

# TUESDAY, 22 JULY 2008

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## ESTIMATES COMMITTEE E—MINES AND ENERGY

### Estimates Committee E Members

Mr ER Moorhead (Chair)  
Mrs JM Attwood  
Mr GB Fenlon  
Mr GE Malone  
Mr MF McArdle  
Mr JW Seeney  
Ms ECM van Litsenburg

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### In Attendance

Hon. GJ Wilson, Minister for Mines and Energy  
**Department of Mines and Energy**  
Mr D Hunt, Director-General  
Mr K Beardmore, Manager, Corporate Performance

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### Committee met at 8.59 am

**CHAIR:** Good morning. I declare this hearing of Estimates Committee E now open. On behalf of the committee I welcome the minister, departmental officers and members of the public to the hearing today. I would like to introduce the members of the committee. My name is Evan Moorhead. I am the state member for Waterford and chair of this committee. Mr Jeff Seeney, the member for Callide, is the deputy chair. The other committee members are: Mrs Julie Attwood, the member for Mount Ommaney; Mr Gary Fenlon, the member for Greenslopes; Mr Mark McArdle, the member for Caloundra; Mr Ted Malone, the member for Mirani; and Mrs Lillian van Litsenburg, the member for Redcliffe.

The committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2008 for the areas set out in the order of appointment dated 1 May 2008. This morning the committee will examine the organisational units within the portfolio of the Minister for Mines and Energy. The committee has this morning agreed to a minor change to the hearing program in relation to this portfolio whereby the examination of the Energy Ombudsman will be considered in the first part of the morning with the Department of Mines and Energy instead of with the energy government owned corporations sector.

Following lunch, the committee will examine units within the portfolios of the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister Assisting the Premier in Western Queensland and then the portfolio of the Minister for Emergency Services. The committee will suspend proceedings for the following breaks: morning tea from 10.30 am to 10.45 am; lunch from 11.45 am to 12.45 pm; and afternoon tea from 3.15 pm to 3.30 pm.

I remind all those participating in the hearing today that these proceedings are similar to the parliament to the extent that the public cannot participate in the proceedings. In this regard, I remind members of the public that under the standing orders the public may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee.

The committee has resolved that audio and video recording of these proceedings by the Parliamentary Service's cameras and microphones shall be broadcast via the Parliamentary Service's web site and to receivers throughout the parliamentary precinct. Television film coverage and

photography will be allowed during the chair's opening statements and the introductory statements of each minister as well as for a short period during each changeover in organisational units. Can I ask that any mobile phones or pagers either be switched off or switched to silent mode.

I remind members of the committee and the minister that under the standing orders the time limit for questions is one minute and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a double chime will sound at the end of each of these 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.

I ask departmental officers to identify themselves when they first come forward to answer a question if the minister refers a question to them so that Hansard can record their name.

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Mines and Energy open for examination. The time allocated is two hours and 30 minutes. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

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

**Mr WILSON:** Thank you very much. This budget is about looking beyond the horizon and building tomorrow's Queensland today. It is about looking after the battlers. It is about tackling climate change. It is about developing a cleaner, greener energy future for Queensland. Renewable energy is crucial for Queensland's long-term future.

We have launched a \$100 million green energy package. Our \$50 million Renewable Energy Fund will help fuel the 21st century with clever solutions to combat climate change. The fund could hold the key to unlocking Queensland's untapped potential in renewable sources and it will help meet our electricity needs in a greenhouse friendly way.

We are striking a partnership with the energy industry and investors. We want to do everything we can to encourage investors to help us meet our renewable and low-emissions target. It will help industry come up with innovative energy conservation solutions in areas like geothermal, solar, biomass, bagasse and other renewable energy sources. Ideally, we would like to see projects with the potential for wide-scale commercial application.

We have also launched our \$50 million Smart Energy Savings Fund and Smart Energy Savings Program. This provides financial incentives to business to commercialise energy conservation technology, saving on the use of coal-fired electricity. We are also investing \$7 million in a solar thermal power station at Cloncurry. It will be a Queensland first. There is also our \$4 million Windorah project which focuses the solar dishes there to act like giant sunflowers and produce clean energy powered by the sun. We are investing \$15 million over five years in our Geothermal Energy Centre of Excellence.

We will continue to work with the new federal Labor government in developing a single national renewable energy target of 20 per cent by 2020. We are also investing \$7.5 million in a solar thermal gas plant in Queensland with the CSIRO. In a find of the century, a new geological basin near Cloncurry has been discovered by the geologists from my department. The discovery of a new, untapped basin of its size is rare anywhere in the world. It came about through our Smart Exploration program. It has exciting potential for petroleum, geothermal, coal seam gas and water resources.

The Bligh government is also leading the field with cutting-edge clean coal technology to help drive the global push for clean coal solutions. Make no mistake, as we push forward with renewable energy sources and gas-fired power, coal will continue to play an important role in the global energy mix. Our key challenge is to use it in a responsible and environmentally sustainable way. That is why we are injecting \$10 million into an oxyfuel project being developed by CS Energy. It is expected to demonstrate the capacity for significant carbon reductions in the existing power stations that we have. There is also our ZeroGen project at Stanwell where we have contributed about \$100 million.

This budget is also a budget for the battlers. Queensland families are under increasing financial pressure. That is why I was pleased when the independent regulator, the Queensland Competition Authority, accepted our strong argument that its proposed seven per cent increase in electricity charges was excessive. The QCA announced a 5.38 per cent increase. While no family welcomes that, it could have been a lot worse.

We know that pensioners and low-income earners are doing it tough. That is why we have announced a consumer action plan. We have provided \$450,000 over three years to fund a consumer advocacy service. We have increased the state government's rebate for pensioners and seniors. We will

also deploy a departmental officer to QCOSS to help set up the advocacy service. It is about giving them a voice—a say in their future. We are also providing approximately \$650 million or on average \$1,000 per household customer in regional Queensland to subsidise their electricity costs.

Shortly, I will be joining consumer groups to launch our special EnergyWise kits for pensioners, seniors and low-income earners. We will continue to look after the interests of everyday Queenslanders, especially people who are doing it tough. We have also read the riot act to those electricity retailers that have done the wrong thing by some pensioners.

We have also taken swift action to address electricity network safety and maintenance concerns raised by unions about the state's electricity distribution network. My department engaged an independent expert to examine those claims and look at the energy distributors' responses. Those recommendations will be implemented, lock, stock and barrel. The field workers will get a new avenue for reporting information on network safety and maintenance. They can report that directly to the top of the organisation.

We are also bringing about big changes in the way in which annual mine safety statistics are reported. Even though our experts say that the report that we have been using in the past is the most comprehensive safety performance statistical report for an industry, there is always room for improvement. This is about making mining safer for workers. I commend the unions and the QRC. This is a budget that looks beyond the horizon. It is a budget that is securing Queensland's future.

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

**Mr SEENEY:** Could I initially recognise the minister and thank him and his staff for the amount of work that has gone into preparing for estimates. I appreciate that a lot of staff do a lot of work. I think it is opportune that I recognise that.

My first question relates to the Service Delivery Statements on page 2-218 and the income statement for expenses and revenues administered on behalf of the whole-of-government by your department. Line 2 shows royalties payments of some \$1.36 billion for 2007-08, \$1.38 billion for last year—that is an increase of just under one per cent—and then a massive jump of approximately 200 per cent to \$3.5 billion for the coming year. This 200 per cent increase in mining royalties, or an extra \$2.2 billion in revenue, underwrites your government's whole budget. How is the Queensland mining industry going to produce a 200 per cent increase in royalties this year when royalties only rose less than one per cent last year when the industry is still struggling with overtaxed rail systems and clogged ports since the mining boom began two years ago?

**Mr WILSON:** I am pleased the member has raised the importance of the mining industry in Queensland to the Queensland economy. Historically, that has always been the case. In the future that will continue to be the case. The amount of revenue and income generated by the mining industry has played an important part in building the Queensland economy.

The royalties regime in Queensland has always been set to ensure that Queenslanders, who are the owners and the stewards of the resources that we have in Queensland, get a fair and reasonable return from the resources we have. Those royalties build our schools, put teachers in our schools, build our hospitals, put doctors and nurses in our hospitals, put police on the beat and provide all the social services. That is what royalties do.

We have identified a way in which the government, as the steward of these resources for the Queensland people, can share in the supernormal revenue that the mining companies are presently obtaining as a result of the supernormal prices that are being obtained on the international market for various commodities, particularly for coal. The new royalty regime, which reflects a significant increase in royalties for the Queensland government and the Queensland people over the forward estimates, is based upon a two-tier arrangement. That means that when the international price for coal, for example, is in excess of \$100 a tonne then an additional royalty of three per cent will kick in for the value of that commodity between \$100 and whatever the international price is. International prices for coal have escalated in 12 months by 300 per cent. The international price for coal is around \$320 or \$330 a tonne.

What happens is between 30c and \$6 extra per tonne in royalties comes to Queenslanders from any coal sold with a price greater than \$100 a tonne. Up until \$100 it is seven per cent. This makes an important contribution to the building of Queensland. It is also a fair and reasonable way in which Queenslanders can get to share in the supernormal revenues that are coming into the mining industry because of the supernormal prices on the commodities market. I am sure that people will understand their entitlement to share, along with mining companies, in these supernormal profits.

**Mr SEENEY:** I certainly do not disagree with the statements that you make about the importance of the mining industry and the importance of the royalties to Queenslanders. Increasingly that royalty figure is becoming important to treasurers who are trying to balance their budgets. What I am trying to do is to determine the validity of the figure that has been included in this year's budget. What you say about the increase in the coal price is undoubtedly true, but that would have been reflected in the \$1.38 billion in royalties that was received by the state last year. You have mentioned the change in the

royalty regime for coal. That has been widely commented on since it was announced in the budget. Surely you are not suggesting that that change in the royalty regime is going to produce an extra \$2.2 billion, which it will need to do to validate the figure that the Treasurer has included in the budget.

**Mr WILSON:** I am pleased that the member has continued with this important area of the mining industry and the way in which royalties apply. It gives me the opportunity to go on to the matters that I was going to raise at the end of my previous answer. Historically, the mining royalties were set many years ago—I think in 1974—initially at 10 per cent. As an encouragement to the then emerging and somewhat infant coalmining industry, particularly the open-cut coalmining industry, the formal rate was discounted to five per cent. I understand that in about 1992 the rate was increased from five per cent to seven per cent and then, as I have outlined earlier, it has been restored to its original position of 10 per cent but with the important qualification that the 10 per cent, or the additional three per cent, only kicks in when the international commodity price is in excess of \$100 a tonne for coal. Historically, we are maintaining the seven per cent for the traditional situation that has applied when, prior to the last year, coal prices were mostly less than \$100 a tonne. But we have established a second tier on top that deals with this current extraordinary boom that is taking place—

**Mr SEENEY:** But is that going to raise \$2 billion?

**Mr WILSON:**—throughout the industry and internationally.

**Mr SEENEY:** Is that going to raise \$2 billion?

**CHAIR:** Order! Member for Callide, the minister is answering the question.

**Mr WILSON:** I understand how closely you have followed this industry over many years. You would well appreciate that the booming economy in China and also the booming economy in India, which is some years behind the Chinese developments but soon to complement, and in an even stronger way the demand internationally for coal, are going to mean that for some years ahead the international price for coal will stay up around about \$300 to \$330 a tonne. Is it not fair and reasonable that the Queensland taxpayers get to share, in partnership with the mining companies, in the supernormal profits and the supernormal revenue that is recovered as a result of this bumper harvest that Queenslanders, and all of Australia of course, are now experiencing because we are on the edge of the Asian revolution that is taking place?

**Mr SEENEY:** Thank you, Minister, for your second explanation of the royalty regime, but that is not what the question was about. The question is about how you arrived at the budgeted figure for royalties for the coming year—the \$3.5 billion—which, as I said, is a 200 per cent increase or an extra \$2.2 billion which underwrites the whole state budget. Surely there must be some rationale for that figure. I understand that the coal royalty has been changed, but nobody—not even yourself, I think—would suggest that the changes in the royalties themselves will generate an extra \$2.2 billion. I ask you again directly: how was that \$3.5 billion budgeted figure, representing a 200 per cent increase or an extra \$2.2 billion, arrived at?

**Mr WILSON:** I have already explained, and am happy to keep elaborating on that explanation, that the Australian economy, and in particular the Queensland economy, is benefiting from an extraordinary development and explosion of economic development in China and India and in Asia more generally. We are living on the doorstep of Asia and we are the principal provider of coal to those economies—that is, China and India and the other growing economies in Asia. I have also indicated that the economic forecasting that has been done tells us that we can have a reasonably firm confidence that the booming international commodity prices for coal will continue in such a fashion for some years ahead.

Of course, like all parts of the budget—like all parts of any budget—forecasting is done and estimates are made about the long-term expectations that can be had around commodity prices into the future. As I have said, it is expected that the commodity prices will stay at this relative height for some considerable years to come. The expectations that are formulated on the basis of sound economic analysis and financial planning that are done not only in the public sector but also in the private sector help underpin the assumptions that are made for any budget. No-one would deny—I have not heard anyone denying since 5 June, when the budget was handed down—not only that the Queensland economy is in a strong boom at the moment in terms of metal and coal prices and commodity prices generally but also that because of the unique circumstances the world is in—the conjunction of the development of China and India in particular but also Asia more generally—there is sound confidence that the boom we are presently experiencing has quite some years to run.

There may of course be some fluctuation in the commodity prices. They may not remain exactly at the level that they are at now and they will indeed fluctuate. But there is sound economic expectation underpinning the view that the boom will continue and Queenslanders are entitled to share in the supernormal revenues that are coming in as a result of the international situation, and that will be put to good use within the schools, the police force and other places.

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

**Mr WILSON:** Mr Chairman, I cannot quite hear the bells. If that is able to be adjusted, then I would be able to hear them a little more clearly.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, I am going to labour this point because it is critically important to the whole budget. Unless this committee can get some explanation for that \$3.5 billion figure then we are left with no alternative but to assume that there is a black hole in your Treasurer's budget. Can you answer specifically: is that \$3.5 billion figure, that extra \$2.2 billion in royalties, predicated on an extra coal tonnage being exported as compared to last year? Is it based on a continuing rise in the price of coal as opposed to what was received last year, or is it all going to be recovered by increasing royalties?

**Mr WILSON:** Like with any commodity, I have explained what has been happening with coal and what is expected to be happening with coal into the years ahead so far as price goes. But of course there are a whole range of factors that have to be taken into account. Perhaps it goes without saying, but I will say it anyway: estimations that are made about revenues that may flow from the royalties regime into the future are also dependent upon, obviously, the volumes of sales that may take place in conjunction with the variation that may take place with the high level of the price that we are looking at even now.

**Mr SEENEY:** But, Minister, you are not going to get any more simply because of the infrastructure.

**CHAIR:** Order! Member for Callide.

**Mr WILSON:** You know yourself; you are the member for Callide. You are in the heart of the Bowen Basin. In fact, you have a very excellent Callide A power plant there, and we will come to that later. But you know yourself that in the last five to 10 years the developments in the Bowen Basin have really taken off. So there is a reasonable and very conservative expectation that the volumes of sales of course will be increasing from the Bowen Basin, and I will give you an example.

**Mr SEENEY:** If they can get down the lines and out through the ports.

**Mr WILSON:** I will give you an example. One estimate given to me recently was that over the next five years there are about 17 existing mines with plans for expansion. There are proposals for 11 new mines to come on in the next five years involving capital infrastructure—capital investment—on those mines of \$36.6 billion. Another example is a particular company which I will not name but which is a very large exporter of coal with a very large number of mines in Queensland. It is my understanding that over the next four to five years it plans to double its export of coal on to the international market. Of course, all of those indications and many others are taken on board by the very conservative forecasters and estimators that operate in the Queensland Treasury. No-one in Australia would doubt how conservative the Queensland Treasury is in forecasting for the economic future of Queensland, and I commend it for being that conservative because it should be. It applies its mind to all of the data available, not only about price but also about volume, and projects forward the expected revenue.

**Mr SEENEY:** Unfortunately, you still have not provided any basis for the figure that underwrites the state's budget. Can you rule out any further increases in coal royalties to try to achieve that figure given that it is unlikely that it is going to be achieved by increased volumes with the infrastructure constraints that you and I are both aware of? Given that the royalty regime change came as a complete surprise to the industry—there was no consultation—and it has posed a threat to industry confidence because it has had to start to consider things like regulatory risk and sovereign risk—

**CHAIR:** Member for Callide, the beginning of your question was about ruling out further increases. Can you point me to where in the Service Delivery Statements that is and how that relates to this year's budget?

**Mr SEENEY:** I am referring to the figure of \$3.5 billion that has been budgeted on page 2-218. I am asking the question: to achieve that figure, will the minister rule out any further rises or any further changes in the royalty regime, the likes of which came as a surprise to the industry and created significant regulatory risk and sovereign risk issues?

**CHAIR:** Order! We have got the question. We are now going into opinions and facts. Can I just hold that question for a moment, Minister, and take some advice. Thank you, Minister. The question is in order.

**Mr WILSON:** I wonder whether you could repeat the question.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, I have tried a number of times to get you to—

**Mr WILSON:** Sincerely.

**Mr SEENEY:** Yes. I have tried a number of times to get you to quantify that figure or to justify how that figure was arrived at. What I am asking you now to do is to rule out any further changes to the royalty regime in an attempt to raise the \$3.5 billion that has been included in the budget.

**Mr WILSON:** What I can tell you is what I did not get to answer in response to your last question and then I will come to that. The notes that I have been provided with tell me that there is an estimated export revenue for 2008-09 of \$37.4 billion compared with a forecast of \$14.7 billion for 2007-08. So we are going from \$14.7 billion to \$37.4 billion in estimated export revenue in the space of one year. It is

those sorts of estimates that underpin the figures that are in the budget generally and in the SDS which illustrate what I was describing before. The second point is that the royalty regime that we have added the top tier to is an affirmation of the seven per cent rate that has been applying since early 1992, because we have said there is that rate which applies for values below \$100 and then we have placed a second tier—

**Mr SEENEY:** But—

**Mr WILSON:** Be patient.

**Mr SEENEY:** But it is not going to raise \$2 billion, Minister.

**Mr WILSON:** Be patient.

**CHAIR:** Order! Member for Callide—

**Mr SEENEY:** It is not going to raise \$2 billion.

**CHAIR:** Member for Callide!

**Mr SEENEY:** That is the point.

**CHAIR:** Member for Callide, you are here to ask questions, not answer them. The minister has answered the question. We will now move to government questions.

**Mrs ATTWOOD:** Good morning, Minister.

**Mr WILSON:** Good morning.

**Mrs ATTWOOD:** I refer to page 2-206 of the Service Delivery Statements in relation to the Smart Exploration program. Can the minister please inform the committee what the government is doing to support and encourage new discoveries of resources?

**Mr WILSON:** Thank you very much for this question. The Smart Exploration program is an excellent one. The Bligh government, I want to keep reminding people, is looking beyond the horizon and beyond the boom. It is about building Queensland beyond the boom. Through our Smart Mining and Smart Exploration programs, we have uncovered a new mineral and energy basin in north-west Queensland. It is about 100 kilometres east of Cloncurry and is one of the most exciting finds of the century.

The discovery of a new untapped basin of this size is rare anywhere in the world. The Millungera Basin is about 300 kilometres long and between 40 to 50 kilometres wide. The rocks could be up 540 million years old. Their discovery until now was masked by the younger, thinner Carpentaria Basin, where the rocks are about only 230 million years old. Other rocks of this age in other basins have significant petroleum, coal seam gas and water resources.

The granites uncovered signal a potential for new sources of geothermal energy. That is what has the scientists excited, that is what has the government excited and that is what I am extremely excited about. A new energy source of the north-west minerals province is important for the future development of the region. An added bonus, of course, is the potential new water source, which, of course, would be the icing on the cake.

The Millungera Basin was uncovered by geoscientists from my department's Geological Survey of Queensland in collaboration with the federal government's Geoscience Australia. Heading the team is Mr David Mason from my department. While many of his colleagues would like the new discovery to be called the 'Mason basin'—as indeed we in the department have colloquially referred to as a mark of respect to Dave—we will stay true to the region's cultural heritage. David and the team of geologists carried out deep seismic surveys to see up to 60 kilometres below the surface. My department plans to conduct further surveys in the area to better define the size, shape and depth of the basin. There are also plans to drill a number of relatively shallow holes to measure the geothermal potential.

We will shortly consider which blocks of land could be released for tender for geothermal, petroleum and gas exploration. Any significant mineral or energy resource discovered here will be of huge benefit to the north-west minerals province and to nearby towns like Cloncurry and Julia Creek.

**Mr FENLON:** I refer to page 2-205 of the Service Delivery Statements and the state government's \$50 million investment in the Renewable Energy Fund. I ask the minister to outline what else the government is doing to help steer Queensland towards a greener, cleaner energy future.

**Mr WILSON:** We are getting on with the job—the most important job there is facing any government in this day and age, and that is the job of tackling climate change. We are getting on with the job of tackling climate change. We are putting dollars on the table to develop a cleaner, greener energy future for Queensland. We have delivered real and solid commitments, and that includes a \$100 million green energy package. There are two fronts for this package: searching for innovative renewable energy technologies and cutting energy use by Queensland businesses. An amount of \$50 million will go to the Renewable Energy Fund, and this is for loans or grants for innovative renewable energy generation projects. There is also \$50 million for the Smart Energy Savings Fund. This is for loans or grants for new energy efficient technologies and processes.

In a first for Queensland, we are investing \$7 million in a \$31 million, 10-megawatt solar thermal power station at Cloncurry capable of creating continuous electricity powered by the sun. There is also \$5 million going to the coastal geothermal exploration project; there is \$250,000 to work jointly with Victoria on developing the solar atlas; we are investing dollars in a prefeasibility study with the Clinton Foundation on a solar thermal park in Queensland; we are investing \$15 million over five years for the Geothermal Energy Centre of Excellence—and this is at the forefront of hot rocks technology; we are putting \$7.5 million into a solar-gas plant project with the CSIRO, the pre-eminent research organisation of Australia; there is a \$4 million solar farm at Windorah and giant solar dishes are now in place; and we have the \$15 million Solar Cities trial in the north on Magnetic Island, turning the island truly into a solar hub. The Bligh government will continue working with the new federal government to develop a single national renewable energy target—20 per cent by 2020—to replace Queensland's 10 per cent target. This is an important complementary measure to an emissions trading scheme.

Today, it is 149 days since the opposition leader promised Queenslanders a new renewable energy policy on 22 February—149 days have gone by—and he still has not delivered on a renewable energy policy. He has an opinion on everything and a solution for nothing. Nonetheless, the Bligh government will get on with the task of planning for the future, building tomorrow's Queensland today.

**Ms van LITSENBURG:** I refer to page 2-226 of the Service Delivery Statements. Electricity retailers have been read the riot act for not doing the right thing by their customers. Can you advise the committee what action the state government took to address this issue and whether the billing glitches have been ironed out?

**Mr WILSON:** I thank the honourable member for the question. There is nothing more important than looking after consumers in Queensland's economy. The Bligh government is not going to be turning its back—and has not turned its back—on the battlers. That is why we pay hundreds of millions of dollars in subsidies to Ergon Energy every year to help electricity consumers in regional Queensland. There was about \$650 million in the budget for the last financial year, translating to effectively \$1,000 per the average householder in regional Queensland.

That is why we have also set up a \$3 million assistance scheme for electricity consumers for financial hardship. That is why we have increased the pensioners' and seniors' rebate—it rose from \$145 a year to \$165 a year. That is a 13 per cent increase. That is why we brought in a gas rebate scheme for pensioners. It is now \$57 a year. That is why \$450,000 has been contributed to QCOSS and other consumer organisations to set up an advocacy service for consumers, and particularly pensioners.

That is why we were less than impressed when AGL, Origin and Queensland Electricity admitted to incorrectly billing some pensioners and some seniors. They were missing out on rebates and they were wrongly being charged the ambulance levy. I read the riot act to those retailers and I told them to lift their game. In addition, the director-general, who is the regulator under the Electricity Act, issued all three electricity retailers with show-cause notices. They were also hit with thousands of dollars in fines for breaches of the Electricity Act. I also requested the regulator to direct all electricity retailers in Queensland to appoint independent auditors at their own cost to go through their billing systems with a fine toothcomb.

The regulator has now reviewed that material, has sought further information from the retailers and will then make a final determination based upon that additional information. Make no mistake: if further action needs to be taken, I will back him to the hilt in exercising his powers as regulator under the Electricity Act. Why? Because we are on the side of the consumer.

We have established a whole range of initiatives that are designed to provide real and effective outcomes for consumers generally in the energy market, but in particular to focus on pensioners, seniors and other low-income earners who are on fixed incomes. We understand well that consumers generally, but in particular those who are on fixed incomes, are doing it tough in today's economy—rising petrol prices, rising rents, rising mortgage payments, rising groceries prices. We will continue to be on the side of the battler, looking after the consumer in Queensland's economy today.

**Mrs ATTWOOD:** I refer to page 2-207 of the Service Delivery Statements in relation to electricity prices in regional Queensland, and I ask: what steps has the state government taken to ensure that householders no matter where they live have access to affordable electricity?

**Mr WILSON:** Thank you for that question. This is an important area that really quite seriously does not get a lot of airplay, might I say. Can I also say that it does not get a lot of recognition from the opposition—the Liberal Party or the National Party—for the amount of funds off the Queensland budget that are contributed to look after Queenslanders in the bush, rural and remote and regional Queenslanders, to ensure that they have access to more affordable electricity.

The Bligh government is a government for all Queenslanders, and nothing better illustrates that than the fact that in 2007-08 we gave Ergon Energy, the regional distributor in Queensland—97 per cent of the state—more than \$600 million, \$250 more than the previous year, to subsidise the cost of electricity for households and businesses in regional Queensland. That is an average, as I indicated earlier, of around \$1,000 per customer. Their electricity bills would have been a lot higher without that subsidy.

People do not see it on their bill or in a letter to them, because it is indirectly provided by the way in which the costs of Ergon are underwritten. But the effective outcome is about \$1,000 additional benefit for regional households. That is only one of the steps we have taken to help ease the financial pressure on households, particularly for pensioners, seniors and low-income earners.

We strongly objected to the QCA's proposed seven per cent increase in the electricity price cap. They came back with 5.38 per cent. We put in two strong submissions against that seven per cent. While it is still going to hurt households on a tight income and a tight budget, it could have been a lot worse. We have also announced a consumer action plan. We have increased, as I was saying earlier, our pensioner rebate from \$145 to \$165 a year. That is an increase of 13 per cent as against the 5.38 per cent increase in electricity price caps—the maximum price cap. We are spending \$450,000 over three years to fund the consumer advocacy service at QCOSS and with the other consumer organisations to do energy consumer research to take their views and the views of pensioners and those experiencing financial hardship directly to the independent economic regulator, the Queensland Competition Authority. This is about giving people in financial hardship a say in their future.

To show how fair dinkum we are, we have delegated and seconded an officer from the department over to QCOSS to help set this up, along with the pensioners association and the Queensland Consumers Association. Shortly I will be launching the EnergyWise kits for pensioners, seniors and low-income earners. These kits have handy hints and tips to help households save energy and save money. The bottom line is that we are on the side of the consumer. We will continue looking after the interests of everyday Queenslanders, especially those who are doing it tough.

**Mr FENLON:** I refer to page 2-225 of the Service Delivery Statements and the services provided to electricity and gas customers by the Energy Ombudsman, and I ask: what steps are you taking to ensure that the ombudsman can continue to provide the best service possible for consumers?

**Mr WILSON:** As I have said before—and I will not tire of repeating this—we are not turning our back on the battlers. We are on the side of the consumer. That is why we set up the independent Energy Ombudsman 12 months ago under the Energy Ombudsman's act so that electricity and gas consumers had someone to turn to. I sincerely say that I appreciate the support of the National Party and the Liberal Party in voting for that Energy Ombudsman being set up when the legislation went through the House. It is a one-stop shop that looks after the rights of consumers—a free, fair, independent service to help consumers who are unable to resolve complaints with their energy retailer.

So far, more than 6,500 Queenslanders have made contact with the service, seeking help with their electricity and gas bills. The ombudsman has conducted investigations into 2,500 electricity and gas complaints. All of those investigations have been resolved. Importantly, most of them were resolved quickly. At the 12-month mark, it is appropriate to consider the first year's experience to make sure people are happy with the service being provided. A customer satisfaction survey was conducted and over 82 per cent of respondents rated their experience with the ombudsman as satisfactory or very satisfactory. More than 91 per cent said they would recommend the services of the ombudsman.

While these are very good results, the ombudsman will look at opportunities to further improve its services. I have sought feedback from the ombudsman on his role and the services he provides. I will take that feedback on board and I will also take that feedback to my advisory council—the Energy Ombudsman Advisory Council—and if the service can be made even better I am more than happy to look at it, because I am on the side of the consumer. I expect the ombudsman will come back to me with a fairly comprehensive and considered feedback on the basis of the first 12 months of operation of this vital free mediation service for consumers. I will also seek the feedback of the Energy Ombudsman Advisory Council.

That is a council that has retailers, distributors and consumer organisations represented on it and is led by a very capable chair. I expect that they will also be able to provide me with good feedback. This is a \$3 million to \$4 million Energy Ombudsman organisation that has very capable and competent staff who know how to solve the problems of energy consumers when they are raised with them. I encourage more people to contact the Energy Ombudsman's office as and when they need to because they are an absolutely effective mediator to resolve any complaints. Of course, they have very heavy powers that the Ombudsman can use against retailers to get the result they need to resolve any grievance.

