rural Multi Tenant Service Centre initiative will establish collocation arrangements which will improve service delivery and reduce costs. Five consortia in Burdekin, Charters Towers, Dalby, Lockhart and Longreach have each received \$17,500 in funding to develop business case and implementation plans. Each centre will be eligible for up to \$1 million establishment funding over the next two years. Those five centres have now got their, what you would call, seed money to develop those plans. When they are produced we will assess them as to their viability and their outcomes and if they stack up each of those centres will be eligible to apply for \$1 million to assist to bring whatever program or project they have decided upon to reality.

Under the Building Rural Links initiative \$.5 million was allocated in 2006-07 to assist non-government organisations develop partnerships and collaborative activities that enhance service delivery. A second round of the funding is due to be delivered in 2007-08.

The rural non-government organisations workforce development projects commenced rollout in 2006-07. There are three key initiatives: rural non-government organisations workforce access to education and training, e-training resources for the rural workforce and rural education pathways for community service careers. The rural non-government organisations workforce access to education and training initiative, as I indicated, will build the capacity of human service organisations by providing guidance, support and flexible funding to address the barriers to education and training opportunities for staff in human service organisations.

An additional \$.1 million in 2006-07 was allocated to expand the strengthening non-government organisations e-training workforce development initiative. That will provide enhanced training and upskilling opportunities for workers in rural and remote areas through the provision of a variety of electronic training resources. Funding of \$.27 million was committed over two years for the rural education pathways for community service careers initiative to establish a pilot site in Roma or Charleville to trial workforce development activities and address shortages of skilled workers in the community services sector and rural and remote Queensland.

These programs are being taken up. They offer an opportunity for rural communities to improve the quality of life and to address some perceived shortcomings in, I guess, the social infrastructure and the human service delivery in our area.

**CHAIR:** The committee will adjourn and resume at 4.30 to examine the estimates of the portfolio unit of Disability Services Queensland.

**Proceedings suspended from 4.15 pm to 4.30 pm**

**CHAIR:** The committee will continue its examination of the portfolio of the Minister for Communities, Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Minister for Seniors and Youth. In this session the committee will examine the department's organisational unit of Disability Services Queensland. Minister, we are joined by the member for Currumbin for this session. I call the member for Currumbin.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I would also like to express my gratitude to this committee for allowing me leave to appear. Minister, can you advise why in this budget Queensland's spending on disability services per capita of the potential population remains lower than any other state or territory? Why does the budget fail to deliver full indexation on existing support services? What is the social and economic cost of not meeting Queensland's unmet disability service needs?

**Mr PITT:** I, like ministers before me, including ministers of a coalition government during the mid-1990s, acknowledge that Queensland's expenditure is below the national average per capita of the potential population. The Queensland government is committed to making a positive difference in the lives of people with a disability by continuing to address unmet demand and improving responses to meet the needs of people with a disability.

This year we announced another record budget for disability services. It was \$1 billion in total but \$717 million of that is for the provision of disability services. This represents an increase of 13.1 per cent on last year's budget for the provision of disability services. In fact, in the last 10 years we have increased the budget for disability services by 371 per cent.

Since the third Commonwealth-state-territory disability agreement was signed in 2002-03 we have more than doubled our funding, an increase of \$285 million over five years. This needs to be contrasted with the Commonwealth government's increase of \$16 million in the same period. The reality is, however, that the demand for disability services continues to rise and there may never be enough money to meet all the needs of all Queenslanders with disabilities with funded service provision alone.

We will continue to negotiate with the Commonwealth government for a multilateral agreement to develop a coordinated, equitable national effort in relation to specialist disability services. However, it is not just about the extra resources. It is also about what we do with these resources. DSQ will continue to reform the system, focus on early intervention and ensure quality services.

On the matter of straight funding, if the member has a very close look at the graph I am showing here now she will see that the funding from the Commonwealth over the period 1998-99 to 2007-08 has barely moved. When we look at what the Queensland government's contribution is in respect of disability services you see a sharp rise in the graph, particularly in the period 2003-04 through to 2007-08.

Every one of us will accept the comment that we have a long way to go. I am committed to continuously pressing Treasury and my colleagues in the Cabinet Budget Review Committee for additional funds. I think we have been quite successful over the last two or three years in getting increases. The difficulty is that the increases are quickly soaked up because Queensland's population is growing. There remains an unmet need within the community.

Queensland government indexation is 3.6 per cent. I think you should note that the Commonwealth government, with whatever formula it uses, has come up with an indexation figure of 1.9 per cent. Therefore, the average that is paid out in these bilateral arrangements ends up being 3.2 per cent. Over the last two years we have increased our indexation and the Commonwealth, unfortunately, has not seen fit to do likewise.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I refer to the MPS at page 2-1 which outlines the increasing demand for disability services and non-government sector concerns that there are significant threats in the Community Services Bill to the survival and vibrancy of the disability services sector. Can you advise the committee of the government's strategy to prevent highly skilled service providers from leaving the sector?

**Mr PITT:** Disability Services Queensland is introducing reforms to improve the way specialist disability services are delivered in Queensland. We have developed a program of reform by listening to the feedback generously shared by our clients, our stakeholders and our partners on the changes needed to deliver a contemporary disability services system.

The attraction and retention of staff is a critical issue for Disability Services Queensland in meeting the needs of its clients. DSQ's most valued asset is its workforce, similarly for non-government organisations. With the Queensland population predicted to grow substantially over the next 50 years there will be an increasing demand on our services. The average age of our workforce is also increasing, not just for DSQ but for non-government organisations as well.

Almost half of our employees are over 46 years of age. We face challenges to replenish our workforce and respond to the increasing demand for our services. To attract suitable candidates DSQ has revised its recruitment and selection procedures. We have designed more accessible employment pages on our web site and we have engaged in targeted promotional material and representations at career fairs.

New selection techniques have been piloted in the department's accommodation, support and respite services which have improved applicant pools and selection decisions. The department is also developing a five-year workforce plan and strategies to address workforce capability gaps in accommodation, support and respite services. In addition, the department provides development opportunities for staff focused on improving performance and motivates and encourages the growth of individual staff members. Opportunities include induction programs, equity programs and professional development programs such as progression schemes for staff in the professional and operational streams.

DSQ is also investigating possible new initiatives. These would include partnerships with other agencies to address difficulties in attracting and retaining allied health professionals, opportunities for national and international recruitment of allied health professionals and rural and remote incentives in order to improve the attraction and retention of staff in regional offices.

Furthermore, the department provides employment programs to attract new staff including recent graduates. For 2006-07, 12 traineeships were allocated of which two people were identified as Indigenous, two people were identified as having a disability and one person was from a culturally and linguistically diverse background. Eight graduates were employed in the 2007 graduate development program including two people with a disability and one from a culturally and linguistically diverse background. From 2007-08, DSQ will offer five scholarships per year over the next three years in the education to employment Indigenous scholarship scheme coordinated by the Department of Main Roads.

I think it is fair to say that we recognise the challenges that are out there. The challenges are not just for DSQ; they are for the human services sector as a whole. We are in a current economic climate where unemployment is low. We are going to have to continuously devise strategies to attract appropriately qualified staff to ensure that the services we provide are maintained and enhanced.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM:** In a question on notice you answered that the Adult Lifestyle Support Program had not been allocated for 2007-08. Can you advise whether there is more funding allocated for lifestyle packages given that many people apply and many are knocked back?