**Ms van LITSENBURG:** I refer to page 2-207 of the Service Delivery Statements and the extent of geothermal activity in Queensland. I ask the minister to advise the committee what action the state government is taking to encourage geothermal exploration in Queensland and how we compare to other states.

**Mr WILSON:** I thank the honourable member for the question. Geothermal is a clean, green energy source and it has a bright future in Queensland. Indeed, it is one of the key renewable resources that will help position Queensland for a secure, long-term future. Geothermal, or hot rocks energy, has the potential to produce more baseload energy than any other renewable energy source. The Bligh government is helping to pave the way for new explorers to kick-start the search for more geothermal energy in Queensland.



In May we granted the first exploration permit for geothermal exploration in Queensland to Granite Power Ltd. Two other companies have commenced native title processes—the final step before the granting of exploration permits. In May we announced the latest successful tenderers for 13 new areas of geothermal exploration. Thirty-five applications were received for the 13 areas totalling 7,000 square kilometres with the majority of the areas receiving more than one application. This latest commitment will lead to an overall investment in geothermal research in Queensland of over \$188 million.

Since 2005 Queensland has released a total of 29 areas for geothermal exploration covering over 15,000 square kilometres. My department has notified 10 companies that their applications over 27 of the areas released can progress towards grant. In terms of R&D, Queensland has committed funds of \$15 million over five years to our Geothermal Energy Centre of Excellence. Western Australia has committed \$2.3 million for theirs and South Australia, \$250,000 for theirs. Of course, we will work in collaboration with each of the other states in the research work that they undertake.

We are working to provide a framework for exploration and production of geothermal energy with the development of a geothermal energy production bill. This will replace the Geothermal Exploration Act, which was the first act of its kind in Australia when we passed it in Queensland. All mining and exploration licences have to satisfy the Commonwealth Native Title Act no matter what the resource that is being explored or that is being mined. While the responsibility for comment about the federal Native Title Act is not within my portfolio, I can advise the committee that there has been some uncertainty with explorers in the application of the Commonwealth Native Title Act to geothermal exploration. The Premier raised the issue at the first opportunity with our new Labor Prime Minister to get a national solution to the problem. Our aim is to develop a strong geothermal energy industry in Queensland, an industry that explorers can invest in with certainty and with confidence.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, can I direct you to page 2-204 of the Service Delivery Statements. Under the heading of 'Strategic Issues' you say that the department will continue to support mineral and petroleum exploration. You would be aware that now much more so than ever before a significant amount of that exploration is being conducted in closely settled and intensively developed agricultural land areas, especially in the case of coal seam gas on the Darling Downs. Minister, how will your department ensure that this exploration and subsequent development is able to occur in a way that respects the property rights of landholders and avoids escalating conflict between those landholders and the exploration companies?

**Mr WILSON:** I thank you for that question. Before I proceed to that question, can I touch base with you on the last question that you asked and restate what I was saying? Firstly, the royalty regime that has been adopted by putting a second tier of three per cent on top of the seven per cent is an affirmation of the continuation of the seven per cent royalty unless the value of the commodity is in excess of the \$100. Secondly, there are no plans about varying or changing the royalty regime that has just been announced. It is now a two-tier system and it will operate in that way with enormous flexibility so that, when indeed the coal prices come off, then we return to the traditional rate of seven per cent.

**Mr SEENEY:** It still will not raise an extra \$2 billion.

**Mr WILSON:** That is just to clarify that, to put that beyond doubt.

You have raised the question of the issue of the interaction of the respective rights of leasehold landholders. You drew a reference to the Surat Basin and explorers and miners wishing to access their land. Seriously, this is an important issue. I recognise the importance of this issue that you have raised and we have recognised the importance of this issue. I have received a number of delegations from some of your colleagues and have spoken to some of their constituents in the months past. I have also spoken with a number of the non-government organisations representing them, one including AgForce and a number of others. The short point is that some months ago I set up a task force of all of the industry players including AgForce, the Queensland Farmers Federation, the APPEA, the QRC and a range of other stakeholders for the purpose of bringing those parties together to address this very issue because I recognise that it is an important issue.

What I wanted to do and, in fact, have now done is set up this task force. My director-general now chairs the task force. It will be meeting on a regular basis. I have extended an invitation to all the parties—I am happy to take an extension of time.

**Mr SEENEY:** You have one minute.

**Mr WILSON:** I have extended an invitation to all the parties to bring to the table the issues around potential conflicting land use questions because people are entitled, one, to have full and transparent access to information; two, to know what their rights are under the prevailing legislation; three, to know what their rights are in relation to any codes of practice that are applying; and, four, to identify whether there are any gaps and whether there are any deficiencies that ought to be addressed. The objective is to put all of that on the table and to identify between the parties—the ones who are representative of the stakeholders involved in this area not confined to coal seam gas but to the mining industry generally—and to produce some understanding between the parties of where the points of difference are. From that

we will work forward in partnership with the industry parties to identify a way in which we can work with them to address some of those concerns. It might be by way of amendment to codes of practice. It might be by way of amendment to any applicable legislation.

I say here that I am fair dinkum about this process. That is why I set it up. I was impacted by the experiences told to me by some of the farmers in the Surat Basin. I think Stuart Copeland, the member for Cunningham, brought these people in and I was speaking with them and also Ray Hopper. I was impacted by what they had to say, along with the conversations that I have had with AgForce, Peter Kenny and a number of others—putting all that together. That is why I set up the task force and I expect the task force to produce some good results.

**Mr SEENEY:** On page 2-214 of the Service Delivery Statements listed under expenses is an amount of \$63 million for employee expenses, a rise of \$11 million from last year. Can you confirm that, of that \$63 million the department will spend on staff, there are no departmental officers in the field specifically tasked with mediating and arbitrating disputes between landholders and exploration companies, nobody with the responsibility of ensuring that this exploration can continue in a way that does not cause conflict between the parties?

**Mr WILSON:** I thank the member for the question. There are 661 full-time equivalent employees of the Department of Mines and Energy. Approximately two-thirds of those work on the mining side of the department and a large chunk of those officers are in the regions managing the legislation and the administration of the department in the regions. They have a wide-ranging brief and they provide advice and information to anyone making inquiries about the information that they want on resources particularly, on the geoscience material—the data that the department has—but also on the questions of what are the existing exploration permits and what are the existing applications for mineral development licences or for mining leases.

Also on an informal basis, they provide advice about the process involved in considering grants of land tenure from exploration permits right up to the granting of mining leases and also, again on an informal basis, information about the rights that parties do have to compensation under the Mineral Resources Act and the Petroleum and Gas (Production and Safety) Act and under other applicable legislation and the opportunities that parties do have before the Land Court—previously the Land and Resources Tribunal—which considers issues of compensation among other things in the process of granting mining tenure, especially mining leases. So there is a whole range of information given across the spectrum of the operations of the mining side of the department.

This is a capacity that is shared by many of the mining officials or the members of the mining side of the department in regional Queensland, and they will continue to do so. What they cannot do—and I do not believe that you are asking that they should do—is advise on a legal basis. They cannot give legal advice to any party presenting across the counter about what their respective rights might be. They can provide all of the information that is necessary for parties to seek their own independent legal advice. Just as a matter of detail, there are three regional mining registrars and there are eight district registrars and they are all trained in alternative dispute resolution. To be serious, they do do a lot of this work, but they are not able to give legal advice—and you would not expect them to—about the position of the respective parties.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, do you believe there is a need for dedicated officers to be in the field to supervise the activities of explorers and to mediate in the case of disputes between explorers and landholders? It is obviously not a job for a mining registrar. The government has field officers and liaison officers of every description across a whole range of departments. The question I ask is: why does your department not have such officers to try to avoid some of the conflict and the disputes that are occurring in places like the Darling Downs with the coal seam gas exploration?

**Mr WILSON:** Quite genuinely, I do not want to prejudge the outcomes of the task force. I have outlined my perspective on the role of the task force in answer to previous questions. I want to bring an open mind to this. The best people to identify what they see to be the strengths and weaknesses around the issue of the interaction of explorers and miners with existing landowners, the best people to crystallise what those issues are, are indeed the parties themselves or the stakeholder representatives of those parties.

I want to know the outcome of the consideration of those issues. That is why I have set up the task force. I do not want it to go on forever. I want it to have a fairly short time frame, but it is a time frame that needs to be subservient to producing a good result. We will have a look at the conclusions that the task force reaches. There will probably be a list of things that they can agree on that might need to change and there will probably be a list of things that they cannot agree on that some say need to change and others say do not need to change. I think it would be imprudent of me to anticipate what might be the particular outcomes.

I simply underline that I was fair dinkum when I set it up. It will run in a fair dinkum way. My director-general is the chair of it. That is how serious I am about this process. I am serious about the process, to identify what the parties themselves believe they can improve. For example, it may be that consensus is reached around a range of things that can be adopted into a strengthened code of

practice. It might mean that there are all sorts of mechanisms adopted whereby people get access to information up-front, whereas presently they only find out about it if they themselves undertake a search and inquiry exercise, and perhaps most people do not do that.

There may be quite a number of opportunities that do not particularly involve a dedicated person being a mediator or changes to legislation or what have you. I am keeping an open mind. When you think about it, I do believe that the mining industry is as committed to this exercise as I am because they understand that interacting well and in a constructive way with landowners is integral to them maintaining and building their social licence for mining. They will understand that. Certainly the better ones do and I think most do. That is why they are committed to this process.

**Mr SEENEY:** The first sentence of the departmental overview in the budget document, under the heading Strategic Issues on page 2-204, says that your department is committed to competitive minerals and energy industries. How will you ensure that Queensland's mining industries, especially our coal industry, are able to maintain international competitiveness under Kevin Rudd's carbon reduction scheme when their international competitors are not going to be subject to the same constraints?

**Mr WILSON:** One of the biggest challenges of our time is tackling climate change. The Rudd Labor government put that forward before the last election as one of probably two key issues that resulted in its election at that time, the other being industrial relations. The Bligh government is serious about tackling climate change as one of the key challenges that we face going into the future. This is a complex area, as I think you would recognise, as is illustrated by the reports that have been handed down to date. We have had the issues paper by Professor Garnaut, then we have had the draft report by Professor Garnaut and now we have the green paper from the federal government. There is a period of consideration now when each of the states, including Queensland, will contribute their views on the green paper to the federal government.

There are three things, among others, that the Queensland government has been championing with the federal Labor government. One is the protection of trade-exposed energy-intensive industries, second is dealing with the hardship impacts on consumers as a result of any emissions trading scheme and the third is financial assistance to established existing generators. We have been making submissions to the federal government on those three key things and we will continue to do so. That will guide the formulation of the emissions trading scheme and the particular detailed features that it will have.

Make no mistake: trade-exposed energy-intensive industries are a key issue that the Queensland government is making all of the right submissions on to the federal government, because we recognise—and, indeed, the federal government itself recognises in the green paper—that trade-exposed energy-intensive industries are vital, obviously, to continue sustaining. They operate in an international environment and we need to continue to support them because they are so vital to the economic health of not only the Queensland economy but also the Australian economy. There are many issues, and they are three of the key issues. It is important that those three continue under the Queensland government.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, I probably have time for one more question. I wanted to ask you this question in the parliament, but we were not able to continue the debate regarding your solar energy rebate scheme. On page 2-206 of the budget document you talk about the announcement of the Solar Bonus Scheme that will offer a feed-in tariff of 44c, but only for the excess electricity the customer is able to generate. Minister, why does your solar rebate scheme not allow Queenslanders who are prepared to buy solar electricity generating systems to be paid for all of the solar power that they produce at the same rate as a major electricity generator who is prepared to invest in solar power generation?

**Mr WILSON:** The Queensland government has adopted a sensible and fair position by encouraging the installation and use of solar PVs on household roofs or the roofs of small businesses. It makes sense: if you are going to encourage people to generate solar power on their roof, why not have them using that solar power in the house, displacing or substituting it for the consumption of coal-fired electricity? It just does not make sense to encourage people to put a solar photovoltaic electricity generating system on their house but not allow them to use that electricity in their house to help them tackle climate change and reduce their consumption of coal based electricity. We would be saying to them, 'You can continue unabated to consume electricity generated out of coal-fired power stations under the proposal that the National Party was putting forward in the parliament.'

I do thank the National Party and the coalition for supporting the legislation when it went through the House and for voting for it. That is a sensible outcome. In Queensland we have done what has happened in South Australia, and since our initiative in Queensland Victoria has adopted the same. All the ministers have spoken about it at the Ministerial Council on Energy. All recognise the wisdom of paying, as an incentive, for the surplus electricity generated from the solar PV on a roof and encouraging people to use it in their homes.

Why is that important? Because the solar strategy is not just about solar; it is about energy efficiency. It is about encouraging and creating an incentive for people in their homes to curtail their consumption of coal-fired energy to maximise the surplus, to maximise the financial return to them from the surplus generated by the solar PV, which is fed into the grid. It makes sense to do that and that is what we have done.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I call the member for Mount Ommaney.

**Mrs ATTWOOD:** Minister, I refer to page 2-206 of the Service Delivery Statements and the level of mineral exploration in Queensland. We all know that today's exploration means tomorrow's mines and tomorrow's jobs. What initiatives are in place to help explorers discover more of the state's untapped mining potential?

**Mr WILSON:** It is true that today's exploration means tomorrow's jobs in the mining industry. The Bligh government is building tomorrow's Queensland today by building and planning for beyond the boom. Mining is booming here in Queensland and, as I say, the Bligh government is backing it all the way. A few months ago I was delighted to join the Premier at the opening of two new mines in Queensland. In the past year construction started on 11 new mining and petroleum projects, nine new coalmines started up and six significant mines went into production.

We received more than \$1.3 billion in mining royalties last year, which is triple the amount when the 'pineapple party' across the chamber was in power. That is an enormous increase, illustrating not only the international price for the commodity but also the extraordinary increase in the volumes of coal being exported. We put these royalties to good use. They help build our schools and hospitals, put police on the beat and put teachers in our classrooms.

While mining is going full steam ahead, we have not forgotten where it began. As I said at the beginning, today's exploration means tomorrow's jobs. This year we released 150,000 kilometres of land for petroleum exploration. Successful companies plan to spend around \$500 million in the first four years. That is a tenfold increase compared to the time of the 'pineapple party'. Under Anna Bligh we are securing Queensland's future. I want to illustrate that to the committee, if I can.

This helpfully crafted display from my department shows what has happened in the three years from 2005 to 2008 in applications for exploration tenure and the grant of exploration tenure. The map on the left shows the extent of exploration in the north west in 2005. The map on the right shows the same region three years later. It shows that our initiatives are working. In that three-year period there has been an 85 to 90 per cent increase in the tenures granted and a 200 per cent increase in the tenures applied for, which illustrates the level of prospectivity within the industry.

We are on track to meet our target of doubling mining exploration investment to \$540 million by 2010, and it does not stop there. We have the Northern Economic Triangle, our plan for the future. I have to say, unfortunately the 'pineapple party' has no plan. It has an opinion on everything but a solution for nothing.

**Mr FENLON:** I refer to page 2-205 of the Service Delivery Statements, and I ask: what steps has the state government taken to support and encourage energy efficiency and energy conservation for homes and businesses, and what initiatives are there for households to save money and save energy?

**Mr WILSON:** As I have said before, the Bligh government is getting on with the job of tackling climate change. Under a statewide initiative to be launched later today we have produced EnergyWise kits to help people save energy and money. Indeed, it just so happens that I have one here that I can show to the committee. We are encouraging pensioners, seniors and other householders on fixed incomes or fixed budgets to use the kit to help save energy and money. There are 40,000 free home EnergyWise kits to give away.

The kit contains everything a household needs to find out how and where their energy is being wasted and what steps they can take to conserve it. There is something for everybody. It is simple, it is low-cost and these are energy-saving tips that involve practical opportunities. The tips include turning off appliances at the wall to cut stand-by power use, insulating the home, turning off the second fridge when it is not needed and fitting low-flow shower heads to save hot water. By switching appliances off at the wall, the average householder can save up to \$100 a year. Of course that varies considerably according to what your average household bill may be in a year.

This is just one way in which we are helping low-income households meet the costs of electricity. We are also increasing the rebate for pensioners from \$145 to \$165 a year—that is a 13 per cent increase. You might note that the maximum electricity price cap increased by 5.38 per cent from 1 July. We are also spending \$450,000 over three years to fund a consumer advocate service for QCOSS to do energy consumer research. This will be a vehicle for taking the views of pensioners and people in financial hardship directly to the body that determines the electricity price cap, and that is the independent economic regulator, the Queensland Competition Authority. A DME officer has been seconded to QCOSS to help set it up and work with the Queensland Consumers Association and the Pensioners League to get the service going.

We are giving a record \$650 million to Ergon Energy to subsidise electricity for regional Queensland households—a \$250 million to \$300 million increase on the previous year. That is because we recognise the vital importance of affordability of electricity for all Queenslanders. We are showing consumers how they can take action too. I heard an interesting story on Madonna King's morning show last week. It was an email from a listener, Rebecca, and she well advertised the importance and the value of energy conservation.

**Ms van LITSENBURG:** I refer to page 2-204 of the Service Delivery Statements in relation to the Queensland government's energy efficiency initiatives. Can the minister please advise the committee what steps the government is taking to save money and save energy with streetlighting?

**Mr WILSON:** I thank the member for the question. The Bligh government has set aside \$20 million over two years to help councils in south-east Queensland—which is the only place where this initiative is taking place—which are not supplied by Ergon to meet the cost of their streetlighting electricity bills. In the past, ordinary householders were indirectly footing the bill for large councils' streetlighting electricity charges through cross-subsidisation. Householders subsidising large south-east Queensland councils was, as you can well understand, unsustainable in the longer term. Now it is a level playing field. Take the Logan City Council as an example. It will receive \$1.4 million in 2008-09 to help offset the new charges and \$734,000 the year after.

South-east Queensland councils can shop around for a deal that best suits them. The early feedback is that councils are indeed doing that and finding that the competition between the electricity retailers really puts the heat on them and helps them get some savings. Also, this is an important opportunity for councils to adopt energy conservation practices and to save ratepayers money. Because streetlighting is used at night when there is low electricity demand, it will be easy for them to get a better, more competitive deal, particularly when you think of a total electricity buy for a large council.

Energex is also undertaking a \$800,000 streetlighting trial with some councils in the south-east corner, looking at ways for councils to save energy and save money. It is about bringing energy efficient lighting to streets of south-east Queensland. The state government, a number of councils and Energex are partners. It is a first for the south-east with technology that is a first for Australia. For example, 50-watt mercury vapour lights have been swapped for more energy efficient lights, which I am told reduces dangerous greenhouse gas emissions by between 25 per cent and 50 per cent on that amount of electricity.

The trial started late last year. It is planned to run for at least two years, with around 300 energy efficient streetlights installed. It involves sophisticated measuring devices to monitor the performance of lights. They will be tested in a range of conditions—beachside streets from the Gold Coast to the Sunshine Coast, in frost prone areas such as Ipswich, and in other areas of the state. Their resilience will be put to the test. Scientific researchers from the Queensland University of Technology, if I recall correctly, will be involved. We will find out how they fare in severe summer storms in the south-east as well. Their illumination will be monitored to ensure that national standards are met and that public safety is maintained. The trial will show us the best way forward with energy efficient lighting. This is good news for councils and good news for the environment.

**Mrs ATTWOOD:** I refer to page 2-207 of the Service Delivery Statements in relation to mine safety. I ask the minister to provide a progress report on safety initiatives the state government has undertaken to improve the safety of the men and women who work in Queensland mines.

**Mr WILSON:** I thank the member for the question. We are well into the 2008 round of unannounced safety and health audits and inspections of mine sites around Queensland, and 838 audits and inspections have been carried out. This follows the success of last year's audits that saw inspectors arrive unannounced at targeted mines. I want to underline that the sole purpose of that exercise and the new iteration of that exercise is about boosting mine safety. Some of the findings indeed hang a lantern on serious health and safety issues, and that is exactly what they were designed to do—to find faults and for mining companies to fix them.

We are also bringing in sweeping changes to the way in which annual mine safety statistics are recorded in Queensland. I ordered a review after concerns were raised with me that some figures in the report did not accurately reflect the safety performance in some mines. Two highly respected experts ran the ruler over the report, which had not happened before, and produced a warts-and-all report of their own with 36 recommendations. While it shines a light on what is being done right, as I said earlier, it hangs a lantern on some of the problems. The recommendations cover a wide range of issues, case studies, mine audits, the definition and reporting of injuries and high potential incidents, data analysis and the level of awareness of health and safety risks. They found that some of the statistics did not actually tell the full story, and to design good effective safety regimes you have to have the full facts.

I have been ready and so has my department to roll up our sleeves to work with the key stakeholders on all of the recommendations one by one. Interestingly, even though the two experts having reviewed the annual report concluded in part that the annual report is the most comprehensive safety performance statistical report for any industry—that is not only any industry in Queensland but

any industry in Australia—they were able to identify significant opportunities to improve. I commend the mining unions, the QRC and particularly the major mining companies for putting their support behind this, because nothing is more important than the safety of our men and women in our mining industry.

While Queensland has one of the best mine safety records in the world, it is in everyone's best interests to keep it that way. As anyone in the industry knows—and I know the member for Callide would have heard this many times before—the real threat to mine safety is complacency. You always have to be on the front foot. There have been 15 prosecutions since our world recognised safety act came in in 2001. That speaks volumes for the work that the mine safety inspectorate has done. That of course compares to 10 years ago when the Nationals were in power. In that 2½-year period there was only one prosecution—one prosecution—under the act.

**Mr FENLON:** Minister, I refer to page 2-204 of the Service Delivery Statements. What steps has the state government taken to ensure a reliable and secure long-term power supply for the north-west so that the region can maintain its reputation as a world-class minerals province?

**Mr WILSON:** I thank the member for the question—and a world-class minerals province it absolutely is having 75 per cent of all of Queensland's base and precious metals resources. I will never tire from saying this because it needs to keep being said: we are planning now, and we are planning for and managing growth in the north-west. We are working on a number of fronts to secure the long-term reliable electricity supply for that region. I set up a task force to work on identifying the energy needs of the north-west for its long-term future. This includes representatives from the major north-west mining operators who are the main energy consumers in the region—the QRC, CS Energy and Ergon Energy, the Department of Mines and Energy, the Department of Infrastructure and Planning, and Treasury. The findings will help stimulate commercially based investment decisions on future power supply. For example, CS Energy plans to expand Mount Isa's Mica Creek Power Station by up to 110 megawatts.

The information put together by all of the industry stakeholders on the task force will stimulate and encourage investment by other potential energy users. The government is open to a range of supply options which may be put forward by proponents and will back any project that stacks up commercially, but I underline that it must stack up commercially because what we are looking for is commercially competitive power in the north-west. For example, there is a project on the books from the private sector—an \$800 million to \$900 million private sector proposal called IsaLink to link Mount Isa to the national grid from around the Stanwell area. It will involve an 1,100-kilometre high-voltage direct current line from central Queensland to Ernest Henry Mine north of Cloncurry. If that stacks up on an economically feasible basis, that is a key way in which the north-west, which is presently an isolated network, can be linked to the entire national electricity market and produce, hopefully, a more competitive price outcome for energy in the north.

There is also the Northern Economic Triangle, which is about securing vital infrastructure to underpin private sector investment in the mineral processing area from Townsville to Mount Isa to Bowen and planning to a horizon of 50 years ahead. Ergon Energy will invest \$16 million in capital works in the north-west over the next few years. As I say, we will continue working with the industry parties for a commercially viable outcome to supply long-term power to the north-west. As you know, I have mentioned earlier that we are also looking at alternatives. We will be providing \$7 million to the Cloncurry solar power station, which is a \$31 million, 10-megawatt solar thermal power plant. We will look at other initiatives as well. We are about looking over the horizon and planning, planning and planning for the long term.

**Ms van LITSENBURG:** I refer to page 2-207 of the Service Delivery Statements and the issue of electricity prices. Since the Queensland Competition Authority announced a 5.38 per cent increase in the maximum price cap for electricity, what steps has the minister taken to ensure that households, particularly households on low incomes, are being looked after?

**Mr WILSON:** I thank the honourable member for the question. We are on the side of the consumer, and I will continue taking whatever initiatives we can to look after the consumer. That is why I was pleased when the independent economic regulator—the market regulator, the QCA—accepted the government's two very strong submissions that its proposed seven per cent increase on the maximum price cap for electricity was excessive. They took our strong submission on board. While no family welcomes a 5.38 per cent increase, it could have been a lot worse.

Even though it is a lot less than last year and lower than the seven per cent the regulator flagged earlier this year in their February draft ruling, it is still going to hurt householders on a budget and particularly low-income households. If you take an electricity bill of around \$400 a quarter, that is an increase of about \$1.70 a week. That is why our consumer action plan will help ease their financial burden. We have increased our rebate for pensioners and seniors from \$145 to \$165. We have instituted a \$450,000 grant over three years to set up a consumer advocate service for QCOSS to conduct energy consumer research. This is about taking the views of pensioners and people in financial hardship directly to the body that determines the price cap.

We are spending \$650 million, as I said before, providing a subsidy to regional Queensland households for their electricity bills. We are putting out the EnergyWise kits for pensioners and seniors with tips on how to save energy and money. There is also the \$3 million Home Energy Emergency Assistance Scheme, which we have called the hardship scheme, for those in financial trouble who cannot pay their bills. That makes available \$360 over two years per applicant. But Queensland is not alone. New South Wales has been hit with a 24 per cent increase over three years, ACT is facing a 16 per cent increase, Tasmania had an increase of 15.7 per cent, and Victoria had an increase of 17 per cent. Just to illustrate, that is what has happened in Tasmania—15.7 per cent in January this year and four per cent in June this year. Unfortunately, we are not alone, but we are on the side of the battler and the consumer, and we will continue to be so.

**CHAIR:** The committee will now break for morning tea.

**Proceedings suspended from 10.30 am to 10.48 am**

**CHAIR:** The committee will now continue its examination of the portfolio of the Minister for Mines and Energy. I call the member for Callide.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, I table for your advice a print from the Queensland Council of Unions' web site which shows an advertisement from Energex. Minister, can you tell us what the policy of Energex specifically, and the GOCs more generally, is in regard to political advertising and using that advertising to support things such as the Queensland Council of Unions' web site?

**Mr WILSON:** I thank the honourable member for the question. My understanding of the way in which the energy GOCs generally, let alone one in particular, operate is that they make proper decisions on a commercial basis about where they place any advertisement or information material into the public arena. They no doubt consider a whole range of opportunities that they have to advertise and inform the public generally and sectors of the public about the activities of the GOC. You would well understand that, quite rightly, the government has high expectations and high standards for the way in which GOCs—and, in the case of my portfolio, energy GOCs—operate in all respects, not just how their advertising dollar is spent. I would expect that decisions, as I say, about where advertising or information material is placed for exposure to the public generally or for sections of the public is a product of a proper and sound decision-making process within the senior management of the organisation. I will get some details about the matter that you tabled and I will get back to you.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, there has also been some publicity about the display of political stickers such as Your Rights at Work stickers on Energex and Ergon vehicles. Do you know, or have you insisted, that these GOCs have a specific policy relating to the display of such obviously political material on GOC vehicles?

**Mr WILSON:** As I said in the previous answer, the government has high standards and expectations that those standards be met by the energy GOCs. They have large workforces, especially Ergon and Energex, which are distributed right around the state. They have well-established employment policies and policies around managing what are acceptable activities and what is acceptable conduct by their employees generally in relation to employees' affiliation with organisations such as unions or fishing clubs or whatever it might be—political parties, for example. They have established policies governing the way in which employees when in work time conduct themselves with reference to their affiliations with other organisations. They also have established policies in relation to the facilities, the vehicles and other equipment that is owned by the GOCs about what is acceptable material to be displayed on those vehicles, substations, facilities, power poles or what have you.

The first issue, I would imagine, uppermost in the mind of a GOC would be that nothing should be done that challenges or brings into disrepute the good public reputation of the organisation, as you would expect with any corporation, public or private. The second issue would be that nothing be done or said that raises a question mark around the safety of employees or the safety of the general public. There would be other issues or criteria that would be used by the GOCs to assess the appropriateness of employee behaviour, and that would be set out in their employment policies. That is the way in which I would expect the GOCs to behave in relation to the sort of incident or situation that you describe there. They are operational matters to be addressed by HR people within the relevant organisation according to their employment policies and practices.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, I refer you to my question on notice No. 10 in relation to the age of the electricity distribution assets that are owned and managed by Ergon and Energex. In your answer you indicate that some 65 per cent of Ergon's assets are greater than 20 years old and over 50 per cent of Energex's assets are greater than 50 years old. Minister, do those figures concern you? Do either or both of those organisations have management plans in place to replace those ageing assets?

**Mr WILSON:** I thank the honourable member for the question. Ergon and Energex are obviously central GOCs to the Queensland economy and the expanding Queensland economy. They do plan year by year for the maintenance, upgrade and expansion of their networks. They lodge with the independent economic regulator, the Queensland Competition Authority and soon to be the Australian Energy Regulator, applications for approval for five-year plans for maintenance upgrades and expansions of

their network. They are currently operating on a five-year plan of 2005 to 2010 that involves a combined capital investment by Ergon and Energex of \$6.2 billion in this five-year period. Powerlink, by the way, is \$2.9 billion. They are shortly to commence the preparation of their applications to be lodged with the AER for approval of the capital expenditure needed for expanding and upgrading their respective networks for the next five-year period, 2010 through to 2015. They need to do that because they are regulated monopolies and they can recover only so much revenue as is permitted by the economic regulator to be recovered on their capital expenditure.