**Mr PITT:** The Adult Lifestyle Support Program, ALSP, is one of a range of programs provided by the department to enable people with a disability to live more independently in the community. The program provides individualised support to adults with a disability that allows them to maintain their own living arrangements, to build and strengthen their social relationships and to increase their participation in the community.

The programs are for adults between the ages of 18 and 65 who have a disability defined under the Disability Services Act 2006. Funding is generally provided on a recurrent basis. Some individuals may receive a combination of recurrent and non-recurrent funding. Others may require non-recurrent funding only to provide time limited support to assist with their transition to community life. Funding provided through the program plays a valuable role in assisting people with a disability to go about their day-to-day activities.

Services available through the program include a range of accommodation options, community access and community support. This includes assistance with personal care—things such as eating, drinking and personal grooming—assistance with household management including cooking, laundry and managing finances and using local facilities and services like banks and shops. Importantly, clients are supported to become involved with others in their communities in doing so as to experience a variety of activities that are meaningful and similar to other community members of comparable age and cultural background.

During 2006-07 an additional \$8.4 million in recurrent funding was allocated to the program. This funding enabled an extra approximately 167 adults with a disability to be supported in community living arrangements. This brought the total funds for the Adult Lifestyle Support Program up to \$69.9 million and the total number of individuals supported through this program to almost 1,500.

In addition, the department provided \$7.7 million in non-recurrent funding from this program to the emergency and crisis response funding program to support individuals in emergency and crisis situations. This support will ensure that adults with a disability continue to be supported to become valued and involved members of their communities.

From 2007-08 the department will begin to implement the *Growing Stronger* program. I am not sure whether the member is aware of the *Growing Stronger* program. I would be very keen to ensure that she gets a full briefing on how that will change the system of assessment, prioritisation, delivery of services et cetera in the disability sector. As I said in an earlier answer, by being innovative I think we

can make whatever dollars we have got go a lot further but also meet the needs of people in a timely fashion. I have a booklet here on the *Growing Stronger* program. I will make that available to you. I believe it is important that you seek a briefing from my staff as to capacity for that to enhance programs like the ALSP.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM:** Thank you, Minister, I will be doing that. You mentioned earlier people who exhibit challenging behaviours. History is littered with poor examples of institutional care where such people were perhaps poorly treated. However, I do not think it can be denied that there is a need for structured care facilities. You mention in the MPS at page 2-5 and over \$7 million in recurrent funding and other funding for people with challenging behaviours. Included in that and distributed throughout Queensland, are their plans for structured care facilities for people whose behaviours are just too difficult to maintain within the community?

**Mr PITT:** The moment you mention concepts like structured care facilities there are some people within the sector who immediately think of institutionalisation. I have a very strong view that institutions generally are not dependent upon the bricks and mortar. Institutions are devised or come about because of the way in which the system operates—what happens inside facilities. The state government has no intention of going back to the old traditional large scale institutions that are a blight on our social history in respect of people with a disability.

As minister I am determined to make as many options as possible available to people to get the accommodation and support needs that suit them. That means that we will not be putting all our eggs in one basket. What we intend to do is explore with the sector—that is, the service providers, advocacy groups, stakeholders, families, carers, whoever—a range of accommodation options and support mechanisms that will be tailored to meet the needs of individuals.

Providing appropriate accommodation for a person with an intellectual or cognitive disability exhibiting challenging behaviours is a serious challenge for this government and society in general. We have recognised this and we are planning for it. We acknowledge the complexity of providing appropriate support to adults with an intellectual cognitive disability who exhibit challenging behaviours. Part of this challenge is to provide environments that support positive behaviour change.

This is an important element of the Investing in Positive Futures initiative. This government supports Justice Carter's recommendations for the immediate establishment of suitable accommodation for use in emergency and crisis situations. You would be aware that it was me who asked Justice Carter to conduct an inquiry and to bring together all the material that had been gathered over many years. There were many false starts in the way in which we addressed these issues. He was successful in bringing it together and providing for me a number of recommendations. The recommendations have been accepted and I have indicated that we will carry through on those recommendations in full.

Some \$1.05 million output funding and \$5.25 equity funding has been allocated in 2007-08 to commence work on the capital works program. This is to provide purpose designed dwellings that will support more effective intervention and support. It will also complement the innovative support housing and purpose built accommodation initiatives that are already well and truly underway.

Refurbishment of some of the existing dwellings on the Wacol site will provide up to 24 beds. We will also initiate planning for the broader redevelopment of the Wacol site. I can assure the committee that the redevelopment and renewal of the Wacol site will proceed under a master planned approach. Over the next four years a number of new dwellings will be constructed as part of its broader redevelopment. It is an area that I am passionate about. If you would like to ask a further question I am prepared to provide further details.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM:** I think the minister's passion for that area is well demonstrated. I look forward to talking to you further. I do have one other question that I need to ask. In my electorate there is a place that provides respite care called Mainstay. It is for people with disabilities and challenging behaviours. They do a brilliant job but their waitlist is now beyond what is acceptable for respite. I am wondering what funds are in the budget for facilities such as Mainstay, which is an overnight residential type facility? What criteria have to be presented for that funding to be allocated to rural and regional Queensland?

**Mr PITT:** The member would know that in recent weeks the federal government has thrown us a real curve ball in relation to respite services where it has deemed it appropriate, in the context of an upcoming election, to go outside the CSTDA process and invest \$1.8 billion in the sector, some of which is going to be targeted towards respite services but at a certain end of the market, so to speak. The difficulty I have with that is that we end up with a parallel system. It is not an integrated system. It can create, in my view, some confusion within the sector and for clients as to who to go to, the rules and regulations surrounding different sorts of programs et cetera.

Our budget will be applied as best we can, but we have a difficulty in that respect. If we do that, who is going to be funded directly by the Commonwealth? It is very hard for us to develop a program of meeting need as we have perceived it so far. I am hoping that the Commonwealth will either have that money channelled through existing programs and processes or, at the very least, engage us in some genuine dialogue out of the heat of an election and make sure that we both focus on producing outcomes for the individuals concerned.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I refer to DISQIS on page 2-20 of the MPS. When does the minister expect to have a clear picture of areas of high need and unmet demand as stated on page 2 of *Growing stronger: investing in a better disability service system*? Will he give an undertaking to release these figures publicly as well as to the opposition and to NGOs in the disability sector?

**Mr PITT:** The Institute of Health and Welfare publishes this sort of data on a regular basis. I guess that is available to those who wish to approach. I am pleased to inform the committee that the Disability Services Queensland Information System, you used the acronym DISQIS, went live on 23 April this year. It is a departmental wide information system to support service delivery to people with a disability, their families and carers. I think technology is really important if we are going to have the streamline system we want here in Queensland. Each of these groups will benefit from the implementation of DISQIS and it will improve the department's capacity to plan for, respond to and report on the delivery of disability services within the state.

This first release of DISQIS encompasses functionality to support service delivery for people with a disability, their families and carers as well as providing reporting to the department and to the Commonwealth government. We have an obligation under our agreement with the Commonwealth government to make available to them data that we have obtained. I have no doubt that the Commonwealth is able to make that information available in a public sense as it sees appropriate.

The system records client information and the services delivered by Disability Services Queensland service outlets. It is used to track the history of DSQ's interactions with the client. DISQIS is accessible to over 1,000 staff across the state. They have been trained in how to use the system prior to it going live. I am pleased to report that 95 per cent of staff indicated that they expect that DISQIS will improve their daily work. The efficiency of the bureaucracy in handling issues regarding disability is quite significant. It is very important that we do not waste money on poor systems. So the modern system of DISQIS should streamline that process.

Statistics from the DISQIS service desk provide a further indication of the usability of the system, with a 79 per cent resolution rate of all calls that have been logged. Future release of DISQIS will build upon the client management functionality supporting the management administration of individuals and organisations receiving funding from Disability Services Queensland. In 2007-08 additional funding of \$1.5 million recurrent and \$2.5 million equity will be provided to enhance DISQIS, and these funds are part of \$16.9 million recurrent and \$11.7 million equity funding over four years.

In April 2007 all Australian governments engaged the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare to undertake an analysis of current and future demand for disability services in Australia. The institute released its report of this analysis on 8 June 2007. It might not hurt to get a copy of that.

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

**Mrs MILLER:** Minister, page 2-37 of the MPS relates to capital expenditure. It appears as though there has been an underspend in this area. For the benefit of the estimates committee, could you outline please some of the causes which have led to this situation?

**Mr PITT:** I think it is fair to say that there should be some questions asked in respect of this. On the face of it it does not look good, does it? I need to tell people that there are no excuses but there are reasons as to why money allocated to capital works cannot be rolled out as quickly as we all would like. Queensland is going through an economic boom at this stage and, although the department has funds made available to it through the budget, we have experienced difficulties in locating sites of suitable size and zoning. Remember that some of our facilities are specialised in nature. Some of our clients require in some way a separation by distance from the rest of the community, and finding those sites in an appropriate location is not easy. Due to the economic boom that we are experiencing right now, we have labour shortages. It does not matter who the successful tenderer is. Whoever the successful tenderer may be, it may be difficult for them to carry out that tender as quickly as they may wish to.

Also, a lot of time is required. It is not a simple matter of getting the money, calling for tenders and once tenders are closed commencing construction. The sorts of facilities we build through our capital works program are specialised. This is not building a suburban three-bedroom home or a standard police station or a school or whatever it may be. We require people who help us with the design. There is a determination on my part that we will not have the government template design, so to speak. We will be engaging the sector and stakeholders within the sector to come up with creative and innovative designs that are going to best meet the needs of the client base who are going to occupy those residences. So there is a fair bit on the design side of things. If you take into account the delays—the purchase of land delays and the fact that we have a specialised area and that not everyone is going to put their hand up and say that they want to take on this body of work—the fact that we have to worry about development approvals for local authorities and then all the necessary advertising that goes with it, it does not happen overnight.

It is probably fair to say that when we have a budget allocation for capital works people should have an expectation that it can take two or three years sometimes to see the full expenditure of that money to make sure that it really hits the mark. I would like to think the money could go out the door a lot more quickly. We are now faced with that challenge, and the DG has been asked by me to come up with ways in which we can perhaps speed the process up, but I am certainly not going to speed the process up to the exclusion of getting a quality outcome.

**Mr HAYWARD:** Minister, I note on page 2-5 of the MPS that your department will be developing service infrastructure for people with an intellectual or cognitive disability. Minister, could you provide more details on the proposed centre for best practice as well as how your department plans to manage recruitment for those who will work there?

**Mr PITT:** Coming to grips with the issues surrounding the Carter report is going to be a challenge for government, but it is a challenge I readily accept. I was very pleased that the Treasurer was able to provide \$113 million over four years in the recent budget to meet this area of need that had for too long almost been put in the too-hard basket. It had to be addressed, and we now have a blueprint, provided by Justice Carter, for going about that.

Of the \$13 million available in 2007-08, \$1.5 million will be directed towards the establishment of a centre for best practice and \$3.4 million to begin development of a range of regionally based teams of disability and mental health professionals. Around \$1.5 million has been allocated to provide additional skilled direct support staff. The centre for best practice is a concept that Justice Carter has put before us. I fully endorse what he is trying to do. If we are going to address this issue, we need to address it at the cutting edge—we need to make sure that what we do here in Queensland is the best possible system that we can put in place in the world. That centre, staffed by qualified professionals, will be, so to speak, a centrepiece of the whole program.

He made a specific recommendation in his report entitled *Challenging behaviour and disability: a targeted response* for the establishment of such a centre. He said we should seek out a high-profile leader to guide comprehensive reforms to support adults with an intellectual and cognitive disability who exhibit challenging behaviour. And the search is on. As we speak, we have commenced that process. The report also recommended the development of a comprehensive positive behaviour support service system comprising highly trained professionals and direct support staff to work with the target group. This is specialised work. We have to get this right. We are dealing with people who have an intellectual and cognitive ability but also whose basic human rights have to be protected. There are no easy solutions to this. This must be done on a case-by-case basis.

The centre will be fully established by 2009. It will employ a total of 15 staff across the key areas of research and policy development, training and development for professional and support staff, and coordination of Guardianship and Administration Tribunal applications. We are also putting in place our specialist response services. This will consist of regional teams which will build over four years to a full capacity of 75 staff. An additional 188 front-line positions are going to be established. It is important that we give an assurance—I think the member for Currumbin might have asked a question regarding this in parliament—that the people we employ are of the highest calibre. I have given an undertaking that the department will do everything we possibly can to ensure that that is the case.

**Mr LAWLOR:** Minister, I also refer to page 2-5 of the MPS and the reference to new infrastructure required as part of the government's response to the Carter report. Minister, how will the government manage the accommodation arrangements for the target group?

**Mr PITT:** As I have indicated, broadly speaking right across the disability sector we have to have specialised accommodation. It is no more critical than in this area in the recommendations of the Carter report. We have to have a purpose designed environment. Containment is one of the aspects that we must engage in. But, whilst we are doing that, in conjunction with well-targeted programs of behavioural change, we have to make sure that the environment which our clients are in at that point in time is such that their human rights are protected as well.

Providing environments that are conducive to positive behaviour change is an important element of the Investing in Positive Futures initiative. The accommodation arrangements that will be developed through this initiative will build upon the recommendations made by Justice Carter to provide a focused response for people with an intellectual disability and challenging behaviour. In accordance with this, a number of purpose designed dwellings will be constructed and a range of targeted accommodation support models developed to enable the provision of individualised support with focus on offering the best opportunities for therapeutic interventions and skills development.

The intention of these accommodation arrangements will be to transition people back into the community where this is appropriate. However, it is acknowledged that some individuals may require longer term support arrangements. The redevelopment of the Wacol site will offer a range of options including responses for those who are in crisis as well as people who may require secure arrangements. Dwellings designed specifically for transition from secure living to community living will also be designed and developed in community settings. These will not be on the Wacol site.

We had embarked on some of the suggestions and recommendations made by Justice Carter prior to the report being brought down. The department has not been sitting idle on this issue. I am not able to mention names, but it really is heart warming to note that a couple of clients who under past practises may have been in secure care have engaged in activities that were beyond them prior to this. I had the wonderful experience of being presented with a report and photographs of a young fellow out on his fishing exhibition. He would never have been able to do that had we not entered into these targeted responses and assisted him on a one-to-one basis. Another young fellow was able to go to his sister's wedding. A social context such as a wedding would not have been possible for him had we not embarked upon a more considered approach to dealing with his issues. I have great confidence that this system will bring good results for people who for so long have not received the attention that I believe a compassionate, humane society would provide.

**Mrs MILLER:** Minister, page 2-6 of the MPS makes reference to your department's plans to enhance accommodation support and day programs. How much is being spent to achieve this and how will these enhancements benefit DSQ clients?