This is important business for Ergon and Energex. Ergon covers 97 per cent of the state. It has about 1.5 million power poles, 150,000 kilometres of powerlines and about 300 substations. It is a very big network. It lodges each year on the public record with the Queensland Competition Authority—and it is there to be seen right now—annual network management plans that set forward the capital that will be spent in the forthcoming year on the management of the network.

The electricity industry in Queensland is the second largest electricity industry in the country and the fastest growing. Seventy-five per cent of all capital expenditure in the national electricity market in the last 10 years has been in Queensland, not only in power generation but also in the expansion of the Ergon and Energex network to match and support the expanding Queensland economy that is growing now in its 13th year faster than the national economic growth rate and in some cases double that growth rate—

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr WILSON:**—thirteenth year, lowest unemployment. That tells you that the booming economy needs support and is getting it from Ergon and Energex.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, I refer you to the Capital Statement, which lists the capital expenditure by Powerlink. There is considerable expenditure to 'reinforce electricity supply to north Queensland'. Minister, what is the government's position on a power station in north Queensland? How will the construction of a power station in north Queensland be balanced against the continual reinforcement of the transmission line?

**Mr WILSON:** Thank you for the question, member for Callide. The key question with power anywhere, let alone in north Queensland or the north-west mineral province, is the availability of competitively priced power. I notice that the member for Maroochydore in estimates hearings a couple of days ago also asked when the government will fund a baseload power station in Townsville. The Deputy Premier addressed it there and I will address it here. The issue is competitively priced power available where it is needed. Whether it be a government corporation or a private sector corporation, no-one—and I hope not on your side of the table—is expecting someone to make a decision to spend between \$500 million and a billion dollars building a power station in north Queensland if it is not commercially viable to do so.

Commercial viability has to be the touchstone here. We are open for business. The Deputy Premier and I are meeting with Townsville Enterprise next week—and I have met with them a number of times. We have talked about this issue. We are doing everything possible to encourage the opportunity for commercially competitive additional power in north Queensland but it obviously has to be commercially viable. It would be very wrong for the government—and I take it in effect you may be asking that we do this—to direct a GOC to invest half a billion or a billion dollars in building a power station in north Queensland when it might not yet be commercially viable to do so because the availability of off-take contracts for the next 10 to 20 years is not there because the load growth is not big enough but is building.

Chalco is looking at Bowen, for example. There is a trade development area in Bowen. When the load concentrates and you get a 10- to 20-year time horizon over which the additional power is needed then that is what makes it commercially viable. In the meantime, Powerlink is spending \$450 million in three stages to upgrade the transmission line from central Queensland to Townsville which has improved the competitiveness of power in north Queensland and reduced the differential between central Queensland power and north Queensland power to around about 10 to 12 per cent, down from around 25 to 30 per cent before they did the upgrade.

**Mr SEENEY:** I certainly appreciate the answer to your question. This is a big issue in north Queensland as you, I and every other politician who goes there knows. My question related though to the balance between continuing capital expenditure on reinforcing the link that currently transmits power to north Queensland as opposed to building a power station there. The commercial viability that you spoke about is certainly something I understand. But the thrust of my question is: how does the continual expenditure of considerable sums of money on the transmission line affect the commercial viability of building a power station in north Queensland?

**Mr WILSON:** What the expenditure does is improve the competitiveness of power being delivered in north Queensland. The powerline from central Queensland to Townsville is, in lay terms, nothing more than a transport vehicle to get power generated from Stanwell or Callide, in your electorate, from one place to another, but of course there are transmission losses.



As we experience with the national electricity grid, the lights are on here right now but no-one knows where the power is coming from. It could be coming from anywhere—South Australia, Victoria, Tasmania, New South Wales and Queensland. It does not matter where it is generated. The issue is: what is the competitive price for power at the point where it is needed? At the moment, Powerlink have authority from the Australian Energy Regulator to spend the \$450 million. They do not do it unless they can recover revenue and the AER will not authorise the recovery of the revenue unless Powerlink has made the business case for spending the \$450 million.

In the context of the national electricity grid, the judgement has been made that it is more economically efficient to spend \$450 million in the three stages to upgrade the transmission line to reduce down to a relatively smaller differential of 10 to 12 per cent between Townsville and central Queensland as a way of delivering more competitively priced power in Townsville—

**Mr SEENEY:** I am sorry to butt in, but who made that judgement?

**Mr WILSON:** A business case has to be put together by Powerlink to get approval to spend the \$450 million. That approval is granted by the Australian Energy Regulator—it used to be the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission—the point being that they do not spend money unless they get revenue and they cannot get revenue unless the capital expenditure is approved. A business case has to be put forward. They do not spend that money if there are more commercially viable solutions to providing power in north Queensland.

The fact that we have a number of private proponents—including AGL, IsaLink and others—considering ways of delivering more competitively priced power in north Queensland tells you that the market is alive to the issue of alternative ways of providing additional power long term to Townsville at a more competitive price. It is a market decision that has to be made about what is commercially viable. We will continue to facilitate that. We are open for business and we will talk with all parties about commercially viable options for Townsville.

**Mr SEENEY:** Could I direct your attention to question on notice No. 9 that I asked in relation to electricity consumption and the forecast electricity consumption for the next 10 years. As you would no doubt be aware, the forecast growth in demand is quite dramatic. What plans do the government owned corporations have to expand their generating capacity to meet that increased demand? Is it the government's policy to facilitate the expansion of the government owned generators or is it a market that you foresee will be filled by privately built generators?

**Mr WILSON:** What happens with decisions made for long-term investment in new generation is that any proponent, whether it be a government owned corporation or a private sector corporation, examines and analyses the amount of generation capacity in the system at the moment and what is projected forward. That is organised through the National Electricity Market Management Company, NEMMCO. It produces a report—the statement of opportunities—each year. The current one projects that on all of the presently available information on what is called committed generation—that is, where proponents have reached financial closure on a proposed new power station—the additional generating capacity in Queensland will be needed from the year 2013 to 2014. There is around a 230 megawatt shortfall.

Everyone takes that on board to examine when they will bring their own project on. It could be a private organisation or a government sector organisation. The government sector generators keep alive to the opportunities that may be available for them to invest in additional generating capacity just as the private sector does. That is the forecast time when additional generating load would be needed. There is approximately 2,000 to 3,000 megawatts of proposed or in the pipeline generating capacity with other projects, most of which is coal seam gas. These are private sector organisations looking at additional power stations on the Darling Downs and in the Surat Basin.

Committed generation tells you that extra generation will be needed in 2013 or 2014. There is about 2,000 to 3,000 megawatts on the drawing board capable of being worked up to a financial closure situation as those proponents choose to do so.

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

**Ms van LITSENBURG:** I refer to page 2-217 of the Service Delivery Statements in relation to championing developing technology. Can you inform the committee what the government is doing to support and promote the use of renewable energy such as solar power?

**Mr WILSON:** I very much thank the honourable member for Redcliffe for this question. We have an iconic project here in Queensland. It is the Solar Cities trial on Magnetic Island. It is the first residential solar system. In Townsville, the Queensland Solar Cities trial has been installed on homes on Magnetic Island. I was there recently and I am very impressed by what they are doing and the extent to which residents have climbed on board this initiative. It was the first in a major rollout of solar systems that will transform Magnetic Island into a solar suburb. This is an iconic project. It shows how communities can harness solar energy and be more energy efficient in their daily lives.

Some \$15 million has been contributed to the initiative by the state government and Ergon Energy. Some \$15 million has been contributed through the federal government's Solar Cities initiative. The Townsville City Council has also made a contribution. Part of the state's contribution has already been put to good use and helped fund the Nelly Bay ferry terminal's solar PV system. The solar suburb will save energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50,000 tonnes over the next seven years. That is equivalent to taking 1,700 cars off the road for the same period. We are all conscious of the importance of caring for our environment. Energy powered by the sun is a great way to go about it.

People who live and work on Magnetic Island will be helping to create a blueprint for future sustainable energy use. Magnetic Island residents and business owners have been invited by Ergon to host up to 500 solar PV panels on their roofs at no personal cost. More than 500 residents and businesses returned an energy use survey and have now registered for a free energy assessment and the opportunity to host solar PV systems on their roofs. Up to 1,700 households and business owners will also receive smart meters and in-house displays which will give information about the amount of electricity used and the cost.

Magnetic Islanders' enthusiasm for the project could not be better. There has been an enormous amount of positive feedback on every aspect of the project. Solar Cities is about the community working in partnership with government to help save energy and money. The community has climbed right on board and that is truly commendable. This is about the community working in partnership with government to help save energy and money. I cannot underline more strongly the importance of initiatives not only in relation to solar energy but energy conservation in the home.

**CHAIR:** I refer to pages 98 and 100 of last year's Capital Statements and the amount spent on vegetation management by Energex and Ergon Energy in the past financial year. What steps have been taken to address safety concerns raised by unions in relation to the power entities?

**Mr WILSON:** I thank the honourable member for the question. I can tell you we took these concerns very seriously and we have taken swift action to address them. First of all, I called in all of the parties for urgent talks and I asked the union to formally provide me with documentation in relation to all of their concerns. Those documents were immediately sent to the Electrical Safety Office which reported back that there were no systemic electrical safety problems. Nevertheless I sought detailed responses from Ergon and Energex because I wanted the full facts on network maintenance.

My department closely scrutinised all the documents, including the responses, and engaged an independent expert to examine the lot. It was found that there was a significant backlog in Ergon's vegetation management program and that there were delays in replacing copper conductors. I have told Ergon that that is not good enough—and it is not good enough. I have told Ergon to lift its game and to implement the 11 recommendations lock, stock and barrel. While it was found that the reliability of the network had improved and that it was much better than the minimum standards, there were other areas, such as replacing old cross-arms and conflicting information on the condition of substations, where again Ergon should have done better.

From now on Ergon and Energex will be required—this is part of the recommendations from the independent expert—to provide shareholding ministers with far more detailed and comprehensive reporting of technical aspects of their performance. The reporting of safety and maintenance concerns will also be strengthened. I want workers in the field with any safety and maintenance concerns to be able to raise them directly with the boards of Ergon and Energex. If they have important information, field workers especially, I want them to have a direct line to the top. That is acting now; that is acting also for the future. That will play a very important role in building tomorrow's Queensland today when it comes to Ergon and Energex.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mrs ATTWOOD:** I refer to page 2-207 of the Service Delivery Statements. Can the minister please inform the committee of any new government initiatives in the pipeline on ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from electricity generation?

**Mr WILSON:** Dangerous greenhouse gas emissions—carbon pollution—is the challenge of this century really. Only eight years into the century, it is the challenge. I thank the honourable member for the question. The Bligh government is getting on with the job of tackling climate change. We are working on clever solutions to help reduce dangerous greenhouse gas emissions. Ergon Energy is about to embark on an Australian first by hooking up a hydrogen fuel cell in a Cairns display home to generate electricity. Hydrogen fuel cells are an exciting generation concept. They combine compressed hydrogen and oxygen from the air to produce electricity, water and heat with no dangerous greenhouse gas emissions.

This groundbreaking million-dollar trial has the potential to be used in communities on the fringes of the electricity network. Ergon will install a residential sized hydrogen fuel cell into a display home in Cairns. It will run for about two hours a day to demonstrate the supply of electricity direct to the customer's premises. On-site generation means that instead of drawing from the main electricity grid a

household will be able to generate its own power and reduce the load on the network. Harking back to my point earlier, it reduces the transmission losses and distribution losses from the geographical gap that exists between source of generation and source of consumption.

It is an instant start. It does not have to warm up and it is not dependent on sun or wind to generate power. Fuel cells are designed so that power can be available on demand 24 hours a day. The use of hydrogen fuel cells to generate electricity into a large network is a first for Australia. Again, the Bligh government is leading the field. This is yet another illustration of where Ergon is being very inventive. In Windorah we have the \$4 million solar farm. There is the solar power plant at Cloncurry and then this project. These are ways in which Ergon can explore substituting the isolated networks—and there are about 35 of them—where power is generated from diesel, which is very dirty from a greenhouse point of view. If we are successful with these technologies, then we can displace those diesel based isolated stand-alone networks with something that is far more climate friendly. Of course it is not limited to that, but that is a key target of some of this important groundbreaking innovative work that Ergon is doing. When those projects succeed, they can be incorporated into the network generally as well.

**Mr FENLON:** Minister, I refer to page 2-204 of the Service Delivery Statements in relation to clean coal technology, and I ask: can you please inform the committee of details of any specific clean coal projects on which the government is now working?

**Mr WILSON:** I thank the honourable member for the question. This is another arena in which the Bligh government is tackling climate change head-on. There are many fronts on which we must tackle climate change. This is one of them. We are securing Queensland's future with energy conservation, renewable energy and also clean coal technology. The ZeroGen project near Rockhampton is a world-leading clean coal project that will create smarter, cleaner power for Queensland and for the national grid ultimately. By 2012 Queensland could be home to the world's first demonstration clean coal power plant that safely captures and stores carbon dioxide. The ZeroGen project aims to capture carbon dioxide and convert coal to hydrogen to generate power. The construction phase of the project will create up to 700 jobs and a further 100 jobs during its operation. The second stage of the project is expected to lead to the development of one of the world's first large-scale power plants by 2017. It is expected to capture up to 90 per cent of carbon dioxide emissions, and the ZeroGen project is in the feasibility stage now for the demonstration plant.

The Queensland government is investing more than \$100 million in the feasibility study. Some \$16 million has been set aside in the 2008-09 budget. If successful, ZeroGen will accelerate the commercial uptake of the technology in Australia and around the world. It will demonstrate that the technology will provide a secure source of baseload electricity but with a low CO<sub>2</sub> emissions profile. It will also preserve the viability of coal as an energy source and preserve the long-term future of Queensland's \$26 billion coal industry and its 130,000 jobs. It is really the start of the journey towards the hydrogen economy, leading to further reductions in fossil fuel CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. It will develop skills, specialist skills and expertise in technology that are in global demand. When you think about the fact that in China they are building a new coal-fired power station every week, we can do a big thing for not only Queensland and Australia but also the world in reducing greenhouse gas emissions through the success of the ZeroGen project. The Bligh government is at the forefront of exciting new technology and is ahead of the field in tackling climate change.

**Ms van LITSENBURG:** Minister, I refer to page 2-204 of the Service Delivery Statements in relation to clean coal and emerging low-emissions technologies. Can you please inform the committee of any special projects the government is undertaking to cut carbon emissions?

**Mr WILSON:** I thank the honourable member for the question. On another front, the Bligh government is securing Queensland's future and getting on with the job of tackling climate change. Queensland is leading the charge to reduce the impacts of coal-fired electricity generation on the environment. Our government owned corporation CS Energy is pioneering a \$200 million oxyfiring project at Biloela in central Queensland just around the corner from where the member for Callide lives. I am sure he knows it well. It is one of the most advanced projects of its kind and is expected to show that coal-fired power stations can be retrofitted with clean coal technology. The project is expected to achieve deep cuts in carbon emissions. CS Energy is partnered with leading research and industry experts from Australia and Japan to convert one unit at Callide's A power station to oxyfuel clean coal technology.

The joint venture partners expect to be letting contracts for plant, supply and services in the near future. Construction will start later this year and the demonstration plant is expected to start producing electricity with carbon capture and storage in 2010, and that is only two years away. This is the first time anywhere this technology has been retrofitted to an existing power station. It is a 30 megawatt station and is ideal for this project. Oxyfuel combustion involves burning coal in a mixture of oxygen and recycled flue gas rather than air, creating a concentrated stream of carbon dioxide that can be captured and stored underground in a process known as geosequestration, or carbon capture and storage. The

result is near-zero greenhouse gas emissions as well as major reductions in oxides of nitrogen and sulfur. This will create about 100 jobs during construction and up to 20 permanent jobs will be created during the five-year demonstration project.

The impact on the Queensland economy will be felt much more widely for three important reasons. Oxyfuel is a relatively low-risk option for near-zero emissions. It builds on existing technologies that generators are familiar with. It can be applied to existing plant as well as new power plants so there is real potential for greenhouse gas reduction. It will enhance the value of existing power generation infrastructure which is not a small challenge to make sure that the existing power generation system in Australia is still put to good use. It will play a vital role in securing a sustainable future for Queensland's coal and electricity supply industries and, importantly, for the regional communities that rely upon those energy sources. The Bligh government is putting money on the table to develop a cleaner, greener energy future for Queensland.

**Mrs ATTWOOD:** I refer to page 2-204 of the Service Delivery Statements. The Wide Bay and Fraser Coast region is growing at a rapid rate. Can the minister please advise the committee what the government is doing to meet the growing demand for power in that region?

**Mr WILSON:** I thank the honourable member for the question. The Fraser Coast is growing fast and the demand for power is expected to exceed 4.5 per cent a year well into the future, and that is a little over the state average. We are planning for and managing that growth in this region. I recently opened Ergon's new \$70 million switching station and Powerlink's \$40 million substation in this region. These twin projects include dual high-voltage powerlines between the two sites. It also enables this new infrastructure to reinforce the backbone of the system that supplies electricity to the Maryborough and Hervey Bay areas. It is a culmination of one of the biggest logistical exercises ever undertaken on the Fraser Coast and that region's 40,000 residents and businesses will be the big winners from this.

The \$110 million project involved two 155-tonne transformers that were transported by prime movers on a 300-kilometre journey from Brisbane to their new home. These transformers convert high-voltage electricity from the transmission network down to a lower voltage suitable for Ergon's network. The Aramara switching station was one of the largest projects undertaken by Ergon Energy. Peak demand for electricity will continue to grow in the Fraser Coast over the next five years, and this project will help meet that growth. We are investing in more than just our electricity network, as you will appreciate; we are investing in the people who live and work on the Fraser Coast by giving them a more secure and reliable power supply now and well into the future.

We are actually building the economies of regional Queensland, and the energy network of Ergon, Powerlink and to some extent the northern and western frontiers of Energex's area is vital to facilitating the continued development of regional Queensland which is important not only for the people who live there presently but for the general Queensland economy. It also encourages the population shift for those coming into Queensland in that it improves the opportunities for people moving to regional Queensland to live, because the regional economies are growing supported by a growing and expanding electricity transmission and distribution network.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I call the member for Callide.

**Mr SEENEY:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, I refer you to the Mudgeeraba to Tugun powerline, which I am sure you are very familiar with and very familiar with the public opposition that has been expressed to both sides of politics regarding the proposed construction of the Mudgeeraba to Tugun powerline. Minister, do you have a current projected cost for the project? Have you considered the cost of putting the powerlines underground in the face of the public opposition that has been expressed?

**Mr WILSON:** I thank the honourable member for the question. Major powerline construction such as this from time to time does indeed raise a range of different views within the community, not just in this area but in other parts of Queensland. There is an established process—whether it be Energex or Powerlink or whoever the proponent is—for examining all of the community based concerns around such a project.

To cut to the chase, it is assumed—and unfortunately wrongly—that undergrounding powerlines is mostly an economic solution and, secondly, also alleviates any concerns about public safety associated with any major transmission or distribution line. Unfortunately, most of the time, save for particular circumstances—they are exceptional circumstances mostly—the economics of undergrounding major powerlines, particularly when you are looking at—and if my memory serves me correctly, we are looking at about 14 kilometres here, it being five to seven times more expensive to underground powerlines in this particular instance than to put them down the common corridor. So the approach being taken is very much along the established lines of putting the proposal forward, then engaging with the community to examine the various issues that people have about it and then looking at how and what opportunities there are to reposition the line.

As I understand it, Energex has commenced a community consultation phase. They have set up a community reference group, they are engaging with all the stakeholders in the vicinity and they are taking on board the issues that are being raised. What has to be remembered here is, as I recall, most

of the proposed alignment for this new line is in an existing corridor not only for electricity distribution but also for other utilities. It is a corridor that Main Roads has established as well. So it is going to be a common-user corridor to minimise the impact of multiple developments on the nearby communities. Energex takes seriously community concerns and they will take those concerns on board.

**Mr SEENEY:** As a follow-up question on that point, I take it from your answer that you and the GOCs involved do not look at undergrounding as an option when these projects are planned and the government does not have any set policy regarding moving towards putting powerlines underground?

**Mr WILSON:** Energex approaches a project, and technically needs to approach a project, from the point of view of what are all the options technically and then what are all the options from an economic point of view. They have to weigh up all of those options. So it is my understanding that it would not be the case that Energex rules something in or rules something out. They have to approach each project with an open mind to examine what are both the technical options available to them and what are the economic options available to them. They are doing it in this case and they do it in other cases. They take on board all of the issues that are raised by the local community and they seek to accommodate as many of those issues or concerns as they can within, one, the technical parameters and constraints of what is technically feasible and, two, within what is economically viable.

I do not think you would be arguing that they should proceed in any different fashion than to identify the best option from a technical and economic point of view. As well, you add the third key element of the range of community issues—and legitimate issues and concerns—that need to be addressed. So it is not purely a technical exercise; it is an exercise that has to accommodate as far as reasonably possible the legitimate and reasonable concerns or issues that either householders or businesses may have associated with a new development.

We expect them to live up to a very transparent and open process. That is the way to build confidence in the community. Even at the end of the day some people may be pleased with an outcome but some people may not be. So it is important that the process be transparent and open and that people can see that the methodology is legitimate and defensible, even though from person to person there may be different views about what is the final decision made by the GOC on a particular project.

**Mr SEENEY:** I refer you to Kevin Rudd's carbon policy and the effect that it may have on the Queensland power industry and the government owned generators in particular. Have you or the government owned generators conducted any sort of analysis about the effect that the proposal may have on the future capital value of the assets that the state owns and the ability of those assets to continue to pay dividends to the state government to the same extent as they have done in the past?

**Mr WILSON:** Every major corporation in the Australian economy has been watching this space, so to speak, for probably the last six months—certainly at least since the federal election. Some may have been doing so well before then. Before the election some were anticipating—but certainly after the election it has been well known across the economy—that there would be introduced by the federal government an emissions trading scheme of some nature as the principal tool—not the only tool but the principal tool—for tackling climate change.

The Queensland government is committed to the challenge of tackling climate change. The Queensland government, like private sector corporations, has turned its mind, as you would expect, to the various papers that have been published in the recent past and what the implications are for Queensland, for the Queensland economy and for Queenslanders. A whole-of-government contribution will be formulated and will contribute to the federal government's green paper. That will canvass a whole raft of things, but it will include three important issues. One is the financial impact of any emissions trading scheme, and particularly any prospective design for one that will come in in Australia and the impact upon the electricity generating industry. Our view on that issue will be informed by our understanding of the circumstances in the other states as well. We will have views contributed to that government view from the energy GOCs.

We will make our contribution to the federal government's green paper on that important issue of what impact there will be on the emissions trading scheme on the existing electricity industry in Australia—not just in Queensland. We will be making our contribution—our submission—around those three key issues that I spoke of this morning. In relation to your particular question, that is one of the three issues, that is, the impact on existing generators—whether they be public or private, I might say—and whatever financial assistance is available out of the auction revenues from the permits is going to be made available for assisting the transition of those generators into a carbon-reduced environment. For example, the OxyFuel Project that CS Energy is developing is a good window into the future about how we can move through the transition to continue the viability of power stations in a new regime.

**Mr FENLON:** I refer to page 2-204 of the Service Delivery Statements. Since coal will continue to play a role in the global electricity generation mix, and in light of Queensland's vast reserves of coal, can you provide details of the efficiency of coal-fired power stations in Queensland?

**Mr WILSON:** I thank the honourable member for the question. Could I have the liberty of the chair to respond to two issues that have been raised in questions before and then I will go on to this question. Earlier in the morning I gave an answer to a government question. In that answer I referred to the

number of successful tenderers for geothermal exploration permits. I want to clarify, so there is no confusion with numbers here—because I provided an answer on notice to the opposition as well—there are now 10 companies with successful tenders over 27 areas. One of those has been granted and another 26 are at various stages of the Commonwealth's native title process, or are yet to begin that process with the Commonwealth. Geothermal is a clean, green energy source and it has a bright future, we believe, in Queensland. Because of various numbers floating around, I wanted to be clear on that.

The second one is in relation to Mr Seene's question about Energex advertising. I am advised that Energex spends over \$2 million a year on safety advertising in a variety of media. Specialist publications, such as industry and union web sites and magazines, are a useful way to publicise messages such as Look up and live—and regrettably there are deaths when that does not happen—watch for fallen powerlines and prepare for summer storms. The target audience for these is Energex staff as well as their customers. I just wanted to complete the answer to those.

In relation to the question of the existing electricity generation mix and the level of efficiency of Queensland's power stations, there is, as I have said, a multipronged attack on climate change. I want to focus on the coal-fired power stations that we have in Queensland. I want to underline that what I am about to say is in no way meaning that we take the foot off the pedal with renewable energy, with gas as a transition fuel and with energy efficiency. There is no way we are taking the foot off the pedal.

As a statement of historical fact, of the 10 lowest greenhouse gas emitters in the country, Queensland has seven of those power stations. We are seen as a leader in adopting highly efficient coal-fired power generation systems. All four of the country's supercritical pulverised fuel combustion power plants—meaning that is the most advanced conventional power station technology—are in Queensland: Millmerran, Kogan Creek, Tarong North and Callide C. Kogan Creek is our newest. It sets a benchmark for environmental performance, with 22 per cent lower greenhouse gas emissions, and uses one-tenth of the water used by conventional power stations.

**Mrs ATTWOOD:** I refer to pages 101 and 105 of the Capital Statement for 2008-09 and the state government's massive investment in electricity infrastructure. Could the minister inform the committee on what criteria Energex and Ergon base their decisions to build powerlines underground?

**Mr WILSON:** I thank the honourable member for the question. If I could have the liberty just to complete a small amount of additional information in answer to that previous question. CS Energy is also leading the field, as I said earlier, with clean coal technology. It is developing the world's first oxyfuel coal project at Callide A at Biloela. It is expected to demonstrate a capacity for existing systems to power generation plants to reduce carbon emissions. There is the money that is being put into the ZeroGen project—up to \$300 million into an IGCC fund, which is not exclusively for ZeroGen—backed by the \$600 million from the Queensland coal industry. That is all important work but it complements what is being done around renewables, gas as a transition fuel and energy efficiency. I thank the member for Mount Ommaney for the liberty of adding that further detail.

Queensland is Australia's fastest growing and most decentralised energy-intensive state. Our electricity demand continues to increase. We are planning for and managing all of this growth. Total network capital expenditure by Energex and Ergon Energy for 2008-09 is projected to be more than \$1.5 billion. That helps secure and establish a reliable transmission network throughout the state.

To answer your question in particular, the undergrounding of powerlines has significant drawbacks. The repair time for underground cable faults is considerably longer than for overhead cables. The cost of underground powerlines is also considerably more than that of overhead powerlines. In 2004 it was estimated that it would cost \$56 billion to underground all of Queensland's existing overhead powerlines including high voltage transmission lines. This estimate is likely to be far higher now and these costs would have to be passed on to consumers.

Having said that, electricity supplies in most new residential estates are installed underground. Developers recoup the additional cost through land prices. But there are some cases where the undergrounding of powerlines is the safest choice. Ergon Energy invests around \$10 million each year installing underground powerlines in cyclone-prone areas and that is so that vital services such as hospitals, water supply, sewerage plants and emergency services have a secure and reliable electricity supply. We will continue to invest record amounts into our electricity infrastructure. We have to do that without placing unnecessary burdens on everyday Queenslanders through the transferred costs to the electricity prices.

**Ms van LITSENBURG:** I refer to page 2-204 of the Service Delivery Statements. With people heading to Redcliffe in their droves, no doubt attracted by our relaxed bayside lifestyle, can you please advise the committee how many new electricity connections there have been not just in Redcliffe but in the south-east corner in the past year and how Energex is planning for and managing all this growth?

**Mr WILSON:** There is a new connection in an Energex area every eight minutes. The Bligh government is planning for and managing growth in south-east Queensland. Energex is signing up a record number of new electricity connections for customers in south-east Queensland—more than 40,000 in the past year. There are around 163 new connections each working day. As I say, that is one new connection every eight minutes. It is a staggering figure.

Last financial year Energex spent more than \$1 billion on its electricity network and employed a record number of new recruits to help carry out the work. In Redcliffe in the past four years Energex has invested more than \$130 million on electricity supplies in the new Moreton Bay Regional Council area, part of Energex's record \$4 billion-plus five-year capital works program. Energex spends on average \$3 million-plus a day on upgrades to its electricity network and to maintain and operate the network.

Energex is taking steps to attract and retain skilled staff and are actively recruiting the best available specialists. They are investing in the future of Queensland by hiring and training record numbers of apprentices and field staff. Close to 300 apprentices—that is more than 50 of their brightest and best—will graduate this year. I have been delighted to speak at each of the inductions for the apprentices for both Ergon and Energex because I think it is a fantastic thing that the GOCs are doing. These new recruits will be the powerline workers, the electricians and the communications technicians of the future. They are being responsible and the government is being responsible in planning for the future. We are rolling up our sleeves and getting on with the job.