**Mr PITT:** Disability Services Queensland is committed to providing accommodation support and day services for people with a disability. Accordingly, in the 2007-08 budget an additional recurrent allocation of \$4 million was announced to support non-government service providers to provide appropriate accommodation support and day services. This builds on the \$17 million of recurrent funding that has been allocated in the past two years to enhance the provision of accommodation support and day services for people with a disability.

Through the accommodation support initiative, the department will allocate funding to non-government service providers to cater for the continuum of support needs of people with a disability so they can live and participate in their community. Accommodation support includes the necessary ongoing support for activities that are typically part of the routine of living at home including personal care, household management tasks, meal planning, cooking, laundry, management of household finances and shopping. People with a disability will also be supported to transition out of emergency accommodation into more permanent and appropriate housing. This government is also firmly committed to providing developmental day services which are instrumental in assisting adults with a disability to become contributing members of the community. Without this day support, extra stress is placed on families and demand for supported accommodation services is likely to occur at a much earlier stage.

Through the day services initiative, people with a disability will be supported by non-government service providers to participate in community activities to develop and use their skills and abilities and build on their knowledge and interest. They will also be given the opportunity to engage in recreational and leisure activities to further develop their social skills. The type of support provided is tailored to meet the unique needs of each individual with a disability as they develop a support plan in collaboration with the service provider. The support plan is reviewed periodically to ensure that it accurately reflects the changing needs, goals and aspirations of individuals with a disability. There is a determination by DSQ to tailor support programs to the needs of each and every individual. Clearly, the additional \$4 million committed in this year's budget to provide accommodation support and day services will be of great benefit in supporting more people with a disability to enjoy a better quality of life.

**Mr HAYWARD:** Minister, I draw your attention to page 2-21 of the MPS and its reference to Disability Action Week. Minister, how has this yearly event been received by people with a disability and the larger community in general?

**Mr PITT:** Disability Action Week is a tale of success. It is the major annual community awareness activity of the Queensland disability sector. Major initiatives of the week include a state launch event in a regional location, the Disability Action Week awards and promotional support for more than 100 community events across the state. I have made the determination as minister that Disability Action Week will more often than not be launched in a regional centre. In 2005 it was launched in Rockhampton and 7,500 people turned up to the launch of Disability Action Week. If we launched it in Brisbane—and this is no negative inference on the good people of Brisbane—we would be flat out getting 200 or 300 people attending the launch. In Cairns about 4,000 people attended the launch.

Last Sunday I, along with Her Excellency the Governor, Quentin Bryce, had the marvellous experience of being at Hervey Bay to launch Disability Action Week and we had 4,500 people turn up. These 4,500 people are not all people with a disability or relatives or carers of people with a disability. Included in that number are general members of the community. It was an excellent launch. We had great support from the mayor of Hervey Bay and his council. It was a fun filled day. It is a bit like show and tell. I have pictures here of people enjoying themselves. I was captivated by this young bloke. It was a day when you felt as though it was an inclusive community coming together. There was a young fellow in the group who had a photographic display. He was confined to a wheelchair but he was able to show people that his disability in no way whatsoever diminished his capacity to show people his abilities. He is a superb photographer. I asked him, 'How did you get some of these photos?' He said, 'Well, I just got in a harness and they lowered me over the side of the boat as it went along and there I am almost in the whale's mouth taking photographs.' We had wheelchair dance sport and a whole range of activities on the day.

We had the awards only yesterday at the convention centre for organisations and individuals across Queensland who are proving that people with a disability have great abilities and that the community at large in Queensland is a very inclusive community. I think the money we spend on Disability Action Week is money well spent. The stigma that perhaps at one point in time may have been attached to people with a disability has disappeared in Queensland and we are embracing our citizens in an inclusive fashion. I urge all members in their own electorates to ensure that they get an opportunity to attend one of the Disability Action Week functions—100 of which will have been engaged in in this last week up and down the length and breadth of Queensland.

**Mr LAWLOR:** Minister, could you please inform the committee what the benefits were of holding the Shared Visions conference in 2006, as mentioned on page 2-21 of the MPS?

**Mr PITT:** The Shared Visions conference—we have held two of them now in 2005 and 2006—has been convened to give people throughout Queensland in the disability sector the chance to create a better future for people with a disability and their carers. It was designed for participants to share experiences and ideas that could contribute to defining practical next steps for the themes and issues raised by delegates during the first Shared Visions conference in 2005. Some of these themes included supporting inclusive communities, building sustainable informal networks, enhancing service provision through technology and collaboration, and addressing emerging issues.

A total of 459 delegates attended the 2006 Shared Visions conference, including people with a disability, family members, carers, government and non-government service providers and advocates. There were a range of contributions from keynote speakers, delegates and workshop presenters. The forum allowed people to share ideas, experiences and good practice examples and further the development of collaborative relationships and open discussion on disability issues that are of concern to both the government and the community. The key themes that emerged from that conference included the need for tailored and personalised support to help meet the diverse needs of people with a disability; the value of community education and learning as a means of creating a more inclusive society; and the need for meaningful, collaborative relationships between all areas of the community to improve the lives of people with a disability over the long term.

It is my determination as minister to garner from as many sources as possible a better understanding and, I guess to put it quite bluntly, to allow the sector itself to help drive policy in this state regarding disability. It is very important that there be a sense of ownership by people with a disability, their carers and other stakeholders who work with them. The Shared Visions conference is one way of doing that.

This year, we will conduct in each of the 10 regions of the Department of Communities and Disability Services Queensland Shared Visions forums where individuals and groups can showcase innovative procedures. I have no pretensions that we can come up with all the ideas. Some great ideas are out there and they will be able to showcase those at these forums. Then we will be able to share them at the Shared Visions conference 2008. Hopefully, government policy, projects and practices that are out there can be supported to improve the lives of people with a disability in Queensland.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I refer to page 2-38 of the MPS. It appears that DSQ has departed from the Carter report recommendations in two main ways. Despite what we have heard, the centre of best practice has been downgraded in status and many of its roles sidelined before it has even got off the ground. You have refused to give a commitment to locate it physically away from either Basil Stafford or any other DSQ office or facility. Justice Carter's very firm recommendation that behaviour management plans containing any restrictive practices should be approved by the tribunal has been seriously eroded by DSQ so that now only seclusions and containment must be approved. That really takes away Carter's notion of independent approval. I note your earlier comments and I ask: will you give an undertaking to implement the recommendations of Bill Carter in a way that does not seriously depart from their extremely well-founded intent?

**Mr PITT:** Can I say that since the report has been brought down I have had the opportunity to meet with Justice Carter. He was made privy to our response—the direction in which we are going to head—and he has no problems with the direction in which the government is heading. As a matter of fact, he endorses it. He has actually been in the media—on radio and I am not too sure if it was in the press as well—affirming that. So he does not, like yourself, believe that we have deviated to such an extent that we would in any way jeopardise the thrust of his recommendations.

In terms of the restrictive practices, the proposed legislation, on which consultation will commence later in 2007, as an outcome of Justice Carter's report, will identify three tiers of restrictive practice that may be used under specific conditions and in conjunction with safeguards for the client. Tier 1 of the restrictive practice is considered the most intrusive and involves containment and seclusion. That is the high-level tier. In the proposed legislative scheme, a formal application comprising a positive behaviour support plan based on a multidisciplinary assessment will be required for submission to the Guardianship and Administration Tribunal—GAAT. GAAT will be empowered to approve the use of tier 1 restrictive practices through proposed amendments to the Guardianship and Administration Act 2000.

Tier 2 restrictive practices include the use of chemical restraint and some form of mechanical and physical restraint where it is necessary to manage challenging behaviour that could lead to injuries requiring medical intervention or which could cause extreme stress requiring treatment. In the proposed legislative scheme, only a guardian appointed by GAAT will be empowered to give consent for the use of tier 2 practices and only after an open and transparent process has identified that the restrictive practice is the least restrictive alternative in the circumstances.

Tier 3 restrictive practices include other forms of physical or mechanical restraints of a less intrusive nature which may be appropriate to manage behaviour that is not likely to lead to serious injury or require medical intervention. It is proposed that consent to make these practices will rest with an informal substitute decision maker for the adult.

In an emergency situation where it is necessary to apply restrictive practices, the proposed legislative scheme will include provisions for an interim authorisation to use a restrictive practice for a limited period prior to the planned response being brought to the appropriate approving or consenting party.

During the interim period and prior to the commencement of the legislation, I am also conscious of the need to provide more certainty and consistency for the services provided and funded by DSQ to enable it to continue to care and support adults with intellectual cognitive disability and challenging behaviour. To this end I am pleased to inform the committee that members of DSQ have developed interim policy guidelines relating to the authorisation and use of restrictive practices.

**CHAIR:** Before we go to the next question, I remind the committee that under standing order 115 questions must not contain arguments, inferences or imputations.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I refer to page 2-6, dot point 2 of the MPS and note that \$2 million is to be spent across Queensland in the Young Adults Exiting the Care of the State Program. Parents tell me that about 11 per cent is allocated to the Gold Coast. It is estimated that in this region alone about 40 applications will be made and that most of the funding will be taken up by children with high support needs—which, of course, they deserve. What can DSQ do for those children who are not high needs and who are not suitable for a supported workplace? Parents are worried that they will have to forfeit their jobs to care for their children at home and that they may be unable to pay their mortgages or petrol. In fact, they say that whole families will be worse off.

**Mr PITT:** I am happy to inform the committee that in 2006-07 an additional \$3.5 million in recurrent funding and \$1.5 million in one-off funding was allocated to the Young Adults Exiting the Care of the State Program. This funding enabled the department to support an extra 71 young adults with a disability.

The additional funds brought the total provider for the program to \$10.9 million, with a total number of individuals supported to 161. The department's Young Adults Exiting the Care of the State Program supports young adults, who are exiting the care of the state to develop or maintain community living arrangements and to access community life. The establishment of the program is in keeping with the government's election commitment to increase funding to adults and young people with a disability to address the high level of critical need identified in the community.

Another program, the Family Support Program, empowers people with a disability and their families by strengthening the family's ability to care for their family member with a disability. Early intervention to help families in need is without doubt one of the best ways to keep the family unit strong. I am pleased to report that in 2006-07 an additional \$6.1 million in recurrent funding was allocated to the Family Support Program. One hundred and seventy-nine additional families were able to be supported through this funding. The allocation brought the total recurrent funding for the Family Support Program to \$35.5 million and the total number of families supported to 1,429. The Family Support Program supports families with a child or adult with a disability living at home with their families whose needs are not being met within the existing service system.

I am also pleased to inform the member that \$3 million in additional funding was allocated to the Post School Services Program in 2006-07. This included \$0.24 million, which was provided on a one-off basis, to enable clients to purchase aids and equipment, such as communication devices, mobility aids and training material, for support workers. It was only earlier this year, I think, that I was in your electorate at the inclusive school—

**Mrs STUCKEY:** The special school?

**Mr PITT:** The inclusive school. I think it was the Currumbin inclusive school

**Mrs STUCKEY:** Yes, it is a special school.

**Mr PITT:** We had a workshop there. Many of the issues in respect of young adults who were leaving school or coming out of the care of the state in one way or another were discussed. They will be providing a report to me as to possible directions in which I could move to ensure we get the maximum return for the investment that we make. One of the things that I am determined to do is to consult with the sector and have them help me design future programs and policies to best meet the needs of the people most important to them and, of course, important to all of us.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** It is great to celebrate people with a disability achieving goals. Many NGOs and carers who put in countless unpaid hours expressed their anger upon receiving the glossy material *Share Your Story* and believe that the department should be more focused on the tough, heartbreaking stories of needs that the department fails to meet. In fact, they believe that if you were doing a good job you would have plenty of stories filtering through and that you would not need to canvass for stories through a marketing campaign. I refer to the income statement on page 2-40 of the MPS and I ask: what is the cost in supplies and services for all departmental promotional material and advertising, in particular that relating to the *Share Your Story* calendars? Could the minister also provide a breakdown of each of the items?

**Mr PITT:** I will get the information regarding the *Share Your Story* calendar in a moment. The government's expenditure through DSQ on information provision and advertising promotion for 2006-07 totalled \$2.67 million. Information provision and advertising promotion supports program delivery, provides community awareness of issues and enables the responsible administration of grants and assistance provision of services.

I know it is a common phrase, but I make no apology for marketing and communications expenditure in the disability sector. We have an obligation to allow our client base to know what services are out there. We also have an obligation to portray people with a disability in a positive light. In many ways, the answers to some of the issues that befall us come from the community and from the support of people in the wider community. By making people aware of the capabilities of people with a disability through those *Share Your Story* processes is a powerful message. It is a message that has brought results.

If you had been in attendance yesterday with me at the Disability Action Week Awards you would have seen that there are some commercial enterprises who have taken on clients with a disability—or, I should say, workers with a disability—who are making a valuable contribution to their workplaces. They have fantastic stories to tell. That is an encouragement to other people with a disability not to consider themselves as different but as special—special to the extent that they have something to contribute to society.

So I am very pleased that we have such a strong marketing campaign. I am very pleased that we are communicating with the wider public. I am very pleased that we are ensuring that people with a disability have a chance to tell their story so that people see them without the disability—not see them as having a disability but see them for their value to our society whether they have a disability or not.

In relation to the *Share Your Story* calendar cost, I will get that to you before close of session today. We will do that for you.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** Thank you very much. I refer to page 2-19 of the MPS concerning feedback from key stakeholders and the document *Growing Stronger*, which the minister has referred to. The part referring to investing in a better disability system, which is on page 5, states that the current system is not working as well as it might for everyone. Given that other ministers have confirmed that they will provide to the opposition deidentified feedback from similar consultations and surveys with key stakeholders, will you provide deidentified feedback from *Have your say: on improving disability services in Queensland consultations*? Furthermore, would you explain why you, in effect, denied my attendance to the major stakeholder disability conference Shared Visions on the Gold Coast, yet you and your government use any opportunity to criticise opposition members for not showing an interest in their shadow portfolios?

**Mr PITT:** I am not too sure whether the last part of your question falls anywhere within the MPS but, seeing you raise it, let us address it. The Shared Visions forums being conducted right across the state are an opportunity for the sector itself to share experiences and innovation. It is not an opportunity for either you or me, or for any other member of parliament, to insert ourselves into that process. The take-up rate to attend those forums has been significant and there is not room for us to insert every local member, every councillor, or every federal member into that process.