**CHAIR:** The time allocated for the consideration of the estimates of expenditure in the portfolio of the Minister for Mines and Energy has expired. On behalf of the committee, Minister, I thank you and your officers for your attendance today. The transcript of the hearing will be available on the Hansard page of the parliament's web site in approximately two hours. The committee will now break for lunch. The hearing will resume at 12.45 pm with the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister Assisting the Premier in Western Queensland.

**Mr WILSON:** Before the committee departs, might I say thank you to the committee for the examination of the estimates for my department this year? I want to place on record my limitless thanks. There are so many people who should be thanked in coming to this process, as the member for Callide acknowledged at the beginning of these proceedings. I want to thank my director-general and all of the staff of the Department of Mines and Energy. I want to also thank the CEOs of all of the energy GOCs and all of their staff. I also particularly want to thank my personal staff. They have all worked enormously hard over the last one to two months. It is an important process and part of the budget process. We do appreciate the examination that the committee has undertaken this morning. All of these people have worked extremely hard in being able to brief me to present the information to the committee that the committee has sought in today's examination. I thank you very much.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

**Proceedings suspended from 11.50 am to 12.45 pm**

**ESTIMATES COMMITTEE E—ATTORNEY-GENERAL AND JUSTICE****In Attendance**

Hon. KG Shine, Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister Assisting the Premier in Western Queensland

Ms D O'Donoghue, Policy Adviser

**Department of Justice and Attorney-General**

Ms J Grantham, Director-General

Mr I Warren, Financial Services

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**CHAIR:** The hearings of Estimates Committee E are now resumed. The next item for consideration is the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister Assisting the Premier in Western Queensland. I remind members of the committee and the Attorney 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 time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will sound two minutes after an extension of time has been given.

The standing orders require that at least half the time available for questions and answers is to be allocated to non-government members. Any time expended when the committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between government and non-government members. I ask departmental officers to identify themselves when they first come forward to answer a question if the Attorney refers a question to them so that the *Hansard* can record their name. I also ask that all mobile phones and pagers be switched off or to silent mode.

I now declare that the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister Assisting the Premier in Western Queensland to be open for examination. The time allocated is two hours and 30 minutes. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure to be agreed to.

Attorney, do you wish to make an opening statement?

**Mr SHINE:** Yes. The Bligh government's commitment to providing a modern and efficient justice system and appropriate protection for Queensland consumers is reflected in the Department of Justice and Attorney-General's record budget for 2008-09. The \$518 million budget will help provide an accessible justice system with a strong focus on the special needs of children, victims of crime and other vulnerable witnesses. We also have a record \$319 million capital works program this year which is part of a record \$17 billion infrastructure program statewide.

Undoubtedly, the feature of our capital works program this year is the \$236 million allocated for the start of work on the new \$600 million Supreme and District Court building in the Brisbane CBD. This building is due for completion in 2011 and will be a state-of-the-art complex replacing existing facilities which are now almost 40 years old. Our record capital works budget also includes \$52 million to finish construction of the new \$92 million Ipswich Court House. I am pleased to say that I visited the construction site of the Ipswich Court House earlier this month and work is progressing well and is expected to be completed in mid-2009. The Bligh government is spending around \$2 million every hour of every day building and rebuilding infrastructure of Queensland, and the Department of Justice and Attorney-General's record capital works program is testament to that effort.

As Attorney-General and as a lawyer, I am acutely aware of the need for adequate prosecution services in Queensland. There has been plenty of publicity on this issue in recent times and that is why earlier this year I asked the former Director of Public Prosecutions, now Judge Clare, to provide me with a report on issues surrounding the attraction and retention of staff within the Office of the DPP. The government provided an initial allocation of \$3.5 million over four years in the budget for the provision of more prosecutors and legal officers within the ODPP. I was pleased to join the Premier at yesterday's announcement of an initial allocation of \$17.5 million over four years for the ODPP, bringing the total increase in funding to \$21 million up to 2011-12. This funding will equate to 31 extra staff including 11 prosecutors, 10 legal officers, five paralegals and five clerks. This government has responded to the increased workload of the DPP and I am confident this funding will help in the retention and attraction of quality prosecutors.

Another issue involving the DPP this year has been the prosecution of nine offenders who pleaded guilty to the rape of a girl at Aurukun. I asked for Peter Davis SC to review sentences handed down for sex offenders in the cape following that case. Mr Davis found that there was no systemic



problem with sentences in the cape but did find there had been some problems with the prosecution's handling of the Aurukun matter. I can advise the committee that, after Mr Davis's report was handed to my office, the Office of the DPP moved to introduce a dedicated prosecution unit to work specifically on Cape York matters. This unit includes one prosecutor, one legal officer and one law clerk. In addition to this dedicated prosecution team, the Cairns Office of the DPP has elected to have sentences for all serious matters, including sex offences, heard in the Cairns District Court rather than in the cape community. These measures will assist to greatly reduce the possibility of the Aurukun case being repeated.

The Bligh government has also moved to increase the coronial services of Queensland through a \$7.1 million commitment over the next four years. This will provide an additional coroner in Brisbane and more support staff for the Brisbane and Cairns coroners.

This year's budget will also allow Queensland to remain a leader in product safety in Australia. Our record budget will allow the Office of Fair Trading's inspectors to continue their inspections of all consumer items, including toys, to ensure the public is protected from dangerous or banned items. Only last week the OFT was responsible for the voluntary withdrawal of a toy for sale as part of a magazine promotion because it presented a projectile danger to small children.

As members would be aware, my role as Attorney-General requires me to work with a large number of independent agencies. I am pleased to report that all these agencies have returned strong reports. For example, the Ombudsman has reported that it finalised all but one case last year within a 12-month period. Some members of the opposition would like to paint a picture of a justice system which is in crisis. I do welcome comments by the member for Burnett on ABC radio yesterday when he said—

I think that the Queensland justice system has shown itself to, on the whole, in the main, to be very good.

**CHAIR:** The first period of questioning is allocated to non-government members.

**Mr McARDLE:** Attorney, good afternoon to your departmental officers and also to your staff. Thank you for your time here this afternoon. I take you to SDS page 1-131, my questions on notice Nos 1 and 3 and the Premier's comment with yourself yesterday about the \$8 million increase in the funding to the ODPP. You made comment today on radio that \$2 million of those funds are to be put aside for the Patel matter, the Nuttall matter and the Watson case. Can you advise the committee what funding from that \$8 million will be directed towards those matters?

**Mr SHINE:** I thank the honourable gentleman for the question. My recollection of what we announced yesterday was that there was a total funding in relation to the DPP of \$21 million all up. That included the amount in the budget of about \$3.4 million. It also included yesterday an amount of \$3.4 million for major prosecutions which included Patel, the Watson matter and I think the Nuttall matter as well. If you heard me say this morning that it was \$2 million, that was wrong. I have no recollection of saying that. The figure certainly is \$3.4 million for those major prosecutions. The balance then—some \$4 million-odd—will be for additional prosecutors. The way it worked out, from memory, is that in the budget it meant an extra four prosecutors and a couple of legal officers were to be provided. Yesterday's announcement means that there will be on top of that another seven prosecutors, bringing it to a total of 11, plus eight legal officers in addition to those mentioned before, plus five paralegals and five clerks.

I think you can see and would agree with me that the increases announced yesterday are truly significant. As to where the money will be spent, that \$3.4 million that I spoke of is a matter for the Director of Public Prosecutions. In my early discussions with him, he senses from the information that he has perused and his own investigations in the short time since he has become the Director of Public Prosecutions that the real challenge is in the regions as opposed to the metropolitan centre of Brisbane. If that is the case then one would anticipate that there would be a higher priority for spending a large section of those funds in the retention of staff and the acquisition of staff in the regions.

**Mr McARDLE:** Let us just stay, if we can, with the high-profile cases. I believe that you made the comment that the Patel matter will be allocated about \$2 million and the balance—I am assuming you now mean \$1.4 million—will go to the Nuttall case and the Watson case. With the \$2 million, is that allocated for a particular purpose? For example, is it up to the committal stage, is it post committal stage or what definitive time line do you have in relation to those funds? What are the plans in relation to funding the additional costs legally, for example the trial and possibly numerous applications to the court for various orders?

**Mr SHINE:** Primarily what we are concerned about here today is the expenditure in my department for the next 12 months. As you would know, it is predicted by many people that that case will proceed over a long period and in all probability beyond the current financial year. I do not know where you got the \$2 million. If I said that on air this morning I do not recall it and it is wrong, anyway.

It is the case that, out of that \$3.4 million, an amount of \$1.3 million has been put aside for the Patel prosecution. That is an amount that is there. It is an amount to be drawn on as needed. It is not divided up as so much for the committal or so much for this three-month period, this four-month period or whatever. It is just an estimate that in the current financial year would be an appropriate amount to have there to draw upon if needed.

As you would know from your own experience practising law, it is very difficult to predict, from a prosecution point of view, how long cases will take. To a large extent under our system of justice the timing of the hearing of committals, the duration of the committals and, therefore, the timing and duration, to some extent, of the trial itself is dependent on what course the defendant might elect to take. There may not be any prolonged committal hearing at all. The defendant might elect not to go down that path. That is a distinct possibility, as you know, in many criminal cases. If that were the case we would have to bring forward substantially the estimate of time when the trial is to be heard. We do not know. Doing the best we can, the DPP has recommended that we put aside this total fund of \$3.4 million, covering those major type cases that we have referred to, and that is what has been done. I can assure you, as I have assured the parliament before, that whatever is required in terms of the resourcing of the Patel prosecution will be provided.

**CHAIR:** I take this opportunity to remind members that we are under the same sub judge restrictions that apply to the House. I know that you have been quite careful, member for Caloundra, but we need to be mindful of the restrictions before this committee and not proceed into those matters that might be in contention in that trial, hearing or proceedings. I call the member for Caloundra.

**Mr McARDLE:** Thank you for your comments, Mr Chairman. Attorney, again staying with the Patel matter, as you would know and as most people in the room would know, if this goes to committal it will be a very long committal. There are something like 30,000 pages, I understand, with the DPP. To prepare the matter for committal will be a Herculean task. To get it to committal and through committal will also be a very big task. Do you envisage a new chamber being established within the DPP specifically to deal with this matter? As I understand it, chambers generally have an average of 22 personnel, including a consultant crown prosecutor leading the matter. Is it envisaged that that will occur in these circumstances?

**Mr SHINE:** How the prosecution is handled from an organisational point of view within the DPP is a matter entirely for the Director of Public Prosecutions to determine. I certainly have not had any discussion with him as to how he proposes to tackle it in that type of detail, nor would I expect that he would necessarily want to inform me about that at this stage of the game. As I said before, these things are somewhat unpredictable as to the duration and timing of the committal, for the reasons I gave you before. I can tell you that the ODPP has dedicated a team of experienced crown prosecutors to work on the Patel matter. The ODPP is being funded in the way that I indicated earlier, through the special fund announced by the Premier yesterday of \$3.4 million.

The extradition process itself, which has now been completed, was a very complex one. I take this opportunity to congratulate and thank the officers of the ODPP who have worked very hard and long under considerable stress, in terms of the public interest in this matter, for a long period. I need to also extend appreciation to the federal authorities, the Attorney-General's department and the justice department, and to officers of the Queensland Police Service. It has been the chief responsibility of the government, of course, to bring this matter to a conclusion and we are at the start of the conclusion process by bringing Mr Patel back to face trial. Yesterday was a very important day in the history of justice in this state, in the sense that the extradition came to a very successful conclusion. Congratulations to those officers are certainly well deserved.

**Mr McARDLE:** Attorney, you referred there to a team of prosecutors—you read from a document there—being established to look at the Patel matter. Crown prosecutors are also accompanied by a practice manager, legal officers, victim liaison officers, legal support services and legal support officers in any given chamber. That is a normal, standard arrangement. Given that you referred to that document, are you able to advise how many crown prosecutors are so engaged and the support staff that accompany them in regard to the Patel matter?

**Mr SHINE:** I can tell you that there has been a dedicated team working on the extradition process for a considerable period. That process has now successfully come to an end. It will be for the current or the new Director of Public Prosecutions, aided by the funding that I announced yesterday, to ensure that there is a team able to effectively carry out the prosecution. I am informed that the team that has been established to undertake this prosecution consists of two consultant crown prosecutors of SES2 standard, one SO1 officer, one PO6 officer, one PO4 officer, one AO3 officer, one AO4 victim liaison officer and one AO2 clerk. As well, of course, the Director of Public Prosecutions will be take a leading role in the prosecution of Patel.

**Mr McARDLE:** Would I be right, Mr Attorney, in saying that there will be a separate chamber for this matter, dedicated to it?

**Mr SHINE:** As I said before, the day-to-day running of this prosecution, like all other prosecutions, is entirely a matter for the Director of Public Prosecutions. How he physically sets up the office will be a matter for him. I will be happy to find that out for you and give you that information later today if you wish.

**Mr McARDLE:** Thank you, Attorney. The funds were also provided for the high-profile matters of Nuttall and Watson. In line with the Patel arrangement of a team being gathered, have separate teams been gathered in relation to those matters and, if they have, are you able to advise the composition thereof?

**Mr SHINE:** I can tell the honourable gentleman that it is proposed to operate the prosecutions of Watson and Nuttall on a similar team basis as the Patel—

**Mr McARDLE:** Separate teams, Attorney?

**Mr SHINE:** As I understand it, they will be. They will be on a team basis and I presume a separate team, although probably not to the same extent as the Patel one which, as you know, is a very complex case involving multiple charges. Again, if there is some inaccuracy in what I am relating to you, in terms of what I have said about the method of these prosecutions, I will be happy to give you more information later in the day.

**Mr McARDLE:** Attorney, again staying with the issue of Patel, I refer to the cost involved in bringing him back to Australia and more particularly the ongoing costs. I notice that this morning on one of the radio shows you made a comment about the Queensland government—that is, the taxpayers—meeting his living expenses on an ongoing basis. I understand quite clearly this exists because we are the country bringing him back; we are the country that has asked for him to come back. These expenses also include him not being eligible for health care or Medicare; is that right?

**Mr SHINE:** What I said to the media this morning was that the Queensland government would comply with the law of the land. In this instance the law of the land is governed by the Migration Act 1958, which basically provides for the agency responsible for bringing a person in this situation back to Australia to be responsible for the 'cost of keeping'—those are the words in the act—the noncitizen in Australia. Of course the Queensland government, via that agency, which in this case is the Queensland Police Service, will be the relevant agency responsible for that. The Queensland Police Service is not my portfolio, as you appreciate, but I would presume that that service will no doubt negotiate and have discussions with Mr Patel or his lawyers in terms of the cost of keeping him in Australia. There is no choice about that. That would have applied whether or not he had left the country because he is a non-Australian.

My advice is that if Mr Patel had tried to leave the country and had been detained before leaving—and I think you made comments on radio about this this morning yourself—under the Migration Act, section 148, the agency wanting to secure his detention would have to satisfy the federal immigration minister that they had made satisfactory arrangements to keep the person while they were in the country. That is my understanding. My advice is that that is exactly the same obligation as we now have, so nothing would have been different. The 'cost of keeping' him, being the words that are referred to in the Migration Act, would have been the same mainly because of his status as a non-Australian.

**Mr McARDLE:** Again, Attorney, on that point, that would mean that Queensland citizens would be paying for his cigarettes, his alcohol, his dietary needs, Medicare costs and other ancillary costs.

**CHAIR:** Member for Caloundra, I am trying to understand how this relates to the Attorney-General's portfolio. The previous answer was that the obligation to pay for those expenses is with the Queensland Police Service.

**Mr McARDLE:** The only comment I make, Chair, is that I am following on from the Attorney's openness this morning on radio to discuss this very important issue of what Queenslanders will need to pay. Given that he was part of the lead agency, I am wondering whether the Attorney will elaborate further just for the sake of the committee and Queenslanders if they are going to be liable to pay for cigarettes, alcohol and those sorts of matters.

**CHAIR:** I think the obligation on the Attorney is to answer questions about the extradition process but not in relation to the particular funding to be met by the Queensland Police Service. I hand it over to the Attorney with those comments.

**Mr SHINE:** Thank you. I will constrain my remarks accordingly. As the honourable member would be aware, matters dealing with Medicare and health care are primarily Commonwealth related and are certainly not within my area of knowledge, expertise, let alone responsibility. The Migration Act, an act of the Menzies government, is the law in Australia. I am sure you, as Leader of the Liberal Party in Queensland, are not suggesting that we should not comply with the law as introduced by Mr Menzies.

**Ms van LITSENBURG:** Attorney-General, pages 1-131 and 1-133 of the Service Delivery Statements refer to the work of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. How is the office assisting in the fight against crime by confiscating money from criminals?

**Mr SHINE:** I thank the honourable member for the question. Nobody should be allowed to live off the profits of serious criminal activities, and the Queensland government is determined to stop people involved in illegal activities from doing so. The Criminal Proceeds Confiscation Act, introduced by the Labor government in 2003, gives the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Crime and Misconduct Commission the authority to seize the profits of crime. The office's confiscation unit works to

recover the proceeds gained from illegal activities and to discourage major crime by reducing the financial incentive to commit such crimes. The community as a whole benefits from the operation of the act as it is helping to recover millions of dollars each year which would otherwise remain in the hands of criminals. Recovered money is used by the government to supplement funding for such purposes as law enforcement, crime prevention and addressing the impact of crime on victims.

The act provides two schemes by which the government can recover the proceeds of crime: firstly, a civil confiscation scheme and, secondly, a conviction based scheme. The Crime and Misconduct Commission administers the civil confiscation scheme, which allows property to be restrained if there is reasonable suspicion of serious crime related activity. Since the introduction of the act in 2003, assets totalling \$66.95 million have been restrained under the civil confiscation scheme. In 2007-08, \$4.67 million was forfeited to the state under this scheme, with a total of \$13.33 million being forfeited since the act's introduction. Under the conviction based scheme, a total of \$5.43 million has been forfeited to the state since 2003, of which \$1.27 million was recovered in 2007-08.

Increased funding from the Bligh government has enabled the confiscation unit to employ extra staff and has seen a substantial increase in the confiscation of illegally obtained moneys. Confiscations under the civil scheme have risen from \$1.9 million in 2005-06 to \$4.67 million in 2007-08, an increase of almost \$2.8 million in two years. The success of the scheme has prompted the government to provide the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions with an additional \$540,000 in 2008-09 as part of a total of \$2.2 million over four years. This investment will enable the confiscation unit to be even more effective in making serious and organised crime less profitable and in helping to reduce crime levels in the longer term. The Criminal Proceeds Confiscation Act provides a powerful weapon against organised crime in Queensland, with the incentive to become involved in crime removed when people see their profits disappearing.

**Mrs ATTWOOD:** Good afternoon, Minister. I refer you to pages 1-131 and 1-132 of the Service Delivery Statement. What proactive steps are Queensland's courts taking to ensure a responsive justice system which also addresses the causes of crime?

**Mr SHINE:** I thank you for the question and good afternoon to you. While one aspect of our criminal justice system is about appropriately punishing offenders who have committed a crime and providing a deterrent to others, the system also has an important role to play in addressing the causes of crime. The courts innovation programs unit was established in May 2006 to coordinate a number of proactive court diversion, treatment and sentencing initiatives in Queensland. For many offences, traditional sentencing options often do not address the underlying motivations for offending. This is particularly relevant when a person's dependence on drugs is the motivation behind a crime. Imprisonment does not provide the solution to their drug dependency. Often these offenders will repeatedly cycle through the court and prison systems.

One key initiative of the courts innovation programs is the Drug Court, which targets offenders who appear before court for offences relating to illicit drug addiction. Jail time or financial penalties are not always appropriate when suitable treatment options are available. It is far more valuable to help rehabilitate these offenders and to help them break the crime cycle thereby reducing the cost of crime to the community. Since the Drug Court's introduction, 285 people have successfully graduated after meeting goals that include sustained abstinence from illicit drugs, reintegration with family and meeting employment and training goals. The Bligh government has allocated \$1.6 million this financial year to the Drug Court, which is a sentencing option in the participating Magistrates Court at Beenleigh, Ipswich, Southport, Townsville and Cairns.

In relation to Indigenous justice initiatives, the Bligh government is responsive to the needs of Indigenous Queenslanders who are still overrepresented in the criminal justice system. The Murri Court provides effective, practical access to justice for Indigenous offenders, and sentences those who plead guilty to criminal offences in the Magistrates Court. It provides a forum where elders, respected persons, community justice groups and the offender's family can be involved in the sentencing process. Magistrates, service providers and Indigenous communities have worked together to establish Murri courts in the Brisbane, Ipswich, Caboolture, Cairns, Cleveland, Coen, Caloundra, Cherbourg, Rockhampton, Mount Isa, St George and Townsville magistrates and children's courts. We are supporting this valuable Indigenous justice initiative with the funding of \$1.7 million this financial year as part of \$5.2 million over four years. The Murri Court is helping build positive relationships between the courts and Indigenous communities. It is providing responsive and culturally appropriate justice outcomes that focus on the rehabilitation of Indigenous offenders into the community.

**Mr FENLON:** I refer the Attorney-General to page 1-132 of the Service Delivery Statements. How are community justice groups working to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities deal more effectively with justice and social issues?

**Mr SHINE:** Thank you for the question. The state government is committed to addressing the issues Indigenous Queenslanders face in accessing justice and has introduced a range of initiatives to assist Indigenous communities. Community justice groups, which were set up in 1993 in response to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, play a vital role in helping address the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system.

The community justice group program helps Indigenous communities build their capacity to resolve justice related issues at a local level. It forges strong links between the government and the communities based on mutual ownership of the causes and the solutions. Currently, 42 groups receive government funding to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims and offenders at all stages of the legal process. This includes encouraging diversionary and early intervention strategies that help address the causes of offending behaviour. The government has allocated \$3.6 million in grant funding this financial year to help community justice groups to continue delivering critical support services to Indigenous victims and offenders in their communities. These grants will also ensure that groups involved in alcohol or welfare reform can meet demand for their services.

A statewide reference group was established this year and met for the first time in May. This group ensures that community justice groups are able to discuss regional issues, share strategies and have input into government policy. The government has also allocated \$175,000 in 2008-09 and subsequent years to maintain and build the capacity of the reference group and associated subcommittees. The reference group comprises two justice group members from eight regions across Queensland and key stakeholders including the judiciary, Legal Aid Queensland, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service, the Queensland Police Service, the Department of Justice and Attorney-General, Queensland Corrective Services and the Department of Communities.

Last year my department continued its program of community justice group training to ensure staff and volunteers working in these groups can provide effective support. Regional training forums have been held at Cairns, Thursday Island, Toowoomba, Townsville and Weipa and were attended by group members from surrounding areas. At the Thursday Island forum, attendees from 11 outer islands in the Torres Strait received training in court procedures and processes to enable them to assist when a Magistrates Court circuits to their communities. The training has helped group coordinators and members improve their knowledge and skills in such areas as maintaining and protecting culture, financial management and court processes.

**Ms van LITSENBURG:** Attorney-General, I refer you to pages 1-131 and 1-149 of the Service Delivery Statements. How will the new Supreme and District Court complex in Brisbane enhance the administration of justice in Queensland?

**Mr SHINE:** Thank you very much for that question. The new Supreme and District Court complex in Brisbane will complete one of the premier legal precincts in Australia and elevate justice facilities in Queensland to an even higher level. Our capital investment of \$600 million, including \$236 million in 2008-09, reflects the need to replace existing facilities that have now reached the end of their useful life. The new building will accommodate up to 47 courtrooms at full capacity sufficient to meet anticipated need for 30 to 50 years. It will also be unique in Australia with the co-location of supreme and district courts providing significant operating efficiencies through the use of shared facilities. In other states these courts are physically separate with functions and services often wastefully duplicated.

The courts are an essential pillar of our democracy, and respect for the administration of justice cannot be maintained if facilities for court users are not of a high standard. The new building will also enhance safety and security, with totally separate paths of travel for members of the public, jurors, vulnerable witnesses, judges and prisoners. Jurors will have a spacious assembly area of lounge, lunch rooms and large jury rooms with natural light. Children and other vulnerable witnesses giving evidence by video recording will have a separate wing, lounges, lift and entrance.

The building will feature the latest justice technology, including a state-of-the-art recording suite for taking evidence, digital audio for transcription services and free wireless broadband access to the internet for lawyers and other court users. It also has the structural capacity for further technical innovation to ensure the efficient hearing of cases into the future with the development of new forms of evidence and procedure.

The courthouse and public square will be a significant feature of the Brisbane CBD, providing a link between the Gallery of Modern Art, the new pedestrian river bridge and the Roma Street parklands. I am pleased to inform the committee that initial site works are expected to start this October. Construction is scheduled to begin next March, with completion by the end of 2011.

Another highlight of our record capital works budget is the \$52 million allocated to finish construction of the new \$92 million Ipswich courthouse. I am pleased to say, as I said earlier, that I visited the construction site earlier this month and work is progressing well. It is expected to be completed by mid-2009. We have also allocated \$3 million to complete construction of the Mareeba courthouse, which will finish in 2009, and \$2.5 million towards the \$8 million upgrade of the Toowoomba courthouse, which I am particularly pleased about.

**Mrs ATTWOOD:** I refer the Attorney-General to pages 1-131 and 1-135 of the Service Delivery Statements, and I ask: can you inform the House of progress to date in the judicial registrars pilot program?

**Mr SHINE:** Thank you very much for that question. The Queensland Magistrates Court plays an important role in the Queensland justice system, handling the highest volume of court cases out of all Queensland courts and dealing with approximately 96 per cent of all criminal cases. This highlights that our magistrates courts are at the coalface of the state's judicial system. Strong population growth, particularly in south-east Queensland, has led to increasing demands and workloads.

In addition to increasing the number of magistrates by five in the last three years, the government has responded with a two-year pilot program of judicial registrars at a cost of \$2.4 million. The pilot started in January this year, with the appointment of judicial registrars to four of our busiest courts—at Brisbane, Beenleigh, Southport and Townsville. In recent months they have also begun circuiting to surrounding court centres. Under this program, judicial registrars are authorised to deal with minor debt claims, Small Claims Tribunal matters, civil chamber applications, domestic violence adjournments, temporary orders and orders by consent. That has reduced the demands on local magistrates and allowed them to focus on weightier matters in a more timely way.

This pilot has been in place for only six months and the formal evaluation will not be concluded until early next year, but there has already been significant positive feedback from court stakeholders. As a result of the excellent work being done by the judicial registrars, local magistrates have been able to dispose of more serious matters sooner and with obvious benefits for all concerned. For example, dealing with criminal charges earlier ensures that victims of crime and vulnerable witnesses including children are able to give their evidence sooner. For defendants, it reduces the waiting time for hearing and finalising their cases. The program has also led to faster disposal of civil chamber applications.

The figures do speak for themselves. In the six months to 30 June, judicial registrars have dealt with 4,059 criminal matters and 3,281 civil matters. That is a total of 7,340 matters the local magistrates in those four courts have not had to deal with. I look forward to the formal review of this pilot program in another six months, but the early indications are extremely promising.

**Mr FENLON:** I refer the Attorney-General to pages 1-131 and 1-135 of the Service Delivery Statements, and I ask: how has the appointment of an additional magistrate in far-north Queensland enhanced the administration of justice in remote Indigenous communities?

**Mr SHINE:** Thank you for your question. Sometimes relatively modest initiatives yield significant dividends in a very short period of time, and the appointment of a judicial magistrate in far-north Queensland is a very good example of that. We have all heard the saying that justice must not just be done but also be seen to be done. Well, this initiative has enabled the Magistrates Court circuit to be extended to an additional eight communities in the Torres Strait since January—Saibai, Yorke, Mer, Moa, Boigu, Yam, Darnley and Warraber islands. It has also enabled additional sittings to be held at Wujal Wujal and Hope Vale on the Cape York circuit. Special hearing weeks have been added to the Magistrates Court Cape York circuit, with additional courts visiting local communities quarterly to conduct trials within the communities. This has reduced the need for parties to travel lengthy distances to attend hearings in Cairns.

The introduction of these additional sittings in remote Indigenous communities has made a fundamental difference for improved justice services. In addition to delivering the court to their front door, this initiative has greatly reduced the cost, the inconvenience and the potential danger of leaving home to attend hearings elsewhere. For island residents in particular it has reduced the need to travel at considerable expense by air or at some peril, as we know, by sea to attend court on Thursday Island. For Wujal Wujal residents, it has reduced the need to travel by a rough and largely unsealed road to attend court in Cooktown.

In all of these communities it has improved local confidence in the delivery of justice by giving residents the opportunity to personally observe the legal system at work and to hear the reasons for the sentences that have been imposed. It has also helped to empower local community justice groups, the JP magistrates and community police officers who interact with the court during proceedings. These benefits have been reflected in the very positive feedback of residents themselves who have warmly welcomed this initiative.

Over the coming year it is hoped to supplement the additional sittings with video-conferencing facilities to enable adjournments and bail applications for defendants who would otherwise have to travel to Thursday Island. Arrangements have been put in place to support remote circuit courts with wireless broadband access to the justice network. These initiatives are a tangible demonstration of the government's strong and continuing commitment to delivering a new era of justice to remote Indigenous communities.

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

**Mr McARDLE:** Attorney, I take you to 1-137 of the SDS, 'Judicial Officers'. You made the comment in reply to one of my colleague's questions that magistrates are at the coalface of our judicial system and that population growth of course is critical to their workload. Attorney, the magistrates do not receive a jurisprudential allowance as the judges do. That allowance is for the judges' self-education. If we accept that magistrates are at the coalface and that they do the bulk of the work, is there any reason that they do not receive an equivalent allowance as part of their salary to allow them to self-educate as judges do?

**Mr SHINE:** I thank the honourable member for the question. The determination of salaries is a matter now governed by what happens to the Federal Court judges, and the whole judiciary in Queensland including the magistracy follows suit from that. They receive automatic increases with respect to their salaries and various allowances that they have been given or are entitled to over the years as a result of what happens under that system, which we brought in in the last 12 months. Prior to that, of course, these entitlements were determined by the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal of Queensland, which had not provided under that system for the jurisprudential type allowances to which the honourable member is referring.

From time to time magistrates do make some representations to me, as you would expect, in relation to their terms and conditions but, whilst they do do a very important and responsible job in Queensland in terms of presiding at the coalface of justice that we have referred to, none of them that I have met are of the view that they are inadequately recompensed. I am pleased at that as well.

I can say that separate funding is provided to the Magistrates Court and that the court provides payment for travel and attendance at conferences from that money. That money is administered by the Chief Magistrate. When magistrates might want, as you say, to increase their knowledge by attending conferences or in any other way to pursue that worthy end, if they feel that they do not want to dip into their own resources then they can make application to the Chief Magistrate. That fund is called, as I understand it, the professional development fund, from which the Chief Magistrate ensures that magistrates can access professional development. There is also an annual conference of three days which the magistrates attend.

**Mr McARDLE:** Attorney, I want to clarify three points. Firstly, are you saying that no magistrate has ever raised with you a concern about not having such an allowance paid to them, as judges are? Secondly, can you indicate what the amount of the development fund is? Thirdly, can you confirm that an application needs to be made by an individual magistrate to the Chief Magistrate, who will then determine whether or not funds will be made available?

**Mr SHINE:** In relation to the last matter, my understanding is that applications are in fact made to the Chief Magistrate. He has the fund. He is responsible for its administration. Therefore, in the normal course I anticipate—and I am not being told anything different—that the applications are made to him to consider. My recollection is that that fund was of the order of \$80,000 per annum, but I will have that checked out.

In terms of representations made to me, what I meant to say before if I did not—I think I did—was that, in relation to their salary, I have not received any complaints from any magistrate that I can recall in relation to the salaries that they have received. In relation to allowances and entitlements, that is a different matter and the magistrates or representatives of the magistrates have come to me—and probably to you—on a couple of occasions since I have been Attorney and have put forward their points of view in relation to having similar entitlements as judges of the district and supreme courts. Certainly I listen to them and give those submissions the consideration that they are due, but I say again that I do not have any recollection of any magistrate complaining that their salaries were not sufficient. I would be surprised to receive such a complaint, to be honest. In relation to the amount of that development fund, I will have to come back to you with a precise figure shortly.

**Mr McARDLE:** Attorney, we have now established that there will be three teams potentially this year in the ODPP—that is, one for Patel, one for Nuttall and one for the Watson matter. They will certainly be comprised of senior and experienced practitioners and court staff. That number of staff who have been withdrawn from the day-to-day activities of the ODPP is of concern to me, particularly when you read the review of issues document that you are quite well aware of that highlighted the great overwork of ODPP personnel. What is the plan to compensate for the loss of these very important men and women to these very important, high-profile cases in dealing with day-to-day issues in the next financial year?

**Mr SHINE:** I thank the honourable member for the question. The funding recently provided to the ODPP will allow the practice to obtain resources to supplement chambers to backfill positions vacated by staff to form those specialist prosecution teams to which I referred. I refer you to an answer to a question on notice in this general area. The specialist teams are not chambers but have been established to deal with specialist prosecutions of Patel, Watson and Nuttall. Staff to form these teams have come from established chambers. Chambers are part of the permanent establishment of the ODPP. As each of the specialist prosecutions has a limited time it is more appropriate to form teams rather than full chambers, simply because the cases are finite.

With respect to the teams for the Nuttall and Watson prosecutions, I will give you the detail now. With respect to Nuttall, there is one SES2 consultant prosecutor, one PO6 prosecutor, one PO4 senior legal officer and one AO3 paralegal. With respect to Watson, the team will comprise a SES2 consultant prosecutor, a PO6 prosecutor, a PO3 solicitor advocate and an AO3 paralegal. Briefing outs will also be available to the private bar where it might be required.

**Mr McARDLE:** Attorney, you mentioned earlier that the moneys allocated yesterday would also allow 11 new prosecutors to come on board. The review document that we are all aware of highlights very critically a number of issues. One is that there are inappropriate skills and experience within the office to fill these vacancies. The second is that the salaries offered compared to other jurisdictions are woefully inadequate. What are the steps now being taken to ensure that the people who come on board are up to a standard required to prosecute these serious matters—and they are all serious matters? Is there any change in the salary structure which is critically highlighted as a negative in the review?

**Mr SHINE:** I thank the honourable gentleman for the question. The matter of how funds are allocated is one for the director himself to determine. As I indicated earlier today, the major challenge for the DPP in terms of staffing is in relation to the regions as opposed to the metropolitan centres where, of course, these major prosecutions are being conducted.

Can I say, though, that the Office of the DPP plays a vital role, as we all know, in the criminal justice system in this state. Over recent years the workload level for staff has continued to increase at a steady rate. That is primarily due to increases in population in Queensland, particularly in the south-east corner. Prosecutions is a demanding and specialist profession and one that in Australia is only conducted by government bodies comprising the various offices of the directors of public prosecutions. The numbers of experienced prosecutors in Australia is limited due to this fact.

Earlier this year I requested that the DPP conduct a review into workload issues and the recruitment and retention of prosecutors in the DPP. That report, written by the executive director, was presented to me on 31 March this year. The report indicated that matters committed to trial in Queensland far outnumbered those of any other state or territory in Australia. The main driver of this is our current legislation. A large number of matters that are dealt with summarily in other states are committed to trial in the District Court in Queensland. Due to this fact, these matters are being referred to the ODPP rather than being dealt with by other agencies such as the police prosecutors and the Magistrates Court.

The report also highlighted the difficulty in the recruitment and retention of experienced prosecutors due to other factors, including the salary levels paid in Queensland and higher workloads. I am currently reviewing the findings of that report, as is, of course, the new Director of Public Prosecutions.

To ease the burden of the workload of the DPP, changes need to be made to current legislation in Queensland, including a review of the jurisdiction of the Magistrates Court. This would reduce the number of matters being referred to higher courts. At the same time, the DPP will require additional resources to recruit and retain additional prosecutorial staff to deal with the level of workload that will continue to be allocated to the practice. Yesterday's announcement of \$17.5 million over and above the \$3.5 million in the budget reflected that.

I am pleased to state that the government is looking closely at all of the recommendations of the report and considering ways in which the DPP funding can be increased. The director believes that he needs some time to analyse the workload at each of the chambers, as you would appreciate.

**Mr McARDLE:** Attorney, you are aware of what is called the bait-and-switch scam on the Gold Coast whereby petrol stations cut off or close off the cheaper unleaded petrol pumps so that people buy the premium fuel. Can you tell me how many petrol stations had been investigated in relation to this issue and whether any prosecutions have in fact occurred?

**Mr SHINE:** Thank you for that question. I share the concern of members of the public with any shorting of the supply of petrol in Queensland, bearing in mind that we are experiencing record high prices for petrol. The surveillance in this area, so far as it relates to the state government, is the responsibility of the Office of Fair Trading, which is now a part of my portfolio. The Office of Fair Trading's compliance program aims to promote responsible business practices and ensure consumers are protected. It administers more than 60 Queensland acts.

Compliance and retail staff conduct proactive compliance involving spot checks of traders' businesses. They also investigate consumer complaints and bring offenders to account for their actions. In 2007-08, the Office of Fair Trading finalised 13,039 complaints, initiated 3,064 enforcement actions, monitored 12,000 entities for compliance and so on.

Some 324 spot checks have been undertaken relating to service stations from January to June 2008. Only one warning was issued. It is likely that some fuel dispensers which have 'out of order' signs on them may still be able to deliver fuel but they may have been shut down because of leaks or a discrepancy in measure—that is, delivering short measure—or alternatively, and more likely, there is still fuel in the reservoir but it is at such a low level that it requires the station to close it down to avoid impurities and sediments being pumped.

**Ms van LITSENBURG:** Attorney-General, I refer you to page 1-131 of the Service Delivery Statements. How will the additional funding allocation improve coronial services in Queensland?



**Mr SHINE:** Thank you for the question. The Queensland government places a very high value on the important role coroners play in providing closure to families and identifying ways to prevent unnecessary deaths. The government understands the need for dedicated full-time coroners to take the pressure off magistrates who carry out coronial investigations on top of their general court duties.

In 2007-08 the government appointed two new dedicated full-time coroners to serve in Brisbane and in the northern regions. The government has funded the appointment of an additional full-time coroner and coronial support team in Brisbane. Mr John Lock was appointed to the position in January this year. His appointment has already yielded results. In the period between 1 January and 30 June this year the deputy state coroner and the Brisbane coroner finalised 772 matters, an increase of 316 on the previous six-month period.

The government was also pleased to appoint Kevin Priestly, a solicitor in northern Queensland, as the new northern coroner. To assist Mr Priestly, the government has provided funding for accommodation and a coronial support team comprising a lawyer and three administrative staff in Cairns.

A southern coroner will be appointed later this year to further boost justice services in the region. The new southern coroner will be responsible for investigations in the rapidly growing Beenleigh-Southport area. The appointment of additional full-time coroners enhances justice service delivery by taking the pressure off local magistrates, increasing the quality and efficiency of coronial services and access to justice for all Queenslanders. It also assists in further developing productive working relationships with local coronial partners, including the police and hospitals, contributing to the efficiency of the coronial system.

Coroners encounter some of the most tragic fatal events that take place in our community each year. For the families and those involved they seek to answer why these events have occurred. For the peace of mind of these people and for the safety of the broader community, their recommendations provide a basis for preventing similar deaths from occurring in the future.

I would like to acknowledge the professionalism and compassion coronial staff bring to this sensitive and at times difficult jurisdiction. This funding illustrates the importance the government places on their work.

**Mrs ATTWOOD:** Attorney, I refer you to pages 1-133 and 1-143 of the Service Delivery Statements. Can you inform the committee on the performance of the State Penalties Enforcement Registry in increasing the collection of unpaid fines?

**Mr SHINE:** I thank the honourable member for the question. SPER, the State Penalties Enforcement Registry, is one of our great success stories, and the figures speak for themselves. In the last 12 months of the previous collection system, in 1999-2000, the total value of fines collected was just \$24 million. Last year, SPER collected some \$130 million—a fivefold increase in just eight years. That is an outstanding achievement by any measure, particularly given the fact that these are the most difficult fines to recover.

SPER estimates that about 80 per cent of all Queensland fines are paid directly to the issuing agencies. It is the remaining 20 per cent that are referred to SPER, and they are the hardest to recover because fine defaulters are typically unwilling to pay, in financial difficulty or not readily locatable. Even so, SPER collected 72 per cent of the 695,000 unpaid fines referred to it last year—an achievement ranking Queensland among the most effective fine-recovery states in Australia. In all, SPER collected an additional \$30 million in 2007-08, representing an increase of some 30 per cent compared to increased referrals of around eight per cent.

Much of this increase has been achieved through the introduction of automated civil enforcement actions such as garnisheeing money from bank accounts or wages and registering interest over property. These systems are among the most sophisticated in Australia. SPER has also invested heavily in staff training and increased its call centre queue capacity by 40 per cent.

This financial year SPER will further upgrade its client service capacity with the latest in call centre technology, enabling it to offer alternative contact options such as SMS and web links. In addition to the hundreds of millions of dollars recovered already, SPER has approximately \$333 million under active compliance or enforcement through instalment plans, fine option orders, redirection of funds and driver licence suspension. During 2008-09 SPER will continue to ensure that fine defaulters meet their obligations. SPER is currently evaluating the results of a trial on a system of issuing warrants for imprisonment in some of the toughest cases where people would not pay.

I also asked my department to look at options to strengthen the fine collection system. These include: enforcement cooperation with other jurisdictions—I want to see an agreement where people who move interstate cannot leave their fines behind; greater information sharing amongst departments; driver licence suspensions; and seizure and sale of assets. We will continue to review the SPER system to ensure as much money as possible is recovered.

**Mr FENLON:** Attorney-General, I refer you to pages 1-135 and 1-143 of the Service Delivery Statements and to the number of births, deaths and marriages projected to be registered. How is the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages working to improve the timeliness of its services to the community?

**Mr SHINE:** I thank the honourable gentleman for the question. With your leave, Mr Chairman, might I just clarify an answer that I previously gave to the Leader of the Liberal Party in relation to the magistrates' allowances et cetera. The budget for the magistracy in this regard is \$1.7 million. The professional development allocation is \$80,000, as I had said. The annual three-day conference costs \$116,000. There is an amount paid for subscriptions and publications of \$323,000. The library charges are \$43,000. That makes a total in that regard of \$446,000.

In relation to the question from the honourable member for Greenslopes—and I apologise for the delay; it is a very important question—this is an area of the portfolio that I have taken a particular interest in. Earlier this year I personally visited the registry to inspect the new service improvements implemented since September 2007. Late last year the registry commenced the implementation of its client service improvement program, which is focused on improving the accessibility, timeliness and quality of services delivered to its clients. In a nutshell, the registry's business processes are being redesigned. Online registrations and purchasing solutions, system enhancements and staff training are all being developed to help with the increase in customer demand. BDM reported increases in both registrations and certificates. In 2007-08 registrations increased by six per cent while certificates increased by three per cent. This can be explained in part by Queensland's increasing population.

In 2007-08 the department allocated to the registry additional internal funding of approximately \$270,000 to alleviate the workload pressures and drive the implementation of the client service improvement program initiatives. While such a comprehensive improvement program does take time, I am pleased to say that the program has already started to deliver real improvements. For example, the average time frame for registering a life event, including births, deaths and marriages, has reduced from six to five weeks and the issuing of certificates has reduced from eight to six weeks.

The new call centre system established in October 2007 has increased the average number of clients serviced over the phone per day from 202 to 786. The establishment of the community liaison pilot program has provided a commitment to increasing the under-registration of life events in Queensland Indigenous communities, and the establishment of a research statistical services unit has provided a specialised service for clients seeking special and genealogical research, certificate validation and data matching.

**Ms van LITSENBURG:** Attorney-General, I refer you to page 1-132 of the Service Delivery Statements, and I ask: how will the new legislation regulating licensing of security providers improve industry standards and the protection of consumers in Queensland?

**Mr SHINE:** Thank you very much for this question. A comprehensive review was undertaken of the Security Providers Act 1993 in 2004-05 involving extensive consultation with the industry and broader community. I am pleased to report that, as a result of the review, significant amendments have been made to the act. Positive changes include tougher penalties for those operating without the required licence and those employing unlicensed operators and improved screening of the suitability of applicants and licensees. These changes are designed to raise the standards for people entering and working in the industry and also cover parts of the industry that have not been licensed before. There are new requirements for improved training and ongoing training as well as expanding the licensing categories to require those who protect, watch or guard property to be licensed.

The new laws introduced penalties of up to \$37,500 for a first offence, five times more than the previous penalty. The penalties for repeat offenders have now been increased to \$75,000 for individuals or 18 months imprisonment. Companies face penalties five times more than individuals for the same offence. Before issuing a security provider's licence, my department can now consider criminal intelligence, a person's recorded and unrecorded convictions within the last five years and other background information when assessing whether an applicant is suitable to work in the industry. These amendments were introduced in three phases, and I am pleased to advise the committee that as of 1 July this year they have now all taken effect.

The new penalties and the improved suitability screening of applicants and licensees have already made a significant difference, with the legislative amendments providing for increased cooperation between the Queensland Police Service and my department. At the beginning of June 2008 some 151 licences had been cancelled, refused or suspended on the basis of the applicant's criminal history.

My department has received an allocation of \$2 million to boost resources to ensure compliance with the amendments to the act. A detailed compliance strategy is currently being developed to target high-risk areas of the industry. Amendments to the act enhance the licensing and regulation of the security industry and improve the safety and security of individuals and families in the community. This

legislation provides protection for us all as well as the industry by setting out the minimum obligations and requirements for the industry to follow. The amendments also ensure that Queensland is at the forefront of the regulation of the security industry in Australia.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Attorney. It being two o'clock, the committee will now take a short break to allow departmental staff at the table to change over. We will return at 2.05.

**Proceedings suspended from 1.59 pm to 2.06 pm**

**CHAIR:** The hearing will now continue its examination of the portfolio of the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister Assisting the Premier in Western Queensland. I call the member for Caloundra.

**Mr McARDLE:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. Attorney, I take you to the SDS at page 1-200 and the Crime and Misconduct Commission. I just want to talk about the role of the commission in relation to the monitoring of the judicial system here in Queensland. Prior to the reforms in 2001, the Criminal Justice Research Unit formed part of the CJC and part of its role was to in fact monitor the criminal justice system. Can you tell me in which agency or in which department rests the obligation to monitor the criminal justice system in this state? Is it your agency or your department alone or is it the CMC or is it the Premier's department?

**Mr SHINE:** I may have misunderstood the question, but as I understood the question you are asking which body oversees the CMC?

**Mr McARDLE:** I am asking who oversees the criminal justice system in this state. Does that rest with the CMC, the Attorney's department or the Premier's department?

**Mr SHINE:** I suppose there are a number of state government agencies that have a role to play in terms of the effective running of the criminal justice system in Queensland including my department, including the police department obviously and including the CMC itself. I take it you are directing your remarks principally to the CMC in terms of the budget papers. The CMC was, as you would know, established by the Crime and Misconduct Act 2001, and the act has created a very powerful agency for fighting crime and misconduct in Queensland. The overarching functions of the CMC are to combat and reduce the incidence of crime, continuously improve the integrity of and to reduce the incidence of misconduct in the public sector, and provide witness protection services in Queensland.

The following operational functions are designed to facilitate achievement of the overarching functions. In terms of the functions of the CMC, I refer you to section 52 of the Crime and Misconduct Act 2000, which sets out the various functions, for example the research functions. Section 52(1) states—

The commission has the following functions—

- (a) to undertake research to support the proper performance of its functions;
- (b) to undertake research into the incidence and prevention of criminal activity;
- (c) to undertake research into any other matter relating to the administration of criminal justice or relating to misconduct referred to the commission by the Minister;
- (d) to undertake research into any other matter relevant to any of its functions.

Section 52(2) goes on to state—

Without limiting subsection (1)(a), the commission may undertake research into—

- (a) police service methods of operations; and
- (b) police powers and the use of police powers; and
- (c) law enforcement by police; and
- (d) the continuous improvement of the police service.

**Mr McARDLE:** Thank you, Attorney. Section 52(1)(c) is exactly the section I am referring to in my next question regarding the SDS at page 1-200. It refers to the CMC having the capacity to research the administration of the criminal justice system. In light of the review with regard to the ODPP which you obtained, I think, in March of this year, have you given thought to referring the question of the research of the ODPP in the criminal justice system to the CMC as an independent body which would then table under section 69 the research result and recommendations to improve that body?

**Mr SHINE:** Thank you for the question. What did pass through my mind was the possibility of referring the question to the CMC of how you came to get a copy of that confidential report that was prepared internally by the DPP. That was my only consideration of involvement of the CMC in relation to that report.

The proper running of the DPP is a matter that is the responsibility of the new Director of Public Prosecutions in Queensland. He has taken up that role with gusto and enthusiasm. The announcement made in the budget and, more importantly, made yesterday by the Premier of additional funding—which because of those two incidents amounts to \$21 million—will be a great fillip to both the director and I think to all people who work within the DPP. They do a very valuable job and I think that is recognised by

the government in that funding for the creation of those extra positions, including 11 new prosecutors. That is a very substantial injection of funds that will lead to meeting that challenge that that agency and, of course, many agencies and enterprises—both government and non-government—have in terms of retaining and attracting good staff in these buoyant economic times.

**Mr McARDLE:** Given the appointment of a new DPP and the capacity within the CMC to undertake research into the criminal justice system, would it not now be an ideal time to join those two forces together, given the resources that are available, to tackle this point head-on and, under section 69, have that report tabled in parliament so that the parliament and the public can see the recommendations of that body of research?

**Mr SHINE:** The honourable member would appreciate that the paper was a document that was prepared at my request to apprise me of the then director's view of any shortcomings that might be present within the DPP in terms of staff and ways and means of improving the system not just by way of the payment of wages but also any suggestion that might be made with respect to making efficiencies. Primarily, the document was a report to me on the state of affairs as the then director and the executive director saw things. It was not in any way, shape or form a research paper as I would understand it in terms of the definition in the Crime and Misconduct Act. Therefore, I would respectfully suggest that the paper that was prepared does not fall within that category of research as set out in the Crime and Misconduct Act 2001.

The proposal on how the ODPP would ultimately like to be staffed, that is internally developed proposals, was the main thrust of the document. It is likely that some of the figures on which it was based really need to be looked at again. But these are matters for the new Director of Public Prosecutions, who, as we have said repeatedly, is newly appointed and heavily involved in these major cases that are before the courts this week and other cases. He will address these issues as soon as he possibly can.

Can I say that the announcement by the government yesterday of that very significant increased funding came about to a large extent because of the work done not just by my department, and my director-general in particular, but with the active and very beneficial support and involvement of the new Director of Public Prosecutions, who is already showing his talent in terms of the managerial and organisational aspects of the DPP.

**Mr McARDLE:** Just staying with that point, the review that you referred to highlights a number of legal steps that can be taken to alleviate the workload of the ODPP, including the jurisdictional increase in the Magistrates Court—the committal question, should it be dissolved—and also other issues. Would you agree with me that the expertise in those areas held by the CMC and the jurisdictional base contained within the act gives them a good base to work in conjunction with the ODPP to resolve those questions—that we have a more streamlined and effective criminal justice system, at least in the higher courts?

**Mr SHINE:** I thank the honourable gentleman for the question. As I said, or implied before, the report to which you referred not only addressed issues relating to remuneration but also addressed issues relating to the investigation and adoption of other efficiencies. I know the new director is very keen to pursue avenues down that track in terms of ways and means by which the staff of the ODPP can be more efficiently and effectively utilised as they are in some other jurisdictions where they do not have the same predominance of involvement in the lower court.

These matters might involve not just a look but ways of ensuring that more matters are dealt with not in the District Court but in the Magistrates Court. I know from what you have said in parliament in the past that you would be supportive—and correct me if I am wrong—of measures to ensure that that type of rearrangement of criminal work in Queensland takes place, that is, that more matters be dealt with in the Magistrates Court at an earlier stage than referred to the District Court, particularly taking into account the involvement of committal hearings and then often having to repeat the same evidence at a trial later on.

To assist in this look at the efficiencies in the DPP I have also engaged the services of recently retired Senior Judge Administrator Justice Martin Moynihan to investigate ways of improving the civil and criminal justice systems generally—not just where it involved the DPP but generally as well. Some of the matters that he will be considering in conjunction with the major stakeholders, such as the Bar Association, the Law Society, Legal Aid, victims of crime et cetera, will be the jurisdiction of the courts, particularly those matters that can be dealt with summarily; committal hearings and how to improve efficiencies there; and case conferencing to allow both prosecution and defence to get together at an earlier stage to negotiate the earlier disposal of matters. So we have work being done in the DPP and outside of it as well all to the same end of creating those sorts of efficiencies.

**Mr McARDLE:** Just on section 52(1)(c) of the act, can you advise the committee on how many occasions you have referred to the CMC research in relation to the criminal justice system?

**Mr SHINE:** I certainly can recall of recent times referring the question of policing activity in Indigenous communities. That was the referral that I made in my time as Attorney-General since November 2006. Can I just say that I have no problem at all in answering questions in relation to the DPP, but it may not be technically part of this category. The CMC is, of course, but the DPP probably is part of my departmental responsibilities as opposed to statutory bodies.

Having made that point, however, could I say in relation to the CMC that it conducts an ongoing program of research into public policy issues relevant to its jurisdiction and as required by acts of parliament. In 2007-08 the CMC was required by law to review the use of the public nuisance offence of the Vagrants, Gaming and Other Offences Act and section 7 of the Summary Offences Act 2005. That review considered the impact of the new public nuisance offence effective since 1 April 2004 and whether public nuisance laws have been used properly, fairly and effectively in Queensland.

The chairperson of the CMC handed the report, *Policing public order: a review of the public nuisance offence*, to the Speaker for tabling in the Legislative Assembly on Friday, 23 May 2008. Major findings of the review include that the new public nuisance offence itself does not appear to have had a significant impact on public nuisance offending, or on the police and court response to it. There is no evidence to support fears that the new offence would lead to an increase in the overrepresentation of marginalised groups, such as young people and Indigenous people. There is evidence that the offence is increasingly being used to respond to the antisocial behaviour of party people, that is, mostly young men who have consumed alcohol at licensed premises. While particular examples of the inappropriate use of the public nuisance offence were identified, on the whole Queensland's public nuisance laws are being used fairly and effectively in the sense that the police were taking action to respond to the messages being sent by the broader community.

**Mr McARDLE:** I take you to page 1-208 of the SDS, the Legal Aid office and in particular the increase of 19 per cent paid to preferred suppliers. A document titled *Criminal case conferencing comparisons with NSW—the Qld perspective* by Jenny Hardy dated April 2008 stated that in 2006-07, 3,400-plus funded matters went to the higher courts and that only 19 per cent were funded for a plea of guilty. Of the balance, only 27 per cent went to trial. There was a significant gap between the number of matters that were being funded for trial in the higher court and those actually going to trial. Do you have any indication of what this is costing the Legal Aid office in regard to legal fees and outlays as a result of this shortfall?

**Mr SHINE:** Legal Aid Queensland is an independent statutory body that operates under the Legal Aid Act 1997 and provides information, advice and representation to disadvantaged Queenslanders in criminal, family and civil law matters. It provides, for example, duty lawyer services in the Magistrates Court and Children's Court around the state. It does play a very key role in advocating for social justice through policy reform and system improvement.

A five-member board headed by a chairperson who is appointed by the Governor in Council provides strategic guidance and direction to the organisation. Legal Aid Queensland is managed by a chief executive officer who was appointed by the Governor in Council. The CEO is also an ex officio board member.

The organisation has two senior managers and three senior legal consultants who are responsible for the key business areas, legal practice, grants and corporate services. LAQ has 13 regional offices around the state and a head office in Brisbane.

The actual detail of the honourable member's question I will have to take on notice. I do not have with me the information that he seeks. I will attempt to obtain it in the very near future.

**Mrs ATTWOOD:** Attorney-General, pages 1-200 and 1-201 of the Service Delivery Statements refer to activities to assist public sector agencies prevent and deal with allegations of official misconduct. Could the Attorney describe how the Crime and Misconduct Commission is improving the integrity of the Queensland public sector and working with agencies to prevent and deal with misconduct?

**Mr SHINE:** Thank you very much for the question. The Crime and Misconduct Commission plays an integral role in maintaining the veracity of the Public Service. Its independence combined with its power under legislation ensures it is a potent weapon in Queensland's fight against crime and official misconduct. The CMC has a strong belief that pre-emption and education are vital to achieving a reduction in the incidence of misconduct. The CMC has taken a most proactive role working with individual public sector units—monitoring and helping them build their capacity to prevent and deal with misconduct. The monitoring program includes reviews and audits of complaints dealt with by agencies.

During the first 11 months of the financial year, the CMC initiated nine capacity-building and monitoring projects. For example, the CMC is currently assisting the Queensland Police Service with Project Verity, a review of its integrity systems. Project Verity is working to ensure the Queensland Police Service has robust, effective and timely complaints management and disciplinary systems that effectively deal with misconduct. The CMC has strategies in place to further this work within the public sector in 2008-09. These include research projects and a series of regional and rural workshops to help agencies deal with allegations of misconduct and prevent conflicts of interest.

To stimulate discussion about the emerging risks and risk management strategies, the CMC is working collaboratively with other watchdog agencies for the Australian Public Sector Anti-Corruption Conference. This conference will contribute to the development of agencies to prevent and deal with misconduct and corruption risk. Queensland organisations will have greater access to this conference, with next year's events scheduled to take place in October in Brisbane.

When it comes to preventing and effectively responding to misconduct, all public sector agencies have a role to play. Agencies and monitoring bodies must give priority to developing the necessary organisational cultures and systems. Building the capacity of units to investigate matters not requiring special powers of the CMC will allow the organisation to focus on the most complex and serious allegations.

In 2008-09 the CMC will continue to concentrate on building the capacity of agencies to prevent and deal with misconduct. This will involve monitoring how agencies deal with misconduct and working in partnership with key agencies such as the Queensland Ombudsman, Crown Law and the Office of the Public Service Commissioner.

**Mr FENLON:** Attorney-General, I refer you to pages 1-200 and 1-201 of the Service Delivery Statements, and I ask: how does the Crime and Misconduct Commission investigate and work to prevent organised crime in Queensland?

**Mr SHINE:** I thank the honourable gentleman for the very important question. The CMC draws on a wide range of expertise and resources to investigate and prevent organised crime. In particular, it seeks to implement innovative, long-term strategies with a high probability of tactical success. Those strategies are based on sound crime research and accurate and timely intelligence. The CMC uses risk assessments to determine its investigative priorities based on the threat posed by particular activities. This involves the continuous evaluation of criminal markets and the rating of networks and individuals operating within those markets. The CMC's objective is to dismantle or seriously disrupt organised crime networks by incarcerating key members and financially incapacitating the networks themselves.