In fact, I will be attending 10 of the 11 forums, but I will be attending to open the forum, to close the forum, and at lunchtime present myself for a sandwich and a soft drink to talk to people who may wish to talk to me. You probably have not opened your mail yet but there is an invitation for you to join me and all the other members on the Gold Coast at your Shared Visions forum for that luncheon break. I look forward to seeing you there. So far from being denied access to something that perhaps everyone else, you think, might be getting access to, you are being treated exactly the same as other every other councillor, every other state member and every other federal member in Queensland. Even the minister himself has determined not to—and I do not want to use this word in a derogatory fashion—interfere in any way with the capacity for the sector to be open and frank and honest and share among themselves their successes and their attitudes to programs and processes and what they can bring to them in the future. This is the deidentified feedback. You can have it.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** Thank you very much.

**Mr PITT:** I should seek permission to table it.

Leave granted.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** Thank you. I refer to page 2-31 of the MPS and the heading 'Recent Achievements'. Given the recurrent funding of \$309 million for the Queensland HACC program in 2006-07 and the increase in the budgeted funding for 2007-08 by \$35.6 million, what will you do to establish a statewide waiting list to get a true picture of the need for HACC related services? How do you intend to better manage the fluctuating demand?

**Mr PITT:** You are pretty rich. HACC came across to my portfolio on 1 July. It has nothing to do with the MPS or me, personally, as a minister for 2006-07.

I have a great affinity for the HACC program. It is one of the few arrangements between the state and federal governments that I can say we have reached agreement on and are both satisfied with. As a matter of fact, Queensland does very well. When the agreement was presented to me, I could not sign the document fast enough to get it back just in case someone changed their mind.

HACC is a marvellous program. I think there are about 18 different services that are provided through the subsets of the HACC service itself. It is not just for people with a disability but it is for people who have impaired mobility et cetera and to encourage people to live in their homes.

I believe the service, broadly speaking, is running exceptionally well. You would have to forgive me, being a regional minister, to having to indicate that I will be having a really good look at HACC to make sure that every little corner of Queensland receives the appropriate service that it should. I am interested in getting feedback from stakeholders and I am interested in getting feedback from councillors and local members in those areas to help me identify areas of improvement. It is one of those services where it is good and if we work together we can make it better.

As far as the HACC program is concerned, I am very pleased to be able to indicate to you that its annual funding has increased from \$147.9 million in 1999-2000 to \$309.5 million this year. There is a formula between the state and the Commonwealth as to who provides what money, but we do very well, thank you very much, and I am pleased with that. In 2006-07, the figure included growth funding of \$31.5 million, resulting in an increase of 11.31 per cent in total joint recurrent funding compared to 2005-06.

I guess the question you basically asked me is: what am I going to do about it? I have already spoken to the unit that resided within Queensland Health. We will be conducting a workshop when I can get estimates out of the way where we will sit down and I will fully come to grips with the ins and outs of HACC. At that time then I will determine what procedures I will put in place to seek further advice from the community and community representatives to enhance that service.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I refer to page 2-19 of the MPS. Given the approach of the new *Growing Stronger: Investing in a better disability system* is to make support available to people before their needs become critical, what mechanisms will be in place to ensure that needs are not only identified but also supported with respite, whether it is activated prior to the critical stage being reached by families? Most importantly, has any specific development been done with this whole program?

**Mr PITT:** Early intervention and support can produce significant improvements in the health, social and cognitive development of people with a disability and help minimise some of the many social and physical barriers faced by families who have a family member with a disability. Where children have disabilities or special needs, it is particularly important that these are identified at an early stage and that early identification leads to effective intervention and practical support for families and children. The state government recognises this by providing a number of initiatives which support prevention and early intervention for children with disabilities.

In respect of *Growing Stronger*, I have embraced the concept of *Growing Stronger* after the Have Your Say process ran its course. You have to bring that to an end at some stage and make a decision, and I have given an indication to people with *Growing Stronger* that if as we begin to evaluate it there are ways of improving it or perhaps we need to amend the way we are going or even take a U-turn, I am prepared to do that. Prior to this particular way of conducting our business as a department not only internally but with our non-government partners, it appeared to me—and I think you would probably agree with me—that to obtain a service it was almost like you had to be in serious crisis. I would like to think that as the minister responsible I am not just in the business of crisis management, although that is part of my responsibility; I would like to think as a society and by using public funds we can be in the business of crisis avoidance. *Growing Stronger* provides us in my view with that opportunity.

In a perfect world, I would like to think that the needs of individuals would be registered in some way with government—and I am not talking about anything compulsory, I am talking about it being voluntary—so that we can devise long-term strategies. That is one thing. It is important also that we walk the journey of life with people with a disability and not wait for them to come knocking on our door at some stage when they have reached a crisis—and it is not only if the individual is suffering trauma but their family as well.

This system—and I would like to go on longer about this—will provide us with the opportunity to assess professionally and have a one-door approach with a single form rather than have people shopping around for programs and being knocked back because they do not quite fit the programs. The resources will be available to the person with a disability rather than have them shop around for those things. Systems will be developed where choices are available through DSQ and non-government providers.

I know that you have probably read the material that has come out regarding *Growing Stronger*. If you have not, please do so. If you require a briefing on the details of it, please ask for that and it will certainly be given. As the process rolls out, if you can come up with any improvements that could be made, even though I have got a short haircut, I am all ears.

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

**Mrs MILLER:** Minister, could you please identify where the disability forums mentioned on page 2-33 of the MPS will be held? Also, could you outline what you hope to achieve by holding these disability forums?

**Mr PITT:** I am pleased to expand on some of my earlier comments. The feedback from the 2005 and 2006 Shared Visions conferences was extremely positive. As a result of that, I decided to take the Shared Visions concept to the 10 Disability Services Queensland regions in 2007 through these Shared Visions regional forums. There will be 11 single day regional forums scheduled between 31 July and 23 October, and that will lead into the next state conference, as I indicated earlier, in 2008. The forum dates are available on the Disability Services Queensland web site—[www.disability.qld.gov.au](http://www.disability.qld.gov.au). The level of interest and size of the population in Brisbane has led me to indicate that we should run two forums in Brisbane. They will be at the same venue with the same program and similar content to allow more people to attend, because of the size of the population.

The regional forums will build on the key themes identified at the 2006 statewide disability conference, including supporting inclusive communities, building sustainable informal networks, enhancing service provision through technology and collaboration, and identifying emerging themes. The forums will allow regional communities to showcase regional initiatives in the disability field and identify local strengths and opportunities for working together.

Members of the disability sector have been invited to consider submitting a presentation through media advertising and the distribution of flyers to regional networks. There has already been a great deal of public interest in the forum program. We have had a substantial response to our calls for presentations at the early forums and we have had to cull to fit them into the program basically. That says to me that we are on the right track. There are many great ideas out there that need to see the light of day and be shared not only within their own regions but in 2008 we get to share the cream of the cream right across the state through our Shared Visions conference.

Just looking at the Gold Coast Shared Visions forum, one of the topics will be the work experience program. It is a highly successful work experience program designed for students with a disability from state government schools with independent service stations on the Gold Coast. The program was developed to provide schools with a well-organised and supportive placement in the retail area and it is currently being expanded into other regions. Another topic is community and belonging. Inclusion is often interpreted as being just a matter of location. This presentation aims to shift that perception to greater emphasise the importance of personal relations and give a sense of membership and belonging for people with a psychiatric disability. They are just two wonderful examples of innovation that should be shared not only regionally but eventually statewide.

**Mr HAYWARD:** Minister, the MPS refers to the Post School Services Program on page 2-11. Could you explain how young people with a disability have benefited from the assistance granted under this program? What future plans are there for young people with a disability leaving school?

**Mr PITT:** The Post School Services Program supports young people with high and complex support needs to make the transition from student to adult life in their community. That is pretty difficult for kids without a disability, but for young ones with a disability it can be quite traumatic. The government is firmly committed to this program as it provides young people with a disability essential support at a critical time in their lives.

Prior to the implementation of the program, young people with high disability support needs had very few options after leaving school. This situation has been addressed by the Post School Services Program. Before the program came into place, young people had all this wonderful support but when they left school they suddenly just disappeared back to their own devices and lost a lot of the network they had built up during their school life.

The program assists young people to participate in and contribute to family life, participate in community activities and explore a range of interests and activities, including vocational opportunities. This proactive approach to supporting young people with a disability leaving school significantly reduces the pressure on families at a critical time. It is recognised that the completion of schooling presents

challenges and opportunities for families as well as for the young person. The program supports young people and families through this transition by providing funding and information and it actively involves them in planning for the young person's future. Families are also provided with assistance to identify and negotiate the required supports, both formal and informal. These supports may be accessed through a range of services, both disability specific and those generally available to all young people.

The government has allocated \$2 million to this program for 2007-08. As part of that budget, an aids and equipment budget of approximately \$155,000 is provided on a one-off basis to purchase items such as communication devices, mobility aids and training material for the young people and support workers and to provide time limited therapy support.

Support through the program is provided by non-government service providers who are chosen by families to provide the requested support to the young people. The details of the support are outlined in individual plans developed by the service providers after consultation between the young person, his or her family, support facilitators in the department's regional offices and any other support person that the young person may nominate. In 2007-08, it is anticipated that approximately 120 young people will be assisted through the program. The total number of people assisted through this program since its inception is 1,914. An evaluation of the Post School Services Program is being undertaken in 2007-08 to inform and assist the improvement of the program.

One of the interesting things that has already come out is that some parents have indicated to me that they see there is value in pooling their packages and providing a congregate outcome for services. I am open to suggestions. I do not have all the answers. I am looking forward to them developing that process even further so I can give consideration as to whether we should amend the way in which we allocate packages to allow this to occur. I think it has merit.

**Mr LAWLOR:** Minister, page 2-12 of the MPS refers to an allocation of \$6.9 million to implement recommendations from a review of Accommodation Support and Respite Services. Could you please advise how the implementation of these recommendations is improving the accommodation support and respite services?

**Mr PITT:** There is an old saying that if you want someone else to do something you should get your own house in order first, and that is what we have done with the ASRS program. The government's objective is to improve the capacity and capability of Disability Services Queensland's accommodation support and respite services. This will allow us to deliver quality accommodation support and respite services and improve the quality of life for people with an intellectual disability and their families.

The full implementation of the 42 recommendations from the Accommodation Support and Respite Services review will improve the capacity and capability of the Accommodation Support and Respite Service workforce, provide rigorous and effective performance management and new practice initiatives, strengthen internal and external scrutiny mechanisms and client safeguards, and improve business systems reporting and corporate information and governance practices.

Significant progress has been made in the implementation of the recommendations of the 2005 independent review into the operations of Disability Services Queensland's Accommodation Support and Respite Services. Out of the review's 42 recommendations, 27 have now been fully implemented, with 36 of 38 projects required to implement the recommendations of the review already commenced. Implementation will continue in 2009-10. During 2006-07, 22 projects were completed bringing the total number of projects completed to 25 as of 30 June 2007.

The projects are being undertaken through an integrated program of improvement in accommodation support and respite services which is underpinned by the Queensland disability sector's quality system. By March 2007 and within 12 months of commencing the implementation program, all 15 service centres with over 230 service sites had transitioned to the new operational structure envisaged by the 2005 review. This was more than four months ahead of schedule.

The new structure involves significant changes to the previous senior management structure, service delivery management structure and reporting lines, as well as reorganised geographic boundaries to better support service delivery. New roles replacing the previous management structure of 51 unit manager positions are 68 team leaders—expert practitioners accountable for practice at point of delivery and coaches for service delivery staff—and 41 service managers—specialist managers of human service delivery, line managers and respite coordinators at all respite service sites.

The move to the new operational structure also delivered new policies, procedures and practices and new resources and skills development programs. These include a new form of induction. Local service user advisory groups consisting of representatives from people accessing services, families and/or guardians and other key stakeholders have been established in each service centre. This is a key development in improving internal safeguards for people accessing services.

A training and development strategy that focuses on advanced skills development to support quality service delivery is being implemented along with a new performance development framework. I am very pleased with the progress of the response to this review. I believe the outcomes for people who are accommodated by the department in these services will be greatly enhanced.

**Mrs MILLER:** Minister, I refer you to page 2-2 of the MPS which refers to the CSTDA and our negotiations with the Commonwealth towards a fourth such agreement. Could you please provide the committee with an update on how these negotiations are progressing?

**Mr PITT:** After having given the Commonwealth a pat on the back for HACC, I am afraid I cannot do the same thing for CSTDA. The Queensland government has been seeking to work collaboratively with all Australian governments to determine a strategic plan for investment that can deliver enhanced specialist disability services under a fourth Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement. The term of the third CSTDA has been extended from 30 June 2007 to 31 December 2007 while negotiations continue. I thank Minister Brough for agreeing to that because we are in the context now of a federal election and the negotiations we were undertaking were at a stalemate. It is important that the services continue for our clients in the meantime. Unfortunately, Minister Brough does not seem to be shifting ground whatsoever, and as I mentioned in response to an earlier question he has gone out in the context of an election with a \$1.8 billion package that, in my view, is more geared for electoral purposes than good, sustainable, long-term development of a system that will actually work to the benefit of not only clients but service providers as well.

There are a couple of things I would like to mention about the CSTDA agreement. It really provides no new money. Even the indexation is a joke. We are expected to believe that we can index our existing services to a level of 1.9 per cent. The state government, as you know, has an indexation well in excess of three per cent and the sector tells me that its real costs probably approach four per cent or maybe more. That being the case, the indexation means that we are not going forward. In many ways we are going to go backwards. I would call upon any member who has any influence whatsoever in the thinking of the Commonwealth government to encourage Minister Brough to look at the outcomes of the select committee of inquiry—an all-party committee of inquiry—which made a number of recommendations regarding this issue which have conveniently been ignored in the negotiations. The intransigence that has occurred has made it very difficult to engender within the sector a confidence that we have a system that will meet their needs into the future.

I am determined to do my best to work with other state and territory ministers and also to continue to engage Minister Brough to ensure that we get a good outcome here. We have a meeting of all ministers next week and this issue no doubt will be high on the agenda. Again, to use that well-worn phrase, I make no apology for refusing to accept the agreement as it now stands because I do not believe that Queenslanders with a disability and those who are engaged in providing services for them should be short-changed in this manner.

**Mr HAYWARD:** Minister, on page 2-1 of the MPS it is suggested that one of the key strategic issues facing your department will be an increasing community expectation that government support people with a disability. Minister, how does your department intend to deal with these key environmental factors?

**Mr PITT:** The key environmental factors of population growth, increasing life expectancy, prevalence of disability and increasing demand for localised, flexible responses to clients all contribute to an increasing demand for disability services. We need to be in a position to better understand the environment in terms of both demand for services and the availability of supply. This will assist us to improve our service capacity and make decisions about prioritisation of services and to ensure that the right services are delivered to the right people at the right time.