In the 12 months to 30 June 2008 the CMC completed 26 organised crime and criminal paedophilia investigations, all of which resulted in significant outcomes such as arrests, charges or the seizure or restraint of property. The CMC also started 22 joint investigations with other law enforcement agencies including the Queensland Police Service, the Australian Federal Police, the Australian Crime Commission and the Australian Customs Service. The overall result in other investigations to 30 June was that 114 people had been charged with 561 offences. During the same period, the CMC obtained 78 proceeds of crime restraining orders involving assets valued at \$18.56 million. It also finalised 27 confiscation matters, resulting in approximately \$4.68 million being forfeited to the state.

The CMC is currently engaged in several joint investigations with the Queensland Police Service and the Australian Crime Commission. As I am sure members would understand, details of these investigations cannot be discussed as they relate to highly complex, organised networks. These networks are allegedly involved in the manufacturing, distributing and trafficking of illicit drugs with associated money laundering and other unlawful activities. The CMC is also heavily involved in the investigation and prevention of organised crime in relation to paedophilia. It will continue to pursue serial or networked child sex predators who offend against multiple victims outside the family.

**Ms van LITSENBURG:** Attorney-General, I refer you to pages 1-200 and 1-202 of the Service Delivery Statements, and I ask: what is the Crime and Misconduct Commission's record in protecting witnesses who have assisted law enforcement agencies in their important work?

**Mr SHINE:** Thank you again for the question. Witness protection is a vital component of the Queensland criminal justice system. It provides an environment that encourages people to come forward and assist law enforcement agencies, even when that presents a potential risk to themselves, their families and their friends. As most people would be aware, witness protection can be quite a major undertaking. Contrary to popular perception, the witness does not have to give evidence in order to qualify. Similarly, witness protection does not always result in a witness being relocated and provided with a new identity, although this can be involved in some serious cases.

Regardless of the circumstances, it requires a high level of professionalism, discretion and personal courage. Queensland is greatly indebted to the officers of the Crime and Misconduct Commission who fulfil this role. Their task is made all the more challenging because the CMC has very little control over the number of applications received from law enforcement agencies, principally from the Queensland Police Service. It is also worth noting that the CMC cannot compel a witness to enter the program. Entry is entirely voluntary.

The CMC derives its responsibility for this work under the Crime and Misconduct Act 2001 and through the provisions of the Witness Protection Act 2000. Protection may be short or long term. In some cases it can require relocating the person along with their family, friends and associates and providing them all with entirely new identities. At the other end of the scale, it may involve little more than a threat assessment and security escort for court appearances.

The witness protection service was established as a result of the Fitzgerald inquiry, firstly under the Criminal Justice Commission and more recently under the CMC. In the two decades since its inception, the service has protected more than 1,500 witnesses. That includes around 470 since the formation of the CMC in 2002. Even more importantly, the service has been 100 per cent effective in keeping those witnesses safe. That is a most outstanding achievement. The CMC will continue to build on that record by further developing its relationships with government agencies and liaising with other Australasian witness protection bodies on the latest trends, methodologies, technologies and legislative initiatives.

**Mrs ATTWOOD:** Attorney, I refer to pages 1-129, 1-158 and 1-159 of the Service Delivery Statements and in particular the references to the Electoral Commission of Queensland's continued delivery of a community awareness program. What was the focus of the commission's information and awareness campaign prior to the March 2008 local government elections and how does it plan to further promote awareness of electoral matters in the community?

**Mr SHINE:** Thank you for the question. A citizen's right to vote is fundamental to democratic societies like ours. The Electoral Commission of Queensland's community awareness activities provide Queensland voters with the information they need to enable them to take part in the democratic process and have their say about the government of the state. The commission encourages all Queenslanders, particularly those from groups which have traditionally low enrolment rates, to register as voters and to keep their enrolment details current.

In the lead-up to the Brisbane City and local government elections on 15 March this year, the commission conducted a specific information and awareness campaign. The campaign included direct mail and print, radio and television advertising. These focused on increasing public awareness of the pending election and date, encouraging people not already on the electoral roll to enrol, encouraging registered voters to ensure the accuracy of their enrolment details, advising voters of the voting options available including pre-poll and postal, and advising voters of the location of polling places for election day.

When the electoral rolls for these elections closed on 31 January 2008, close to 120,000 additional people were enrolled to vote compared with the same time in 2007. Young people are important members of our society as it is they who will influence and develop public policy and lead future governments. Therefore, it is vital that they become engaged in the democratic process at the very earliest possible time. The Electoral Commission is actively working to boost the number of young people enrolled to vote through its Vote Y Project, which targets generation Y—young people aged between 16 and 23. Commission staff have regular contact with education authorities, universities and youth groups to offer support and information. Youth focused materials which explain the electoral process have also been developed.

At a national level, the commission is working jointly with the Australian Electoral Commission on projects to further increase community awareness of electoral matters. The commission is already planning its awareness campaign to be used in the lead-up to the next state election. This will benefit voters by informing them of election arrangements, their voting options and specific milestones such as electoral roll closure dates.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Attorney. I call the member for Greenslopes.

**Mr FENLON:** Attorney-General, pages 1-208, 1-209 and 1-210 of the Service Delivery Statements refer to the work of Legal Aid Queensland. How does the agency recruit and develop graduate lawyers to provide legal aid services throughout Queensland?

**Mr SHINE:** Thank you for the very important question. Members would be aware of the valuable contribution Legal Aid makes to the legal system in Queensland. These roles include providing a free legal information service to the public, free legal advice on most personal legal problems, legal representation either through a duty lawyer or a legal aid grant, and specialist services to assist priority groups with specific legal problems. You would be aware that Legal Aid Queensland has identified a challenge in recruiting and retraining lawyers to provide these essential legal aid services throughout Queensland.

As Australia's population ages, Legal Aid Queensland has found there is a trend towards older lawyers being the primary providers of legal aid services. This raises the need to ensure there are enough professional service providers to meet future demand for legal aid services. Legal Aid Queensland is addressing this issue through its Graduate Recruitment and Regional Solicitor Programs.

The Graduate Recruitment Program offers important and interesting work to final year lawyer students, students enrolled in a practical legal training course or recently admitted practitioners. For graduate lawyers this valuable experience can launch an exciting career whilst also providing work in excellent conditions. The 2008 recruitment campaign saw more than 200 graduates apply for positions in the Graduate Recruitment Program. The 10 successful applicants will receive extensive guidance from senior lawyers to ensure they achieve the highest possible professional standards. By the end of their training they will be able to confidently manage a case load and represent clients in court.

Legal Aid also has its Regional Solicitor Program, which is run in partnership with the private legal profession and aims to make rural and regional locations an attractive option for newly admitted solicitors. This program offers a competitive starting salary of \$40,000, which is equal to or greater than what is offered by most Brisbane based law firms. Lawyers in the Regional Solicitor Program are placed in rural and regional communities that currently do not have enough lawyers to meet local residents' demands for legal aid. In the four years it has been operating, the program has been successful in addressing short-term supply issues in some Queensland areas. It has also persuaded 30 lawyers to pursue careers in regional law firms from Innisfail to Mount Isa to Charleville. For many people, the lawyers working under these programs represent their only chance for legal assistance. These programs have improved access to quality legal advice and representation throughout Queensland and have kick-started the legal careers of many new solicitors.

**Ms van LITSENBURG:** Attorney-General, I refer you to page 1-208 of the Service Delivery Statements and the work of Legal Aid Queensland. Can you inform the committee how the government is improving the rate of payment to private lawyers undertaking criminal case work for Legal Aid Queensland and how this will enhance the provision of legal aid services for disadvantaged members of the community?

**Mr SHINE:** Members would be aware of Legal Aid Queensland's work in providing grants to people to allow them to be represented in court. Much of this work is conducted by members of the private legal profession who represent legally aided clients across Queensland. There are about 400 law firms around the state that are committed to providing legal aid services to the disadvantaged and they are currently undertaking about 70 per cent of all legal aid case work. Given the vital role that they play in supporting the disadvantaged members of our community, it is vital that these lawyers receive fair and reasonable remuneration for their work.

That is why the Bligh government has committed an additional \$2.8 million from the Legal Practitioner Interest on Trust Accounts Fund, LPITAF, to increase the hourly rate paid to private lawyers who do criminal law case work for Legal Aid Queensland. From 1 July 2008, the hourly rate increased to an average of \$110 an hour from an average of \$100 an hour, an increase of 10 per cent. This is the second step in a series of staged increases aimed at achieving parity between the hourly rate paid for criminal law cases and the family law case work rate of \$120 per hour. In the 2007-08 budget we provided an additional \$4.4 million from LPITAF to increase fees from \$84 to \$100 an hour, an increase of 19 per cent.

By providing adequate remuneration to the hundreds of lawyers who do legal aid work around the state, Legal Aid Queensland is better able to retain and attract quality supplier law firms to provide services to legally aided clients now and into the future. I am committed to ensuring Queensland has a strong legal aid system and will continue to review fees for criminal law matters with the aim of achieving parity between the criminal and family law rates.

I would like to thank the hundreds of lawyers who do legal aid work around Queensland for their dedication, and their hard work and willingness to assist vulnerable and disadvantaged Queenslanders. They are a vital part of the justice system in Queensland and their work improves access to justice for the disadvantaged and helps us achieve our goal of delivering a fair, open and accessible justice system.

Members would be aware of the valuable contribution Legal Aid makes to the legal system in Queensland. These roles include providing a free legal information service to the public, free legal advice on most personal legal problems, legal representation either through a duty lawyer or through a legal aid grant and specialist services to assist priority groups with specific legal problems.

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

**Mr McARDLE:** Attorney, I wish to stay with the Legal Aid Commission, SDS 1-208, and the increasing demand for legal services in the criminal law and child protection areas. You are aware of the report by Peter Davis dated 15 February 2008 that was mailed almost across the state. At paragraph 24 it says that the Legal Aid office is also experiencing some difficulty in the cape circuits. A letter of 7 February 2008 from Jenny Hardy of the Legal Aid office was sent to me and also the Attorney. Can you outline the concerns of the Legal Aid office in the cape circuit, as referred to in the memo from Peter Davis?

**Mr SHINE:** At this time I publicly thank Peter Davis for the valuable work he did as a consequence of or follow-on from the tragedy of the Aurukun nine case. He was asked to do a difficult task and to do it quickly. He was able to do that despite the fact that he is an extremely busy senior barrister in Brisbane. He was asked to do a comparison of sentences in the cape over a period. It was a very large task and he did it very well.

In terms of the child protection aspect of the honourable member's question, Legal Aid Queensland's Child Protection Unit aims to give vulnerable children and young people in the child protection system a voice in the legal decisions that affect their lives. Whilst Legal Aid, of course, has a role to play all over the state, the provision of legal services in the cape area, particularly to Indigenous



communities, traditionally has been the responsibility of ATSILS, the Aboriginal legal service, primarily funded by the federal government. Therefore, the matters to which the honourable member refers would be of primary concern to that organisation which, of course, is not part of the budgetary measures that we are considering today.

**Mr McARDLE:** Attorney, I have to push this point because what it says here is that the Legal Aid office is experiencing difficulties with the cape circuits. Legal Aid has a very important role to play in the criminal justice system in the state. Clearly the paragraph in the Davis report refers to that. It also refers to concerns by that office and a letter by Jenny Hardy of 7 February 2008, which I assume sets out the concerns of that office in regard to cape circuits. Are you able to outline the concerns contained in that letter or are you prepared to table the letter to the committee here this afternoon?

**Mr SHINE:** I thank the honourable gentleman for the further question in relation to this matter. The systemic deficiencies identified in the Aurukun rape case that we were concerned existed and that gave rise to the Premier announcing the cape sentencing review by Mr Peter Davis SC provide a disturbing demonstration of the consequences of funding inadequacies and their potential to bring the justice system into disrepute.

Legal Aid Queensland's commitment to delivering legal services to Indigenous Queenslanders improves the responsiveness of the criminal justice system and supports Queensland's commitment to reducing overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system. However, unless the federal government increases its funding to ATSILS, Indigenous Queenslanders will continue to receive a lower standard of legal representation than that enjoyed by the rest of the Queensland community. I am pleased that in recent times the federal government has, at least in part, responded to those needs with a grant of \$800,000, I think, to that particular aspect of Aboriginal requirements in terms of legal services in Queensland.

Legal Aid Queensland is the single largest service provider in the state representing the interests of children and young people in the legal system. The organisation approved an additional 245 applications for aid in child protection matters in 2007-08, which is an increase of 14 per cent on the previous year. This is largely due to a surge in demand from parents, children and young people seeking representation at all stages of the child protection process.

Legal Aid Queensland has responded to the increasing number of orders from the Childrens Court and Children Services Tribunal, appointing separate representatives to act for children in proceedings. Family group meetings, which were introduced as part of stage 2 of the child safety legislative reforms, have been another brave area. Legal Aid Queensland grants aid for parents and children and young people to be represented at family group meetings. Legal Aid Queensland is committed to continually improving its relationship with the Department of Child Safety.

The general subject matter that the honourable member refers to is, of course, dealt with to a large extent in the report that we tabled yesterday by Donna-Maree O'Connor, which I commend to the honourable member. It sets out in detail her suggestions as to matters that should be attended to on a whole-of-government basis, but particularly in relation to this provision of legal services and how they can be better provided.

**Mr McARDLE:** I go back to the CMC, SDS 1-200, and in particular its role in preventing major crime. You would be aware that in his 2006-07 report the chairman again touched upon TI and said it would greatly improve the CMC's operations, particularly in the areas of organised crime and internet paedophilia. Attorney, you would be acutely aware of the chairman's attitude towards TI and the imperative nature that he sees it playing in his department's role. Have you taken an opportunity to talk to the chairman and gain his views as to what can be done to get TI on board, sooner rather than later? If you have, can you elaborate to the committee?

**Mr SHINE:** Before answering, if I may I will make reference to the previous question which I took on notice. Really, I am seeking some clarification. Of the matters funded for trial preparation by LAQ, a number do not proceed to trial in the higher courts. The reasons for this include guilty pleas being entered or charges being withdrawn, probably at a late stage. Therefore, it is difficult to provide a simple answer regarding the costs of these matters to the LAQ. More details of the question are required and then specific costs can be provided. I doubt whether we can do that today, but after conferring with you further, and with the Legal Aid office, as to precisely what you are want I am sure we will be able to give it to you.

**Mr McARDLE:** Thank you.

**Mr SHINE:** As to telephone interception, the government's view has always been that there is a very important role in terms of the public interest for the Public Interest Monitor, or PIM, to be involved, particularly in the earlier stage when permission for interceptions would be requested. You will recall that the previous federal government was not cooperative in that regard. My recollection is that submissions have been made in recent times since the Rudd government came to office to further that matter, but at the moment there has been no final resolution.

Your question was: has the chair of the CMC made representations to me? He has. He does, in his regular visits to me, raise a number of issues and, yes, we have discussed this issue, as you would anticipate we would and, indeed, we should. He understands the government's position and I am sure he understands our concern for basic human rights to be protected, as I am sure you and all of us here would want to be the case. At the same time, we are very conscious of the threats to our society from crime. So there is a balance required. We believe that the involvement of the PIM is the way to achieve that necessary balance.

**Mr McARDLE:** Attorney, has the chairman expressed to you a preference as to where the PIM should be placed—before or after the application is made?

**Mr SHINE:** To be frank, I do not have a clear recollection of where he may want the PIM placed. My last conversation with him on this topic would have been some time ago.

In terms of the question about telephone interception powers, the government has drafted legislation to permit the use of telecommunication interception powers by the Queensland Police Service and the CMC to combat crime and enforce the law. The proposed legislation includes significant safeguards to protect fundamental individual rights and ensure public confidence. The government has had prolonged discussions with the federal government to move forward on this issue. The government has consistently argued that involvement of the Public Interest Monitor, or PIM, was required in the application process—that is, at the beginning—for a telecommunication interception warrant.

The Queensland Police Service and the CMC already have broad powers to use surveillance devices including listening devices, visual surveillance devices and tracking devices. The PIM has for many years played a vital role in the exercise of these powers. This system has proven to be very effective in protecting the interests and rights of Queenslanders. The Queensland government will not allow Queenslanders' telephones to be tapped without proper input in the process in the public interest, ensuring that fundamental individual rights are protected.

In early January this year the government forwarded the proposed legislation to the Commonwealth Attorney-General and the Prime Minister for their consideration. The matter remains under consideration at this particular time.

**Mr McARDLE:** Attorney, have you taken the concerns that have been raised with you in discussions with the chairman to cabinet to express to cabinet the chairman's point of view on TI powers? If so, can you tell us when that was last done?

**Mr SHINE:** There are a couple of things there. The matters that are discussed and dealt with in cabinet are of a confidential nature, and I do not have cabinet's permission to break my oath of secrecy on this occasion or any other, for that matter. But I can assure the honourable member that the chair's views in relation to the need for telephone interception have been forcefully put from time to time. He and I, and everybody else I think in this room, look forward to a satisfactory resolution of the impasse that did exist for many years with the previous government. I would hope that the delay that has gone on now since writing to the Commonwealth earlier this year is indicative of the fact that careful and considered thought is being given to the state government's draft legislation that we submitted earlier this year.

**Mrs ATTWOOD:** My question relates to pages 1-170 and 1-172 of the Service Delivery Statements and, in particular, the references to servicing Queensland's diverse community and the Ombudsman's awareness campaigns targeting multicultural communities. How is the Ombudsman promoting its services to multicultural communities and promoting their access to appropriate complaints investigation processes?

**Mr SHINE:** Thank you for the question. The Queensland Ombudsman's office embraces the values of the Queensland government's multicultural policy and continues to implement programs by promoting those principles. Of particular importance is ensuring multicultural activities are aware of the Ombudsman's services and that these services are accessible to these communities.

For people to understand their rights under our system of government and to stand up for those rights, they need information that is culturally and linguistically appropriate. The Ombudsman has continued to demonstrate this commitment, operating a comprehensive communication and engagement program targeted at multicultural communities. In 2007-08 the Ombudsman focused this program on reviewing resources targeted at multicultural communities. This included a translation of the Ombudsman's complaints brochure into eight different languages. To ensure access to this information, the office incorporated an updated multicultural languages section in its web site redevelopment.

The Ombudsman is also currently working to extend its reach into Indigenous communities by proactively working with those communities to develop awareness material to specifically target Indigenous people. In line with its engagement strategy, the office worked with Indigenous prisoners at the Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre to develop artwork it has used on posters and in brochures. Aboriginal communities were extensively consulted to ensure that the key messages and artworks were culturally sensitive and clearly communicated the role of the Ombudsman. Partnerships with a vast network of community health and legal centres will distribute the material.

Throughout the 2007-08 financial year, the Ombudsman worked to assert a physical presence in the community. Ombudsman officers conducted information sessions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service officers in their regional offices. The office also participated in Multicultural Week and NAIDOC Week. These events have proven very successful, and the Office of the Ombudsman intends to continue its involvement in these initiatives in the coming year.

The office continues to work in partnership with other accountability agencies on strategies to effectively engage with multicultural audiences. This has included collaboration on the publication entitled *It's OK to complain—your rights are our concern*. To ensure it remains relevant to multicultural communities, this publication will be reviewed in 2009. The Ombudsman continues to move forward with its multicultural engagement strategies to ensure that all Queenslanders, including the state's multicultural Indigenous communities, understand that 'it's okay to complain'.

**Mr FENLON:** Attorney-General, I refer you to pages 1-170 and 1-171 of the Service Delivery Statements which refer to the Ombudsman's work supporting public sector agencies to implement internal complaint systems that meet the requirements of the Public Service Commissioner. Can you please inform the committee of the Ombudsman's work to date on this project?

**Mr SHINE:** Thank you for the question and I would be happy to do that. It is a basic entitlement for people to be able to make complaints to government agencies, and complainants rightly expect that their concerns will be dealt with fairly, transparently and as quickly as possible. The Ombudsman has developed a number of positive initiatives to support agencies to meet these rights and expectations. These include the Public Service Commissioner's *Directive 13/06—Complaints Management Systems*, which was issued on 10 November 2006.

The directive required all state government agencies to have a complaints system in place by 10 November 2007 that complied with specific requirements. As part of the Ombudsman's complaints management program, his officers have been assisting agencies to comply with the directive, and they are continuing to provide agencies with guidance on ways to improve their complaints system. The office held a series of complaints management workshops in July 2007 which were attended by representatives of 17 agencies. Feedback from the workshops was extremely positive, and the Ombudsman decided to publish the workshop material on the office's web site. The material is one of the most frequently downloaded items from the office's web site.

The Ombudsman's officers also met with officers from 19 agencies to provide specific advice on the sufficiency of their own agency's complaints policies and procedures. The office began to deliver training on effective complaints management to internal review officers and agencies in October 2007 and introduced a separate module for front-line officers in November 2007. The office has presented 15 training sessions for internal review officers, with approximately 450 officers attending the training sessions. The training is offered to agencies that have complaints policies and procedures in place in accordance with the directive or, in the case of councils, the Local Government Act.

In April 2008 the office began auditing state agencies' compliance with the directive. The office developed a self-audit questionnaire and instructions based on the directive. These have been sent to state agencies. After it completes the survey of the complaints systems of state agencies, the Ombudsman will survey local government to assess the extent to which their general complaints processes comply with the requirements of the Local Government Act 1993. An audit tool will be prepared for this process. This positive initiative meets one of the key objectives of the Ombudsman Act 2001 of 'improving the quality of decision-making and administrative practice in agencies', as well as ensuring people are treated fairly in their dealings with state and local government agencies.

**Ms van LITSENBURG:** Attorney-General, I refer you to pages 1-180 and 1-181 of the Service Delivery Statements. What activities did the Public Trustee undertake in 2007-08 to ensure service delivery to regional and remote communities across the state?

**Mr SHINE:** Thank you very much. As Queensland's population grows, it is inevitable that demand for the services of the Public Trust Office will increase. These vital services include the administration of deceased estates, trusts and financial management for people with a decision-making disability. These issues can be difficult for people to confront. However, all Queenslanders should be aware of the need to plan ahead and make arrangements that will safeguard their interest and their assets should the need arise.

The Public Trust Office is committed to consumer service and ensuring all Queenslanders have access to its services. The office works proactively with communities from across Queensland to provide education and information to clients. The Public Trustee's 15 regional offices provide easy access for clients in a range of locations. For those clients who encounter mobility issues, the Public Trust Office offers site visits, regularly visiting clients in their homes or hospital. The Public Trust Office continues to meet the challenges faced by this state's increasingly decentralised population.

The Public Trust Office is working closely with Queensland government agency program providers, clerks of the court and government departments to seek new ways of delivering services to the Queensland community. For example, it has developed relationships with the 68 Queensland Government Agent Program offices across the state in regional areas in order to enhance its service delivery.

These networks have allowed the Public Trust Office to present education seminars to a diverse range of community groups on a regular basis. In 2008-09 the Public Trust Office will continue to deliver educational and informational seminars to community groups across Queensland, a service complemented by site visits to frail, ill or immobile clients. The development and enhancement of the community education awareness program empowers Queenslanders to make their own financial decisions, plan wills and arrange enduring powers of attorney. By actively engaging with the community, the Public Trust Office ensures that information is shared across rural and regional communities, strengthening services to the community and empowering people to make their own decisions. I am particularly happy to support their efforts, bearing in mind my responsibilities assisting the Premier in western Queensland.

**Mrs ATTWOOD:** Attorney, I refer you to pages 1-180, 1-181 and 1-183 of the Service Delivery Statements. Could you inform the House what community services the Public Trust Office delivers? In addition, how are these services funded?

**Mr SHINE:** I am delighted to answer that question. It is essential that all Queenslanders have access to trustee services, no matter what their financial situation. The Public Trust Office, through its 15 regional offices, delivers a range of professional, accessible and reliable trustee services. Without these services there are many people in our community who would struggle to afford assistance with important legal, financial, trust or professional matters. By providing immediate rebates, the Public Trust Office ensures people with limited financial means can access such services.

The available services include a free will-making service, which encompasses the provision of both wills and enduring powers of attorney, legal assistance to enable Queenslanders with limited financial means to pursue civil actions in the courts and free information services. A large number of people do not have a will, which is an important legal document that every adult should have. In the event of their death, a current will is the only way a person can protect the assets they have worked hard to accumulate and ensure that they are distributed according to their wishes. The Public Trust Office provides wills free of charge irrespective of whether it is appointed the executor. In 2007-08 the Public Trust Office made 21,129 wills, allowing people to plan a smooth transfer of the assets to their loved ones. This is an increase of 22 per cent in this service in just four years. Through its free will kit, the Public Trust Office helps thousands of Queenslanders write or update their wills.

The Public Trust Office also provides free advice to members of the community and to the courts and tribunals in areas in which it has expertise. As Queensland's population grows and ages, more and more people are seeking Public Trust Office services to help them plan for the future. Community members can also seek advice in relation to such matters as trust and deceased estate administration and enduring powers of attorney.

The Public Trust Office fills a gap by providing vital services to Queenslanders, particularly those who cannot afford a private lawyer. Significantly, these services are provided at no cost to government, with the costs offset by funds generated commercially through other areas of the Public Trust Office's business and investments. The Public Trust Office plays an essential role assisting the government create a fair, socially cohesive and culturally vibrant society.

**CHAIR:** The time allocated for the consideration of the estimates of expenditure in the portfolio of the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister Assisting the Premier in Western Queensland has expired. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the Attorney and the departmental officers for their attendance today. The transcript of the hearing will be available on the Hansard page of the parliament's web site within approximately two hours.

**Mr SHINE:** Mr Chair, I would like to say a few words before you conclude today's proceedings. I would like to thank you, Mr Chair, and all members of the committee for your participation. I acknowledge all of the staff of the Department of Justice and Attorney-General, particularly my director-general, Julie Grantham. I would also like to thank the independent statutory authorities and my ministerial office staff, all of whom have worked for a considerable period of time in preparation for today's events.

The preparation for budget estimates is very time consuming and it is particularly intensive. However, at the end of the day it is a very important process to examine the expenditure of the government in an important portfolio like Attorney-General and Justice. So I thank everyone involved. I think that the information given today has been informative for all concerned, including me.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. The committee will now break for afternoon tea and resume at 3.30 pm with the Minister for Emergency Services.

**Proceedings suspended from 3.15 pm to 3.33 pm**

## ESTIMATES COMMITTEE E—EMERGENCY SERVICES

### In Attendance

Hon. NS Roberts, Minister for Emergency Services

**Department of Emergency Services**

Mr J McGowan, Director-General

Commissioner L Johnson, Commissioner, Queensland Fire and Rescue Service

Commissioner D Melville, Commissioner, Queensland Ambulance Service

Mr F Pagano, Executive Director, Emergency Management Queensland

Mr G Mahon, Executive Director, Strategic Policy and Executive Services

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**CHAIR:** The hearings of Estimates Committee E are now resumed. The next item for consideration is the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Emergency Services.

I welcome the Minister for Emergency Services and his staff to today's hearing. 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 time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will sound two minutes after an extension of time has been given. The standing orders require that at least half the time available for questions and answers is to be allocated to non-government members. Any time expended when the committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between government and non-government members.

I ask departmental officers to identify themselves when they first come forward to answer a question if the minister is to refer a question to them so that Hansard can record their name. I also ask that all mobile phones and pagers be switched off or to silent mode.

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Emergency Services open for examination. The time allocated is two hours and 30 minutes. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement?

**Mr ROBERTS:** Yes, I do.

**CHAIR:** Minister, you have five minutes.

**Mr ROBERTS:** I welcome the opportunity to outline the government's record investment of \$940.8 million in the Emergency Services portfolio in 2008-09. This record investment represents an 11 per cent increase on last year. It is proof positive that the Blich government is committed to plan for the future and to build tomorrow's Queensland today. Significantly, the Queensland Ambulance Service budget has increased by \$53.1 million to \$455.7 million. As the committee would be aware, the Ambulance Service has experienced unprecedented and growing demand for its services. The government has responded to this by funding an extra 255 ambulance officers last financial year and by commissioning an audit of the Ambulance Service.

I am pleased to report that the QAS attended 50 per cent and 90 per cent of code 1 cases within 8.3 minutes and 16.7 minutes respectively last financial year. These results are comparable with 2006-07 results of 8.2 minutes and 16.5 minutes respectively, despite the increase of more than 57,000 urgent code 1 and code 2 responses, or almost 10 per cent, over the last 12 months. These results are much better than the estimated actual results in the Service Delivery Statements, which were 8.5 minutes for the 50th percentile and 17 minutes for the 90th percentile.

Queensland Fire and Rescue Service is also on track to exceed expectations with its response times against the benchmark of 90 per cent for structural fires within 14 minutes—with an expected actual response time for permanent full-time stations of 98.3 per cent; composite permanent/auxiliary stations, 93.7 per cent; and auxiliary stations, 90.5 per cent.

I can release today the Ambulance Service's plans for the regional deployment for 245 of the 250 extra ambulance officers being funded this financial year. The regional breakdown of the 245 will be 72 for the Brisbane region, 63 for the south-eastern region, 40 for the north coast region, 21 for the northern region, 20 for the central region, 15 for the south-western region and 11 for the far-northern region. In addition, three full-time equivalent emergency medical dispatcher positions will be allocated across the state. Among these recruits will be 221 extra paramedics, 19 extra emergency medical

dispatchers, six operational supervisors and four regional staff educators. Of the 250 additional officers funded this financial year, five remain unallocated in order for the QAS to strategically deploy extra officers throughout the year based on operational needs.