In 2007-08 the department will begin to implement the *Growing Stronger: Investing in a better disability service system* initiative. As I have indicated, this initiative aims to maintain or improve the capacity of a person with a disability to be independent. It also supports strengthened access to generic services for people with a disability. Initiatives under *Growing Stronger* include the introduction of fair and transparent access to government funded specialist disability services, a person-centred approach to delivering government funded specialist disability services and the introduction of a more contemporary approach to service management. This approach will involve individual assessment through a standardised and uniform assessment process which will enable us to identify what support people need to maintain or improve their current situation and strengthen their capacity to live as independently as possible in the community.

After assessment, we will prioritise applications for services with other applications for the same types of services so that we can allocate services fairly and equitably. Improved information technology will support this more efficient, effective and responsible delivery of disability services around the state. The technology will also enable centralised provision of information about service vacancies across the disability sector and the purchasing of new services when funding is available. This will allow us to match available and appropriate services to prioritised applicants.

A key benefit of the improved information technology is that a centralised and consistent process for collecting and managing information about client need and service responses will improve the government's ability to plan for future service provision. This means that we can achieve the fundamental aim of ensuring that the right services are delivered to the right people at the right time.

Workforce capability is also being addressed. This will include professional training and development, and recruiting additional professional staff to deliver specialist disability services. While community expectations are that government will provide support for people with a disability, the reality is that funding is not sufficient to meet everybody's needs or their wants. Disability Services Queensland continues to negotiate with the Commonwealth government for a multilateral agreement to develop a coordinated, equitable national effort in relation to specialist disability services. An important element of *Growing Stronger* will be to work across government to assist all government agencies to improve access to services for people with a disability, their families and carers. Providing links to appropriate mainstream services can be an effective early response to the support needs of some people with a disability and help ensure specialist disability services are well targeted.

**Mr LAWLOR:** Minister, page 2-3 of the MPS discusses the implementation of the new Disability Services Act. Could you please provide the committee with an update on how the implementation of the act is progressing and how the department has been communicating these changes?

**Mr PITT:** All Queenslanders should be proud of the Disability Services Act 2006. It went through parliament—and the member for Beaudesert was the shadow minister at the time—with the unanimous support of all members of the House, as it should have because it was something that was a long time in coming. It had been canvassed quite widely within the sector. Members were kept well and truly abreast of what the intent was. We now have in this state a Disability Services Act that is the flagship of the nation. Due credit goes to both sides of the House for embracing the need for that change and for making sure that that act, when put in place, would best service the needs of our constituents.

It came into effect on 1 July 2006. Since that time Disability Services Queensland has led the implementation of the act through the establishment of central units within the department to manage the new processes emerging from the act, and the provision of communication and training for the sector and for departmental staff. Under the new legislative arrangements, Disability Services Queensland is responsible for the approval of non-government service providers as eligible to receive recurrent funding under the Disability Services Act 2006.

DSQ is also responsible for the criminal history screening of people engaged by the department and by funded non-government service providers. Complaints and compliance in relation to disability services provided or funded by the department are also included as part of its regime including the appointment and training of authorised officers to monitor, investigate and enforce the Disability Services Act 2006. There will be formal reviews and appeals processes in relation to some decisions made under the Disability Services Act 2006.

The department is also nearing the completion of the implementation of the communications and training strategy which commenced when the act was first introduced into the parliament on 1 December 2005. This strategy has included an information campaign that focused on the policy initiatives of the new act, highlighting the government's response to the rights and needs of people with a disability as equal and valued members of our community.

Training sessions and information resources were delivered by the department to 2,400 Queenslanders in 86 locations across Queensland in 2006-07. This provided an overview of the new legislation with specific reference to the criminal history screening requirements and processes, and clarification of how the act works in conjunction with existing systems. There is also an outline of the operational aspects of funding agreements and processes, and there was training on the development of policies. There was also opportunity for members of the disability sector and the community to ask questions. We put in place numerous information resources which will culminate in the publication and dissemination of an information kit providing information about the Disability Services Act 2006 in a variety of alternative formats.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I refer to references to the 'Have your Say' consultation mentioned on page 2-5 of the MPS and in the *Hansard* of the Estimates Committee F hearing on 19 July 2006, where the minister stated that those consultations would determine future methods of setting priorities and determining whether priority panels would continue to be used for reviewing family support program applications. Mr Chair, I seek leave to table a depersonalised letter from a desperate sole parent and also one from a paediatrician.

**CHAIR:** I will just take instructions.

**Mr PITT:** Mr Chair, I am not too sure under standing orders that that process is permissible. It is more something that the member should bring to me personally or perhaps raise on the floor of the House. I am not too sure how it relates to this estimates hearing, but I seek your ruling on that.

**CHAIR:** Member for Currumbin, only ministers are entitled to table documents in response to questions. If you have an issue which you wish to raise in those documents, you should read the relevant part of the document to the minister as part of the question and have the minister respond.

**Mr PITT:** With your permission, Mr Chair, if there is a specific issue for a specific individual that you want to raise, please raise it with me. But I would tend to think it would be appropriate to raise that not in the context of this open hearing but to discuss it with me or my staff on a one-to-one basis. I do not want to appear to ignore the comments or requests of any individual, but I do not really think this is the appropriate place in which to do that.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I am happy to rephrase the last part of the question and continue, Minister. The letter from a woman explains that the Moreton region had 261 applications for family support packages but funding for only nine family packages. Accordingly, the most needy succeeded. Minister, can you see that such a system is manifestly unfair? Will you fund more family packages to relieve the pain of such families?

**Mr PITT:** Before I answer the question, I want to make sure that I fulfil a commitment which I gave you earlier, member for Currumbin. The total cost for the Share Your Story calendar was \$46,270. To allow me to answer your question, I will ask permission to have that information tabled for you.

Leave granted.

**Mr PITT:** The points you make about numbers of applications and the capacity of people to meet that demand is exactly why we are instituting the *Growing Stronger* process. I do not for one minute believe that we can meet all need, and I do not believe that we will ever have the resources to do so. No jurisdiction will have. I think it is important to have a system where people get as fair a go as we can make it, but you have quite rightly pointed out that whilst ever—and it probably is forever—there are scarce resources priority must be given to those in the most need.

But there are other things other than just full packages that can be applied to people under this new process at an appropriate point in time that will perhaps even meet their requirements and will assist them not to slip further into crisis. I think that is the whole concept of this early intervention that we are trying to put in place. As this unfolds I would seek your support, as the shadow minister, in ensuring that we can put this into practice effectively, because it is a radical departure from previous practices but to me it seems the best way to go to assist as many people as possible at an appropriate point in time in their disability.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** Thank you, Minister. I will see the minister about that specific issue.

**CHAIR:** The time allotted for the consideration of the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Communities, Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships and Minister for Seniors and Youth has expired. On behalf of the committee, Minister, I thank you and your departmental officers for your attendance and participation today. The transcript of the hearing will be available on the Hansard page of the parliament's web site within approximately two hours.

That concludes the committee's consideration of the matters referred to it by the Legislative Assembly on 23 May 2007. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the research directorate of the committee, Ms Julie Copley and Ms Amanda Honeyman. On behalf of the committee, I also thank the staff of Hansard, the time keepers and attendants for their assistance throughout the day. I declare this hearing of Estimates Committee G closed.

**Committee adjourned at 5.59 pm**