One of the key issues raised by the ambulance audit was the proportion of ambulance operational staff which at the time of the audit was 77.6 per cent—lower than the national average of 81.7 per cent. I can confirm that this proportion has now increased to 80.96 per cent and is expected to increase again to 82.31 per cent this financial year—a shift of almost five per cent to the front line.

Earlier today I released the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service efficiency review and the government's response to it. The government has accepted recommendations to secure more than \$5 million in savings, and these will be invested in up to an extra 45 front-line firefighters. The review has identified scope for greater efficiencies and commitment of extra resources to the front line. The government has accepted four of the six efficiency measures to secure savings for additional front-line firefighters.

The government has invested in greater coordination between the services. The emergency services computer-aided dispatch system, or ESCAD, is the first integrated dispatch system for both services. It allows dispatchers to automatically notify crews from the other service to incidents in which their assistance is required. Since the rollout of the ESCAD system, its operational availability has been 99.9983 per cent, despite six unplanned outages since its introduction. As minister, I am determined to see a safe and reliable rollout and performance of the ESCAD system. Last week I announced an independent review of ESCAD following advice from the Queensland Government Chief Information Office. I also announced that there would be a software upgrade scheduled for the early hours of Thursday, 24 July. During the upgrade, communication centre staff will use the manual backup system for dispatch.

Before concluding my remarks, I would like to pay tribute and thank the many thousands of professional full-time and volunteer emergency service workers and their families, and so many others who worked during the flood crisis earlier this year and also during the many other emergencies they respond to on a regular basis. I welcome the opportunity to respond to the committee's questions about the budgeted expenditure of the Department of Emergency Services this year.

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

**Mr MALONE:** I welcome the minister and his staff. I do not know how we dragged the last shift, Minister, but it seems to happen fairly regularly. But we will move forward.

Minister, during your opening statement to estimates last year you said, 'The service is heading in the right direction.' That statement, in the theme of *Yes Minister*, is probably fairly courageous considering that you faced an audit, lost your DG, had the commissioner and his deputy resign and some more ongoing problems. I have a simple question first. Are you and your senior managers confident that you are heading in the right direction now?

**Mr ROBERTS:** Absolutely. I think when I said that at the last estimates committee hearing I was confident, after a few short days in the chair, that the service was doing a lot of work to address the increasing demand for services. As the member and the committee would be aware, over the last few years the Queensland Ambulance Service has been experiencing unprecedented levels of demand, growing particularly in our code 1 and code 2 areas in the vicinity of 10 and up to 12 per cent a year.

The government has responded very proactively. The management of the Queensland Ambulance Service and the Department of Emergency Services have responded very proactively to those demands which are placed before them. As I will keep repeating and have repeated many times over the past 12 months, the government provided additional resources for 250 extra ambulance officers last year. Through efficiencies we were able to employ an extra five, making an additional 255 ambulance officers over that year.

As I indicated in my opening statement, response times over the year have remained consistent. If you look at the trend lines of response times over the four quarters of the year, there was a reduction in the first quarter of the year. That followed on from a very heavy flu season in which there was unprecedented demand not just on the Ambulance Service but also on the Queensland health system. The trend improvement over the year clearly shows, in my view, that the increased resources that we have rolled out across the regions are having an impact on our ability to respond.

One of the other significant reforms that we have undertaken in the service over the last 12 months has been the reform of the roster system. Again, in my view, this is a very significant step forward. When I first became minister I regularly spoke with ambulance officers who raised issues with me about the 10-hour rosters. The Ambulance Service entered into, in good faith, the introduction of those rosters. But it was obvious that there were issues that needed to be addressed.

With the introduction of the 12-hour rosters I believe that we will see a number of efficiencies in terms of our ability to respond to particularly our code 1 and code 2 emergencies. The early evidence is that those rosters are assisting in that regard. It is very early days and I am not making any significant claims here, but in speaking to both ambulance officers and looking at the results in the few months since the 12-hour rosters were introduced I think it is very clear that the system is improving.

Member for Mirani, do I believe that the Ambulance Service is heading in the right direction? Yes, I do. As you are aware, the Queensland Ambulance Service underwent a very intense audit late last year. That in many respects was a circuit-breaker for the service. It provided us with an opportunity to look at the resources that we had and how they could be best applied to the front line. That ambulance audit identified an opportunity to shift \$12 million or thereabouts in resourcing from non-operational areas into front-line service delivery. We have been working on that very substantially since that time and the results will be self-evident as time goes by.

**Mr MALONE:** Could you detail in respect of the new work contracts for the commissioner and the deputy commissioner whether there have been pay increases? Have there been any issues associated with the payout of the contracts of the previous commissioner and deputy commissioner?

**Mr ROBERTS:** Specifically what are you asking in terms of pay increases?

**Mr MALONE:** I am specifically asking whether there have been cost increases for the new contracts and whether there have been payouts in terms of the old contracts?

**Mr ROBERTS:** In terms of the payouts, my understanding is that they are in confidence. In terms of the wages and conditions, my clear understanding is that wages and conditions of the new commissioner are identical but for those wage increases which would always apply as a result of increases across the public sector. My understanding is that there has been no change to the pay arrangements for the new commissioner.

**Mr MALONE:** Just to clarify, had the contracts of the previous commissioner and deputy commissioner run out or was there time to run on those contracts?

**Mr ROBERTS:** The former commissioner left on his expiry date. That was announced at the time that he made his public announcement and put a message out to staff. The deputy commissioner will retire from the service on the expiry date of his contract.

**Mr MALONE:** I am becoming increasingly concerned about the delivery of ethical standards within your department. Is that performed by contractors? If so, could you name the contractors and detail the cost to the department?

**Mr ROBERTS:** I am not quite sure what point you are driving at. But we have an Ethical Standards Unit comprising officers employed directly by the department. I could answer the question, unless I am corrected by others, that they are permanent employees of the department. The director-general has just advised me, if necessary, consultants or contractors may be required to provide support. Essentially, the Ethical Standards Unit is an in-house unit of the department which, as you are aware, conducts investigations into matters as referred to it.

**Mr MALONE:** Perhaps I could reword the question. Does the Ethical Standards Unit within your department seek advice or counsel from a separate organisation or contractors et cetera? If so, could you name them and detail the cost to the department?

**Mr ROBERTS:** As I indicated, yes, from time to time they would. If I can take that on notice we will provide further detail to the member later in the hearing.

**Mr MALONE:** Recommendation 4.2 of the audit addresses the vital issue of staff welfare, the high level of staff stress, grievances, anger with longer hours, poor management, a lack of career paths et cetera. It calls on the QAS to—

- take immediate steps to reduce its levels of absenteeism, separation rates and overtime, building on the work already underway in the organisation;
- implement procedures which will allow full-time ambulance officers to complete their shifts with the transfer of a patient at hospital as a means of reducing overtime and fatigue;
- continue its focus on the safety and health of the workforce and maintain reductions in the level of grievances reported ...

What happened in terms of a budget allocation to implement this recommendation? What are you specifically doing to redress low staff morale and high turnover?

**Mr ROBERTS:** There are a number of components to that question. I will try to pick up on as many as I can. I gather the thrust of it is: what are we doing to support staff in what is an increasingly difficult situation in terms of the pressures placed upon them? If I can just pick one aspect of that. That relates to overtime which is one of the issues that you mentioned.

There is no doubt that staff in the Queensland Ambulance Service—our paramedics and front-line ambulance officers—are called upon from time to time to conduct overtime as a result of shift overruns or meal breaks et cetera. There is no question about that. It is an issue in terms of staff welfare that the Queensland Ambulance Service has put a lot of effort into.

The 12-hour roster is a significant step forward, I believe, in addressing many of the issues that you have raised. When I first became minister I spoke to many officers about their experiences with the previous roster system and what they desired from a new roster system. A couple of the key items always raised with me is that people were looking for more certainty about when they finished their job. They were looking at the opportunity to have their meal breaks when they needed a meal break. Importantly, and just as regularly, people wanted to have more regular days off more often. Essentially they were the underpinning principles which guided the negotiations and the final establishment of the 12-hour roster system.

To pick one particular aspect of that, I want to talk about overtime. As you are aware, because you speak to ambulance officers as well, overtime is an issue that confronts many officers, particularly after a tough day at work—and they do plenty of them. Let me give you some figures on the early indications of the impact of the 12-hour rosters since they were introduced.

Since the introduction of the new rostering system more shifts are finishing on time. It is early days but the indications at this stage are very clear—more shifts are finishing on time. The information that I have to date is that the number of shifts finishing on time has increased by three per cent from 75.2 per cent to 78.2 per cent. Obviously, from a paramedics' point of view, you would want every shift to finish on time. But that to me is quite a significant step forward. I believe that that can in a significant part be attributed to the introduction of the 12-hour rosters.

Let us look at the amount of shift extension overtime. Again this is an indicator when you look at the whole overtime pool how much of it is attributed to shift extensions. The figures for the period from 28 March to 6 July show that the amount of shift extension overtime—the amount of time of shift overruns—has reduced from 26 per cent of the total overtime hours to 19.6 per cent, a 6.4 per cent drop. That is pretty significant and I believe an indication that at least the 12-hour rosters are helping with staff morale and staff wellbeing.

**Mr MALONE:** It was fairly clear when the Premier stood up in parliament and said that the government would guarantee four days on, four days off. I am not sure that the roster system that you are implementing and talking about currently is actually guaranteeing paramedics four days on, four days off. Can you indicate to me where four day on, four day off rosters are implemented? At which stations are they implemented? When will you finally roll out four days on, four days off across Queensland?

**Mr ROBERTS:** It is a good question. One of the issues that was talked about quite extensively leading up to the change to the 12-hour rosters was that basic core principle of four days on, four days off. There is no doubt about that. In fact, I would argue that it still does form the basis of the roster system that has been delivered.

The first point that you have to recognise is that the final implementation arrangements for the introduction of 12-hour shifts into the Ambulance Service were put to a ballot of ambulance officers. Every single officer had the opportunity to vote. Some 81 per cent of those who returned their ballot—and my recollection is that it was over 1,500 people, which is a pretty significant number of paramedics and other officers—supported the arrangements. So in terms of the 12-hour shifts and the four days, on four days off, the core principle is there. The final implementation arrangements were supported by 81 per cent of people.

The other important point to note is that each of the particular arrangements that apply in local areas and regions were negotiated specifically by the union and its delegates and ultimately voted on by the staff in that region. So the final outcome of the implementation of the 12-hour shifts was supported and negotiated by people at the local level.

When I move around and talk to people about the 12-hour shifts I ask them a couple of questions. How many extra days off do you get as a result of these rosters? It varies across the state. I have spoken to people in areas where they have an extra 20 to 30 clear days off. You would be familiar with the term 'grey days' which means that they might finish at one o'clock in the morning. These are clear days off—no interruption; 24 hours clear. In some cases they are getting 20 to 30 extra days off in a year. The feedback I am getting from ambulance officers is that overall and in general the 12-hour rosters are far more welcomed than the 10-hour roster. One of the other significant points about the 12-hour roster system is that we put in place a principle that when they got to the end of their shift the final job they did was their final job.

Previously there were many instances where people would do their final job at the end of the 10-hour shift and on the way back to the ambulance station they would get a call and they would be off. We built into this system the final job is at the end of your 12-hour shift. We will try where we can to get relief arrangements into the hospitals or wherever. That is something which we need to work at and something that is working well in some areas and not as well as it could in others. Overwhelmingly, the feedback I am getting in terms of finishing on the last job is that people are saying it is working. Getting back to your core question with regard to the four days off and the four days on arrangement, I have



seen many rosters where there are four days on and four days off. I have seen others where they are getting three days off and others where they are getting five consecutive days off. It is a mix, but it has been voted on locally by local people.

**Mr MALONE:** Thank you, Minister. My understanding is that the EBAs for both the ambos and the fires are still moving forward. Would you like to brief the committee on where the department is currently in terms of negotiating the EBAs for the QAS and the QFRS?

**Mr ROBERTS:** In terms of the Queensland Ambulance Service, we have already had preliminary negotiations. My recollection is that the agreement is due to expire in June next year. I am sorry; that is the fire one. The ambulance agreement is due to expire in September this year, so negotiations are now underway and meetings have been occurring between the service and the union and its delegates. So that is a matter which is ongoing and hopefully we will be able to get a good negotiated outcome which benefits employees. In terms of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, that agreement expires in June of next year. We have not yet started formal negotiations with the UFU in relation to that, but I understand that there may have been some preliminary discussions but there has been no formal negotiation framework put in place yet. Again, these matters are well in hand. We expect them to be a very robust discussion but ultimately we hope that we get an agreement which is beneficial to the employees and obviously to the service as well.

**Mr MALONE:** Thank you, Minister. In terms of the EBA, I guess from my perspective there have certainly been some changes to the service—

**Mr ROBERTS:** Which one are you talking about?

**Mr MALONE:** With respect to the EBAs for both the QFRS and the QAS, there certainly have been some changed circumstances and certainly the employment conditions in Queensland have changed dramatically in terms of what people can actually earn, particularly those people who have high levels of responsibility, as those two organisations have. It is incumbent on the government to look at the level of the responsibilities within those services and be reasonably generous in terms of a negotiated outcome, because if you are not you will have people, as they are currently, moving from those services into the mining industry et cetera. Are you open minded in terms of the EBAs or are you going to stick to the government's standard level of remuneration in terms of CPI et cetera?

**Mr ROBERTS:** Obviously there will be a government framework that we will negotiate within. In terms of these EBAs and recognising people's skill levels—and I can focus particularly here on the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service—you would be aware that in 2006 the EBA negotiations with the firefighters included a requirement and an agreement indeed to conduct a job evaluation which looked at the role and responsibilities of firefighters from the entry level through to experienced firefighters and station officers. That was the predominant focus of it. The Mercer report which arose out of that review did identify that the role of firefighters has changed over the 10 or so years since the previous job evaluation.

The government, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and indeed the union have all acknowledged that. In fact, without getting into all of the details of the current disagreement that we have with the United Firefighters Union, we are in fact on common ground on many issues. We agree that the role of a firefighter has changed. We accept the Mercer report findings that there have been changes in value to the firefighter role and we actually agree that there needs to be an adjustment to the classification structure and wages to compensate for those recognised changes in job value. The issue of course again—and this is probably an issue for another question—is that we have a difference of opinion on how that particular document can be interpreted and applied to the classification structure. Unless you want me to, I will not go into all of the detail of that particular dispute. But, in terms of a general response to the question, of course we have an open mind in terms of these negotiations. We want to deliver a good outcome for the employees and a good outcome for the service.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I call the member for Mount Ommaney.

**Mrs ATTWOOD:** Good afternoon, Minister. I refer to page 2-98 of the Service Delivery Statements and the number of State Emergency Service—SES—volunteers and the number of SES volunteer hours of operation, and I ask: how has the department allocated resources to support the work of the SES in recent years?

**Mr ROBERTS:** At the outset, I want to again pay tribute to the tremendous contributions that our SES volunteers provide to communities across Queensland. In the short time I have been minister, I and indeed many Queenslanders have seen the tremendous sacrifices and efforts that these people go to at all hours of the day and night in all types of weather to support their local communities. These people are volunteers. They do it for nothing and we need to take every opportunity to thank them for the magnificent contribution they make to protecting and, in many cases, saving lives. It goes without saying that obviously the government values very highly the contribution they make. In terms of the government commitment to these volunteers, in 2008-09 the budget allocation is \$12.464 million which will enable the department to continue to provide resourcing, support training and other administrative support to the operations of the SES. It needs to be understood that we do this in partnership with local authorities.

The SES, although governed in a sense by state legislation, is very much based within local authorities and we very much appreciate the very cooperative relationship we have with local authorities in that regard.

In terms of the \$12.464 million we have allocated this year, that compares to funding in 2005-06—just three short years ago—of \$6.7 million. So in three short years we have effectively doubled the financial contribution that we have made to the SES. In recognising the need to boost equipment and training, last year the state allocated \$7.458 million as part of the 2006 election commitment Safeguarding Cyclone Communities which had a range of initiatives attached to it and a lot of dollars allocated to particular initiatives. For example, \$1.185 million was allocated for upgrades to emergency communications equipment and support staff and \$2.931 million was allocated for a range of key equipment initiatives including personal protective equipment, rescue equipment, rescue trailers, flood boats, upgrading our equipment stores and communication packs. Money was spent on the Cyclone Summit which was conducted early this year. Money was also spent on personnel equipment maintenance et cetera. Some \$3.342 million was also allocated for improved volunteer training, and that included money to enhance regional training delivery. There was also money allocated for training materials, enhanced first-aid training and training package enhancement as well. In 2008-09, as I have indicated, we are allocating \$12.464 million to support the service.

**Mrs ATTWOOD:** I refer the minister to the eighth dot point on page 2-94 of the Service Delivery Statements and mention of the audit of the Queensland Ambulance Service last year. Minister, what were the outcomes of the audit and how have they been implemented for the further improvement of front-line Ambulance Service delivery in Queensland?

**Mr ROBERTS:** As I have indicated in answers to questions to the member for Mirani, the Queensland Ambulance Service audit was in many senses a circuit breaker which enabled the service—something which is continuing now to this day and will continue beyond today—to really look long and hard at the resources that it has and how those resources can be reallocated where possible to front-line service delivery. In a nutshell, that is what the audit findings were about—that is, that we need to look at every opportunity within the Queensland Ambulance Service to question why we are allocating resources to particular activities, whether those activities are a priority or actually required by us to perform and if not we have to think about how we can allocate those resources to front-line service.

When I move throughout the state and talk to our ambulance officers I tell them time and time again that they are the most important aspect of the Queensland Ambulance Service. They are the ones delivering our priority reason for existence, and that is getting a well-trained and professional paramedic to a sick, dying or injured person as quickly as possible and getting them safely to hospital. That is what it is all about, and we should be spending the majority of our resources on achieving that objective. The audit, as I said, provided a circuit breaker and indeed an impetus for change and gave us an opportunity to implement a range of initiatives which in many instances also looked at how we managed the increasing demand that the service is experiencing. I have said here today and I have said many times before that we are experiencing unprecedented levels of demand, running over the last few years in the vicinity of 10 per cent to 12 per cent a year. That is unprecedented. It is well above five and six times population growth, so this is something which is exceptional and requires a significant response, and the audit provided us with that opportunity.

The audit came up with 21 recommendations in seven key areas of demand management, and I will talk more about that in a moment; budgeting and resourcing; workforce; service delivery models; performance management; our interface with Queensland Health, which is a critical part of our existence; and also future funding strategies. One of the key elements arising out of the audit was savings identified of about \$12 million which we have used, amongst many things, to fund 100 of the 250 ambulance officers who were put in the field this year. But it also talked about a range of other issues such as demand management strategies et cetera. In terms of the total package of \$12.2 million in savings, \$4.3 million of those were being redirected from non-essential services—and that is where we have had to make some very tough decisions about withdrawing from some services which the Ambulance Service has traditionally provided for some time—and \$7.9 million was identified across both the Department of Emergency Services and also the Queensland Ambulance Service's corporate services area.

**Mr FENLON:** Minister, with reference to page 2-94 of the Service Delivery Statements which discusses Queensland Fire and Rescue Service's focus on the new challenges and risks in front-line service delivery, can you advise what the outcome has been from the internal review into the service that you announced back in December 2007 and what this means for addressing some of those challenges?

**Mr ROBERTS:** As you would be aware, the Auditor-General recently conducted an audit of the Rural Fire Service and the Auditor-General identified a range of issues where he believed that the performance and in fact the operation of the service needed to be improved. In many respects we have agreed with many of the issues that have been raised by the Auditor-General. In fact, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service has for some time recognised many of those factors and indeed has put in

place internal mechanisms to address them. The important issue that arises out of the Rural Fire Service audit is that it acknowledged that the Rural Fire Service currently provides effective management of fires within rural communities. That is a very significant statement.

If we look at some of the recommendations, as I have said, we are working to address those and in fact have been for some time. But the Auditor-General's report actually acknowledges that the Rural Fire Service is performing effectively at this particular point in time. The Auditor-General also recognised that the Fire and Rescue Service has taken a number of positive actions towards addressing sustainability issues, which was the principal focus of many of the recommendations in the report. I want to emphasise that any changes that we make to the Rural Fire Service need to be done in a way which do not overly bureaucratise the service. The important point with the Rural Fire Service is that this is a volunteer community based organisation. In fact, it is many organisations. We have more than 1,500 rural fire brigades throughout Queensland with about 36,000 members.

They are locally based community volunteer organisations. The way in which we apply many of the recommendations or suggestions made by the Auditor-General needs to be handled carefully so that we do not create a situation where good, decent, hardworking volunteers feel that they are overwhelmed with bureaucracy. We need to work with them. We need to ensure we have systems in place to ensure they can do what they do best, which is get out there in the community and fight fires.

There have, in fact, been a number of significant advancements made to the Rural Fire Service in recent years. If I can, I will just highlight a few of those. In 1997-98, the budget for the rural operations was \$9.7 million. It increased to \$16.4 million in 2002-03 and in 2008-09 it has reached a level of \$28.2 million. So in the space of 10 years the budget allocation to the Rural Fire Service has basically close to trebled.

**CHAIR:** My question follows on from the question asked by the member for Greenslopes. With reference to page 2-94 of the Service Delivery Statements, can you advise the committee what the recent Auditor-General's report into the Rural Fire Service means for the RFS? What action will be taken by the government to respond to the challenges highlighted? What has been done already?

**Mr ROBERTS:** I think I have actually just answered that question.

**CHAIR:** Is that adequately dealt with? I will follow up. Can I also refer you to page 2-94 of the Service Delivery Statements and the workplace health and safety provisions. I ask: can you provide an update on the response to reports of five cases of cancer among former and current staff at the Atherton Fire Station over the past 15 years?

**Mr ROBERTS:** At the outset I want to recognise the significant events that have taken place at Atherton and also pay tribute to the firefighters at the station and their families for the way in which they have handled this very, very difficult situation and the way in which they have worked with both the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and Queensland Health in working through what has been a very difficult and traumatic issue for them. They have handled this matter exceptionally well. A number of their colleagues have experienced very, very traumatic illnesses through cancer. It is a matter that the fire service has taken very, very seriously. We have endeavoured to provide as much support as we can to those firefighters and their families during this very difficult time.

As the committee may be aware, five staff members who currently work or who previously worked at Atherton Fire Station have been diagnosed with various forms of cancer in the period ranging from 2003 to 2007. These cases were highlighted, in a sense, to Queensland Fire and Rescue Service management on 12 December 2007, when it became apparent that we had a particular issue and problem at the station. The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service acted immediately and formed a high-level project team, which included the United Firefighters Union. Again, I want to place on the record my thanks and appreciation to the firefighters union for the support that they have given both their members and the service in conducting this matter in the most appropriate way that we can.

I visited the station on 16 December, along with the commissioner and the UFU state secretary. We reassured staff that we were there to conduct a very open and transparent investigation into these issues. I also took the opportunity at that time to brief both the member for Tablelands and the former mayor of Atherton about the developments at the station.

The work that was undertaken since those visits essentially boiled down to a very comprehensive epidemiological study that was conducted by Queensland Health. That study was presented to the firefighters before it was made public. It did identify, as has been published in the media on many occasions, that the incidence of cancer at the station did meet the definition of a cancer cluster. So our original concerns were well justified and the efforts that we took to support the staff and to ensure that all avenues were pursued to investigate this matter were put in place.

There were two additional reports on testing which was undertaken at the station. The first was by the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency and the second was from the Safety in Mines Testing and Research Station. This again showed that there were no materials of concern identified at the station.

**CHAIR:** I refer to the increased SES hours of operation in the 2007-08 financial year. I would like to acknowledge the fantastic role our SES volunteers played during the flooding earlier this year. What efforts are underway to recruit and attract even more volunteers to the SES in Queensland?

**Mr ROBERTS:** As I have indicated, SES volunteers are the backbone of many communities. They do this for nothing. They volunteer in circumstances which many of us would find very, very difficult and in some cases traumatic. So again, we simply take the opportunity to commend them and thank them for their work.

The SES, as the committee is aware, is a cooperative partnership in many respects between the state government and local government. So many of the recruiting activities for the SES take place at the local level. We recently released a recruitment kit for our Rural Fire Service which is proving to be very, very effective. It provides a range of materials for local brigades to target local communities to recruit new members and it has been used very, very effectively. The early reports are that we are getting good feedback about the numbers of new recruits that are being secured.

The State Emergency Service is basically established under the Disaster Management Act 2003, which not just provides its establishment but also supports its functions, which are to advise and assist local government, government departments and other bodies to educate and train members of the public; to coordinate, direct and control members of the public; and to provide material and resources with respect to counterdisaster purposes.

One of the things we have done to try to assist with recruiting in the SES is put a lot of work into developing a recruitment kit similar to what was delivered for the Rural Fire Service. That particular kit has not yet been finalised, but we have some samples of the types of materials that have been developed. The kits will include posters and guidance to local brigades et cetera on how they can recruit. We have been working in very strong partnership with the insurance company NRMA, which has been very good, to form a supporting partnership and sponsorship of the SES with us. That has resulted in a number of initiatives, including advertising which they pay for during the storm season, but also will now assist us in producing this recruitment material that will ultimately be rolled out to SES groups across the state.

It is interesting to note that after a very, very busy year the recruiting activities of the SES have, in fact, seen some good results, even despite the fact that these kits are yet to be rolled out. It is encouraging to see 540 people join it across the state in one of the biggest boosts to membership in the service's 33-year history.

**Ms van LITSENBURG:** I refer you to smoke alarm performance measures on page 2-99 of the Service Delivery Statements and the target of 90 per cent for the proportion of households with operational smoke alarms installed. How realistic is this target?

**Mr ROBERTS:** It is very realistic. As the committee would be aware, smoke alarms were made compulsory in all Queensland households last year. We have basically seen 12 months now since that legislation was enacted. One of the pleasing statistics—and we derive this from a regular household survey that is undertaken—is that in the past year the number of Queensland homes with a smoke alarm has increased by nine per cent to 96.2 per cent of Queensland households. That is a very significant step forward. It is showing similar steps forward to what is happening in other states which also have similar legislation. But again, I think it really demonstrates that Queenslanders are heeding the message, which the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service very actively promotes, that smoke alarms save lives.

One of the issues which we ask people to take note of—and indeed this is the reason we will continue to promote the legislation and our principal focus is on an educational role; we will enforce the legislation where required but we want to educate people—is that currently the statistics show that 87.6 per cent have an operational smoke alarm. That is up 8.6 per cent in a year but, again, it is showing that there is a gap between the number of smoke alarms that exist in people's homes and those that are operational.

One of the constant reminders that we do, and we do it on April Fools' Day each year but in terms of a date it can be any day—a birthday, Christmas Day or anything else—is that people need to regularly change their batteries. So we will continue with regular campaigning to support the awareness of this legislation but also encourage people to change their batteries quite regularly.

**Mr MALONE:** QAS has done quite a bit of recruiting to attract paramedics—from interstate, the UK, Canada, South Africa—to Queensland. Can the minister outline the total cost of the recruitment drive? What is the average cost of recruiting a paramedic from overseas in comparison to recruiting a local paramedic?

**Mr ROBERTS:** Sorry, what was that last question?

**Mr MALONE:** Can you detail the costs of bringing a paramedic in from overseas as compared to recruiting one locally?

**Mr ROBERTS:** In terms of some of those figures, I might need to take some of them on notice. We will see what we have. Just generally, as I said, we will try to identify some of the costs for you, but the Ambulance Service has had to embark on an overseas recruitment campaign. The simple reality is that there are not enough qualified paramedics within Queensland, or indeed within Australia, to satisfy our demands. We are putting on 250 new officers this year, as you know, and there were 255 last year. A significant proportion of those will need to be qualified ambulance officers.

So in order to meet the demand, we have engaged in quite a proactive overseas recruitment campaign that is principally focused on the United Kingdom, because the training and the models of service delivery over there are very similar. We have identified that the paramedics who come across from the UK fit in very, very well in terms of their skills, their competencies and the type of work that they perform.

Since we commenced the qualified recruitment campaign in March 2006—and this is up to June 2008—there have been 190 appointments of qualified ambulance professionals. That includes 113 resulting from campaigns conducted in the United Kingdom. Others recruited from these campaigns included experienced paramedics from Queensland and interstate. In November 2007, 90 interviews were conducted in the United Kingdom to determine suitability for appointment to the QAS, with 56 applications being progressed for appointment.

In terms of the costs of those campaigns, of course there is travel expenditure. Last year in the United Kingdom campaign \$77,000 was expended on travel expenses. Without having the detail directly in front of me, we had to send a team of people over to conduct up to 100 interviews over a period of one or two weeks. That was a very extensive interview process, because obviously we need to ascertain whether the qualifications they hold are suitable and indeed whether the individuals are suitable to bring to Queensland.

**Mr MALONE:** In respect of some of those paramedics who have arrived from overseas, I understand there are some problems with the 457 visas. What steps is the department taking to rectify that situation? How many paramedics are caught up in that situation?

**Mr ROBERTS:** I actually have been addressing this issue. Over recent days there has been some publicity about it. I do not accept the fact that there have been some significant problems with visas. We are waiting for the information. We have a labour agreement with the Australian government where, from my recollection, we can bring in up to 125 paramedics on section 457 visas and also section 854 visas—do not hold me to those particular sections. One is the long-term stay and the other is permanent residency.

There have been a number of instances where people have been brought across on the 457 visas. It has been brought to my attention that there are three where they are currently working through situations. For example, one I know had to meet certain qualifications standards before they were deemed eligible to apply for permanent residential status and the other two of these also needed to meet certain requirements before they could be considered for permanent residency. Overwhelmingly—and again without having the figures in front of me—I understand that we processed last year or since the agreement was put in place about 160 visas. The overwhelming majority of those are have been routine. In relation to those where there are issues, we are working to support the individuals involved and provide them with the support they need to move to permanent residency.

This issue was raised in the media over the last few days and I have made the point that we want these people to stay. We do not want them having uncertainty about whether they are here for the long stay or not. We want them to come into the Queensland Ambulance Service, to feel welcomed, to feel supported. We are putting in every endeavour we can to make sure that those very few of the ones who were brought over on those 457 visas are able to transition to permanent residency status as quickly as possible. On the advice provided to me when this issue arose in the media last week, I am pretty confident that we are going to be able to work through those few who are outstanding. Again I make the point that the overwhelming majority of those visas that we are working through have been processed routinely and those people have been supported. I am confident that the remaining ones, of which there are very few, can be resolved as well.

**Mr MALONE:** One of the big issues before the department currently is the delivery of the ESCAD system. Minister, can you detail to the committee—and you may even have to make an estimate—the amount of money that has been spent in terms of delivering the previous computer aided dispatch system as well as the latest technology with the ESCAD system? That goes back over quite a number of years, as you would know. Can you give us an estimate of the amount of money that has been spent in delivering this program and some estimation of how much more will be necessary to actually make the system workable?

**Mr ROBERTS:** In terms of previous expenditure, my understanding is that the total expenditure for the system is about \$9 million. There is a small allocation in this year's budget obviously because the bulk of the work has been conducted over a couple of years. This is a very good system. There has

been a fair bit of discussion about it in recent weeks. However, as I have indicated a number of times, this is a significant step forward for both the Queensland Ambulance Service and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service.

Just to go back to the cost, the total estimated cost is \$9.45 million of which we have spent \$9.212 million to date. That is in Budget Paper No. 3 on page 57. So there is a small amount of money left. This system for the first time brings together three separate systems. Queensland Ambulance Service currently, as you are aware, operates on two systems and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service as well has its own system. They cannot talk to each other. Even within the Queensland Ambulance Service you have the system which operates the patient transport sector. It cannot talk in a technical sense to the acute system. This ESCAD system for the first time provides a computer aided dispatch—and I stress ‘aided dispatch’—system which enables the entire service to be integrated and for us to be able to dispatch ambulance and fire services in a much more coordinated way. I am very confident that this system is going to deliver great benefits to the service.

As I indicated earlier in my opening statement, despite the outages which have occurred—and there have been six; there is no hiding behind that, we are addressing that. We know very clearly what the cause of a number of those outages were and we are working with the suppliers and the providers of the software and hardware to rectify software issues, and I indicated there will be a rollout of some upgrades next week. The important point about the system is that, since it has been implemented, it has handled around 150,000 calls for both fire and rescue and also ambulance services. It has been dispatching ambulances and fire services across the state since about March this year. But the important point in terms of availability is that, since the rollout began, 99.9983 per cent of the time it has been available. I think that is a significant point which needs to be noted.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, do not get me wrong, I have always been supportive of the upgraded technology. I have been concerned in recent days about the dispatch of fire-engines from far away to a fire just around the corner. Perhaps you could detail some of the problems with that particular incident? It certainly would be of concern to those people who were waiting for a fire-engine to turn up.

**Mr ROBERTS:** There has been a lot of misinformation put out about this particular issue. The important point to note about the ESCAD system and, indeed, any computer aided dispatch is that it is an aid to the dispatchers. It is not a computer dispatch system; it is a computer aided dispatch system. Yes, in recent days there have been highlighted in the media some instances—and there have been talks of up to 80 instances—where incorrect addresses have been found within the system. They are being progressively rectified as they are discovered. Have fire services actually been dispatched to incidents incorrectly? The advice I have received is no.

What this system has done in a very small number of cases—and I want to stress that—out of the many, many thousands that it has handled is that when a fire or incident is identified at a location, the first point to make is that we know where the fire or the incident is. Indeed, the location of that fire or incident is inputted into the computer aided dispatch system. So there is no question about the system not knowing where the fire or incident is. It makes a recommendation to the dispatcher about where the closest resources are. For example, it might come up with a list of three or five resources which are available for the professional dispatcher to make a decision as to which one, two or three resources they will send to that fire.

**Mr MALONE:** It seems to have stuffed up in this case, though.

**CHAIR:** The minister is answering the question.

**Mr ROBERTS:** The important point about this system, as I have indicated, is that it will bring up on the screen a recommendation of three, four or five resources—we are talking here about fire trucks or fire appliances—which can be dispatched to a particular incident. The dispatcher who knows the area—they know where the fire is, they know where the resources are located—will then make a decision which one of those he or she will send to that incident. Where the computer system has in a number of instances—and we are talking, on the advice I have received, about 80 over many thousands of instances—identified incorrectly, one in that list might be inappropriate or ridiculous, the dispatcher obviously has recognised that and will make a professional decision about which resource will be dispatched. That is the clear advice I have received and that is my clear understanding of how the system works.

Are those systems desirable? Of course they are not. We want a system which is reliable and safe, and I believe it is. Where we have identified these issues, they have been principally related to what is referred to as the geocoding for a particular address. So we actually have the correct address. The geocoding, which is the system which identifies precisely where it is placed, needs some adjustment and we are doing that as they are brought to our attention.

**Mr MALONE:** Thank you for that explanation. I would like to take it a little bit further. Obviously the system is reliant on a satellite navigation type product. How often is that upgraded? Could we have instances where because of either heavy rain or shadow from buildings that that technology may not necessarily be available at any one particular time? Will it not recognise recently developed subdivisions or places that have come on the map in recent times?

**Mr ROBERTS:** In relation to the information on which this platform is established—and we are talking about the addresses and so on—we rely upon information, for instance on roads, which is provided on a quarterly basis from the Department of Natural Resources and Water. That is the state digital road network information which includes updates of any new roads, developments et cetera. Departmentally, once we receive that update on a quarterly basis from the Department of Natural Resources and Water, that is transferred into the CAD system. So the actual information which underpins the decision-making process within the computer system is based on quarterly updates on a database which is provided to us by the Department of Natural Resources and Water. It is important to recognise that there are a considerable number of roads in Queensland which are unnamed. Obviously that presents an issue for any emergency service and also for the operators. Also there are some situations where colloquial names exist.

I am advised that the Department of Natural Resources and Water is leading a whole-of-government response to this issue, and the Department of Emergency Services is involved in that process to try to make sure that, where we do have roads which are in effect unnamed or have locally applied names, that information is provided into that database to render our system as accurate as possible.

In relation to the global positioning system that you referred to, again that relates to a system of satellites to fix the position on the globe of a particular object. I am advised that weather conditions do not affect that satellite navigation equipment. QAS utilises that technology in conjunction with automated vehicle location technology to track emergency response vehicles to dispatch the closest, most appropriate vehicle to a request for assistance.

Many of these are very technical questions. I was an electrician many years ago and I think I have a fair understanding of many of them. I just make the point that I am trying to explain as best I can. We do have a fundamental platform in terms of a database which is updated regularly. Yes, we do use satellite navigation and the advice I am receiving is that it is not impacted significantly by things such as weather.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, just as a follow-up, has the couple of failures that you have had impacted on the communications staff? Have there been any instances where they have taken stress leave or have there been instances where they are concerned about having problems delivering a service? In other words, have you had feedback from the communications centre from people who may be concerned about doing their jobs in an efficient manner?

**Mr ROBERTS:** Yes, I have. I have spoken both with the United Firefighters Union, which has raised issues with me about impacts on staff, and the ambulance employees union. I made the effort to go up to Toowoomba where some recent media coverage was raised in relation to this issue. I sat down and spoke with both the fire communications officers and also ambulance officers. In fact, one of the officers I spoke to had recently returned from stress leave. I spoke to that person at length about the implementation of the new system. Certainly for some individuals this has been a difficult transition. This, as I have indicated, is the most significant technological upgrade that the Department of Emergency Services, Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and Ambulance Service have undertaken. In any transition of that nature there are obviously pressures on staff.

We have endeavoured to put in place support mechanisms in terms of training and also opportunities for people to raise issues. I acknowledge that we probably did not do that as best we could in the early stages. In fact, as a result of some of the discussions that departmental officers have had we have provided additional support to support staff in this transition. We have lengthened the period for the rollout in some areas to make sure that we provide staff with the additional support that they need. We have gone back into some areas to provide direct support to individuals and to the staff. We have rejigged the schedule to allow sufficient time within the rollout program to support people.

In answer to your question, yes, it has been putting pressure on staff. We acknowledge that, but we think we have made some adjustments that will help them cope and help to deliver the new service.

**Mr FENLON:** I refer to page 2-92 of the Service Delivery Statements where it states the key demand strategies are being implemented in the Queensland Ambulance Service following an audit in 2007. Can you please advise what progress has been made on implementing these initiatives? How will this ultimately impact on front-line service delivery?

**Mr ROBERTS:** As I have indicated, the ambulance audit was a very significant milestone in the Queensland Ambulance Service's history and one which, I will say again, provided a circuit-breaker and an opportunity to change a lot of things that occurred within the service in terms of how we delivered that service.

The audit delivered a number of recommendations. A key number of those related specifically to demand management. As I have indicated, demand for ambulance services has increased in the range of 10 to 12 per cent, particularly in our code 1 and code 2 emergency cases, over the last few years. That is five and six times above the population increase. That is significant. One of the areas that we need to give a fair bit of attention to is how we actually manage that demand. Of course, that does not

mean that we do not want people who need the Ambulance Service to call; we do. If people need an ambulance, they should call 000. But the reality is that there are a number of instances where people are calling 000 when perhaps they should consider another option.

One of the things that arose out of the audit was a recommendation to conduct a community education campaign on the appropriate use of 000. We have now prepared that campaign. It will involve a series of advertisements that will run on television across the state, across a range of channels. It will also involve some printed material that will be available for distribution to members' offices and for ambulance officers to use in terms of promoting the more appropriate use of 000.

At this stage our plan is to roll out that campaign in Ambulance Week. I think that when you see it you will see that it is a very appropriate way of raising awareness. One thing that we do not want to do is to create a situation where more people call 000 just for the sake of it. Therefore, the crafting of the message has had to be done very carefully. The message basically is that you should really think about whether you really have an emergency before you call 000.

One of the other significant initiatives is enhanced clinical input at the point of the call. Experience and the evidence show us that if we can address these matters at the time of the call we can save resources which, in a sense, can go to the more urgent cases. One thing that we have currently implemented in south-east Queensland is placing in our communications centres at both Brisbane and the Gold Coast an officer who has clinical oversight of the decisions that dispatchers are making about which resources they send out into the field.

**CHAIR:** Minister, the committee has heard today about the Queensland government's commitment to tackling climate change. I refer to page 2-92 of the Service Delivery Statements and your department's commitment to managing the effect of climate change. Can you advise the committee what the agency is doing to reduce energy consumption and implement energy and water saving plans?

**Mr ROBERTS:** Like all government departments, the Department of Emergency Services has put a significant amount of effort into implementing and identifying ways in which both energy and water can be saved. It is factual that the Department of Emergency Services has been a very active participant in that program across government. Based on the measures that have been put in place, it is projected that the department's Kedron Park complex, which is basically our headquarters and where the overwhelming majority of our staff work, will achieve a 50 per cent reduction in actual water consumption in 2007-08 compared to 2004-05. I think that is a very significant achievement that both management and staff can be very proud of. It is a 50 per cent reduction from 2004-05 to 2007-08.

At the Kedron Park complex the department has installed nine water tanks with a total capacity of 87,600 litres. That is being used to top up the staff swimming pool, which we inherited from the old QUT campus. It is very much appreciated by staff. It is topped up with water collected from the roofs. The tank water is also used to irrigate gardens, which now feature many drought resistant native plants as a part of our overall conservation strategy.

In seven departmental properties we have upgraded our hot-water systems to solar electric. That has helped to achieved an estimated reduction of 21 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. That has occurred at Annerley Fire Station, Chermside Ambulance Station, Cleveland Ambulance Station, Caboolture's joint ambulance and fire station, Hillcrest Ambulance Station, Springwood Ambulance Station and Woodridge Ambulance Station. Three departmental properties have also adopted a change in electricity tariffs, which are expected to achieve savings of approximately \$31,000 over the 2007-08 year.

Water and energy efficient initiatives are also included in the design and construction of any new departmental buildings. For example, all new fire and ambulance stations now have energy efficient lighting and water tanks. The redevelopment of QCESA, the Queensland Combined Emergency Services Academy at Whyte Island, will use captured water which will result in a significant drop in the use of town water at that training facility.

**Mrs ATTWOOD:** Minister, page 2-92 of the Service Delivery Statements refers to the recruitment of 255 additional ambulance officers across the state in 2007-08. Will you please advise how this will boost ambulance coverage across the state? Specifically, can the minister refer to the additional staff devoted to the Brisbane region, including my own electorate of Mount Ommaney? What planning is under way to locate the additional 250 ambulance officers funded in this financial year?

**Mr ROBERTS:** I take the opportunity to elaborate a little more on the figures that I outlined in my opening statement. However, before I do I think it is important to note that the increased funding in last year's budget provided for 250 initially and we actually delivered 255. Funding in this year's budget will provide for another 250. Those 505 additional officers represent the biggest increase in ambulance resources in the service's history. It is very significant.

As I have indicated, we can take nothing for granted in relation to the increasing demand, but the quarterly figures that I outlined earlier show an increasing trend of improved response times. I personally believe that a significant part of that is as a result of the additional resources that we have rolled out over the past 12 months. Of course, in this financial year we have a budget that will deliver another 250.



In 2007-08 those additional 255 ambulance operatives and operational support staff were funded. As I have indicated, the 250 target was met and in fact we exceeded it. In the budget papers we identified that we would be bringing on additional officers last financial year in preparation for the rollout of the additional 250 this year. We indicated that we thought there would be about 40 additional officers on top of the 255 last year. We did, in fact, exceed that. Subject to me being corrected by my departmental officers, my understanding is that we in fact brought on in excess of 60. That is over and above the 255 prior to the end of the financial year. Of course, they are a part of the 250 that we are funding this year. A part of the 250 for this year also resulted from the QAS audit where we used savings to identify funding for 100.

With respect to your electorate, the Centenary Ambulance Station currently operates with a staffing establishment of 17 paramedics. In addition to the coverage provided to the local community by Centenary Ambulance Station, the electorate is covered by the south-west area support roster, which has a broader coverage across a number of areas in the south-west with a staffing establishment of 22 paramedics. While those officers commence their shifts at the South Brisbane Ambulance Station, they are deployed across the area to meet demand which, as I have indicated, is growing quite significantly. The additional coverage provided by the support roster has increased the coverage within the south-west area by two extra day shifts and two extra evening shifts, seven days per week. Those additional resources are delivering visible extra shifts, which means extra paramedics on the road, delivering support to your community and many communities in Brisbane.

**Mrs ATTWOOD:** Page 2-93 of the Service Delivery Statements refers to \$16.9 million to commission 145 ambulance vehicles. Can you please advise the committee how this will further enhance the delivery of ambulance services across the state, including the Brisbane region?

**Mr ROBERTS:** Again I highlight the point that last year we delivered funding for 140 additional ambulance vehicles and this year's budget, as you have identified, provides funding for the commissioning of 145 new vehicles. The Ambulance Service is in a very aggressive and proactive program to modernise its fleet. It will see the latest generation of the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter vans, which are now very prevalent in the service, delivered across Queensland. Those vehicles are fitted with the latest European fuel-efficient, clean-burn diesel technology engines. As a result they will deliver a cleaner and more fuel-efficient fleet of ambulances across the state.

Paramedic ambulance vehicles are equipped to meet the needs of all immediate life-threatening emergencies. They are a very sophisticated fit-out, and that fit-out takes place in a range of areas within Queensland and interstate. They carry a range of vital equipment including oxygen and resuscitation equipment, defibrillators, stretchers, stair chairs and a selection of medical consumables such as syringes, dressings, bandages et cetera.

The Queensland Ambulance Service is also developing and building three bariatric ambulances designed to meet the changing needs of the community and the workplace health and safety needs of our paramedics. These are ambulance vehicles designed to carry very obese patients. As we are aware, there is an increasing prevalence of obesity in the community. It is not just a health and safety issue for the individuals themselves; it is a very significant health and safety issue for our ambulance officers. We are proposing to build three of these ambulances and have them strategically placed throughout the state where we know there is a particular patient with special needs, so they can be dispatched to them. As an interim measure, our new Stryker stretchers, which are being rolled out with the new ambulances, have been designed to carry people up to 228 kilos. As an interim measure the new stretchers will cater for many people who are overweight, but the new bariatric vehicles will be specially designed to cater for those cases.

In 2007-08, as I have indicated, \$15.7 million was allocated to purchase 140 new vehicles, which are due for completion and delivery on 30 September this year. Five of those are new vehicles and 135 are replacement vehicles. As at 18 July, 85 of those vehicles had been commissioned and the remaining vehicles will be commissioned by the end of September. That is in accordance with the contract that we have with the suppliers.

**CHAIR:** My question is about the first dot point on page 2-93 of the Service Delivery Statements. It also refers to the funding of the 145 new ambulance vehicles. What investment is the Ambulance Service making to ensure its fleet is more fuel efficient and how does that relate to the bariatric vehicles referred to in your previous answer?

**Mr ROBERTS:** I touched on the issue of bariatric vehicles just a moment ago, but I will provide some more information on that in a moment. As you have identified, we have allocated \$16.9 million in this year's budget to purchase 145 new ambulance vehicles to accelerate the replacement and upgrading of the fleet, following on from the 140 last year. To reiterate, I also indicate that, as well as purchasing those vehicles, we are employing an additional 250 ambulance officers. As I have indicated, over 60 of those have already been recruited.

In terms of fuel efficiency, all new QAS ambulance vehicles are fitted with the latest fuel efficient Euro IV clean burn diesel engines. The Euro IV compliance engines comply with the stringent European emission standards which define the acceptable limits for exhaust emission of new vehicles. The new

ambulance vehicles are replacing the older generation V8 diesels, which were obviously not as fuel efficient and produced more greenhouse gases per kilometre. Q-Fleet has developed a simulation model for identifying the emissions of the leased fleet vehicles. The Queensland Ambulance Service is working with Q-Fleet to extend the application of this model to its own fleet of ambulance vehicles. That will ensure consistency in reporting the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in the future.

I did speak earlier about the bariatric vehicles. Again, once they have been delivered they will be deployed to strategic locations across the state. To reiterate, we are installing in all new ambulance vehicles the new yellow Stryker stretchers and stair chairs, which provide very easy access both up and down stairs, as I understand it, for ambulance officers. It is a significant workplace health and safety issue. It assists in moving patients without the amount of effort that would otherwise be required.

**Mr FENLON:** Minister, you have already touched upon the extensive roster reform process for ambulance officers. Perhaps you can expand on this in terms of explaining how this will help deliver on the department's priority, as stated at page 2-92 of the Service Delivery Statements, of maintaining service delivery in light of the increasing demand for services?

**Mr ROBERTS:** As I have indicated, the implementation of the 12-hour rosters is a significant reform for the Queensland Ambulance Service. Without going over all of the ground I covered earlier, it really was one of the more significant issues raised with me as I moved throughout the state talking directly with ambulance officers. In October 2007, we were able to negotiate with the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union an agreement to introduce 12-hour shifts for core rosters at 24-hour ambulance stations. So these 12-hour rosters apply at our stations where we have 24-hour, seven days a week operation. As a part of the 12-hour shifts, we also have what is referred to—as I mentioned earlier—as support rosters which provide shifts of shorter lengths, generally up to 10 hours, to better manage the demand particularly in those changeover periods for those people on those core 12-hour rosters.

We established an implementation steering committee with the union to oversee the effective implementation of the 12-hour rosters. All 24-hour ambulance stations across the state have now implemented the 12-hour roster system. As I have indicated, as I move throughout the state I talk to officers and I can report to the committee that they are being very well received.

Combined with the 38-hour week, which was introduced into the service on 1 October last year, the state's front-line ambulance staff will now effectively receive nine weeks a year away from work. I need to stress that that is a combination of both annual leave entitlements plus accrued time off which accrues as a result of the way in which the rosters are arranged. So, in addition to the significant increase in clear days off that ambulance officers receive from these 12-hour rosters, they also receive nine weeks away from work that they can take in a sense as leave entitlements.

I indicated earlier that these roster parameters and the way in which they were implemented were actively negotiated with the union, the Ambulance Employees Association, and then were put to a ballot across the state. In excess of 80 per cent of the people who voted supported the roster system. So to me that sends a very clear message that ambulance officers have given a ringing endorsement to this new roster system, and that is reflected in the comments that are provided to me when I move throughout the state.

Some of the benefits that have been flowing to ambulance officers and indeed the service as a result of these rosters are: a more even spread of workload over the duration of the shift—when I talk to supervisors and officers, that has been assisting with response times in some areas—and also more regular days off more often.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, I am really keen to get one more question in about the ESCAD system, one of the most important issues right across the department in terms of rural fires, the QFRS, the QAS et cetera. You mentioned the fact that Natural Resources provide a quarterly update on new road locations. Is it a fact that that information has to be sent to America to be loaded? If that is the case, what guarantees have you that it is loaded in a timely manner?

**Mr ROBERTS:** I will need to check on that detail. I do not know the answer to that question. We will get some information on that and get back to you. The member raised an issue, Mr Chairman, earlier on the ethical—

**Mr MALONE:** I would prefer to ask another question, Minister. You can clarify that later.

**Mr ROBERTS:** If I may seek the indulgence of the committee, I can respond to an issue that was raised earlier.

**CHAIR:** Not in the member's time. We will come back to that.

**Mr MALONE:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, how many medical emergency call-outs that would normally be responded to by QAS have been attended by a fire truck as a first responder in the past year? Can you give an indication of how many? If you cannot do it now, maybe you can take it on notice.

**Mr ROBERTS:** 208. This is an issue that has been raised a number of times about fire officers being used as first responders. The fact is that it is in a very minute number of cases. Last year the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service responded to 65,000-odd incidents. Of those, in terms of what you could refer to as medical assistance, there were 250 instances where they provided direct assistance to an individual—208 of those were directly related to the application of first aid, CPR and the like, and the other 42 related to assisting an invalid, which is the category that is used. I think it is fair to say that 208 is the figure. Out of 65,000, that is a very small number.

We do not use the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service as an automatic first responder. The reality is, however, that they are very often the first on scene where people have been injured. Our fire and rescue officers are trained to Senior First Aid standard, which enables them to apply immediate first aid to injured people, including CPR, oxygen et cetera. That is a part of their training and they do it very well. If they are first on scene and they can apply those skills then they do it.

Both the Queensland Ambulance Service and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service have very clear agreements, understandings and protocols about supporting each other in times of need. As I answered questions on this issue last year, this is a normal and expected part of the role of a fire and rescue officer and one which will continue. They do it very well. But, as I have indicated, they are not an automatic first responder. They will provide immediate first aid support to people where required, and of course in some areas they will also assist ambulance officers who may be on their own with a particular incident or may need additional assistance to cater for the needs of particular patients.

But to suggest that this is a major component and a major focus of a Queensland Fire and Rescue officer's role is absolute nonsense. It occurs in less than 0.4 per cent—I think that is the figure—of the responses they provide, less than one per cent. But it is a necessary part of their role and it is one which will continue.

**Mr MALONE:** Can you detail the full costs of travel and expenses for departmental staff attending the World Rescue Challenge in South Africa? I understand that a figure of around \$35,000 has been bandied about. I think quite frankly it is more than that. Can you detail those figures for me?

**Mr ROBERTS:** I should be able to provide that detail to you. I am advised that that event was two years ago.

**Mr MALONE:** The South African challenge.

**Mr ROBERTS:** Yes, two years ago. So what relevance has that to today's estimates hearing?

**CHAIR:** In that case it does not relate to this year's budget statements.

**Mr ROBERTS:** I might take the opportunity given the question has been asked to talk about overseas travel because it was an issue that the member raised last year. There has been a significant reduction in overseas travel. The department has taken a very, very comprehensive look at its travel arrangements and indeed applied a very, very strict ruler. Indeed, I do as minister because I ultimately have to approve overseas travel. I take a very strict approach—that is, there needs to be very clear and demonstrated benefit to the service and the people of Queensland before overseas travel is approved.

In 2007-08 the department spent \$363,000 on overseas travel compared with \$573,000 the year before, which translates to a 37 per cent reduction in the overseas travel expense. The overwhelming majority of our overseas travel expense this year, which is all public, related to two projects—one was the contract negotiations, commissioning and training directly related to our new Augusta Westland helicopters, which overall was a \$48.3 million investment by the department. All that has been budgeted for within that original allocation. That accounted for 68 per cent of the total expenditure. The other major component of overseas travel related directly to our overseas recruitment campaign in the United Kingdom. Combined, those two elements accounted for 89 per cent of the total overseas travel budget. They were entirely justified and necessary.

The Augusta Westland project is a major step forward in terms of the capacity of Emergency Management Queensland to respond to emergency situations. These are state-of-the-art technology helicopters which require intensive training of pilots. They are very, very complex negotiations which required the attendance of senior officers there to ensure that we got what we paid for, and many, many issues were resolved as a result of having people on the ground. In fact, the third of those helicopters is due for delivery shortly for introduction to our service.

Again, with the UK paramedic recruitment, this is one of the most significant endeavours the Ambulance Service is undertaking to ensure that we get the staff we need to deliver the service appropriately to Queenslanders. We needed to have expert people in London talking directly to the people that we wanted to recruit. As I indicated earlier, that team interviewed up to 100 people over a period of a week or two weeks to narrow it down to the ones whom we believe would best suit our service.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, the residents of lower Redlands have been paying the full fire levy since 2001-02, even though their local fire station is situated at Cleveland and Beenleigh, over 40 minutes response time away, and that determines the boundary of levies for A-class service. What happened to

the government's promise made prior to the last election of a new fire station to be built at Redlands within six months? We have a similar situation at Caboolture, where a slab of concrete was put down and residents in that area are now paying the A-class levy. Could you comment on that?

**Mr ROBERTS:** At Caboolture you are talking about?

**Mr MALONE:** Yes, as well as Redlands.

**Mr ROBERTS:** Burpengary is where the new station is going.

**Mr MALONE:** Yes, the Caboolture area.

**Mr ROBERTS:** In terms of the payment of the levy, again I will try to pick up on some of the points that you raised. As you would be aware, the fire levy applies to four different categories of station, building up from a part-time/auxiliary provision exclusively to a full-time, 24/7 coverage by full-time firefighters, and you pay a levy according to what level of—

**Mr MALONE:** Service.

**Mr ROBERTS:**—staffing and support that we provide. You are aware of that. As to the area that you identified in the Redlands, my clear understanding would be that if they are paying an A-class levy, which you are suggesting they are, that is because they fit within the A-class levy boundaries. The service regularly reviews these boundaries and works on the basis that any households or residents which fit clearly within that 14-minute boundary—and my understanding is that it is actually a 12-minute boundary from the location of the station—will pay the A-class levy. Anyone who fits outside that will pay a different scale of levy depending on the fire service provided.

In terms of the Redlands area, as you are aware we have committed to building a new fire station at Redlands. A decision was made following intensive lobbying by local members and the local community—and, indeed, the member for Mirani raised the issue supporting the construction of a fire station at Redlands.

**Mr MALONE:** Absolutely.

**Mr ROBERTS:** We have made that commitment and we have allocated money in the budget. We have the land. We are currently going through the ministerial designation process, and I look forward to seeing the first sod of dirt turned down there as quickly as possible.

With respect to Burpengary, again, people pay an A-class levy when they are receiving a service which fits within the definition. I was at Deception Bay just a couple of weeks ago. As you know, we have an auxiliary station at Deception Bay. Currently, we have housed the permanent firefighters who will staff the Burpengary station, which is currently well under construction, at the Deception Bay Fire Station. They are currently delivering a 24/7 service to that A-class area whilst based at the Deception Bay station. We have made accommodation available through increasing the amenities there. The people in that area you referred to will get a new station, and they are currently receiving 24/7 coverage based out of Deception Bay auxiliary station.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, in terms of the delivery of capital expenditure and the time blow-outs in delivery of that service, what procedures—

**Mr ROBERTS:** Sorry, could you start again?

**Mr MALONE:** In terms of the delivery of cap ex and the recognised issue of blow-outs in delivery times, what procedures is the department looking at to minimise the blow-out in costs and to endeavour to deliver cap ex on time?

**Mr ROBERTS:** Every government department, every private sector builder and every homeowner is faced with escalating costs, and the Department of Emergency Services is no different. We have made a number of significant changes to our capital works program. I think it is fair to say, and I acknowledge this, that in the past some of the capital works programs that have been identified for the department have been a little too ambitious. As a result, we have made some significant changes to the way in which we are going to deliver our program. I believe that the capital works program that has been established this year, which sits at around about \$160 million, is deliverable. That is, of course, subject to the usual issues that you are confronted with, and that is finding a suitable block of land, in the case of a new ambulance station or fire station, and also dealing with some of the very complex land tenure issues which arise. That is not just native title issues but also very complex issues such as that which we are dealing with in Ipswich in terms of transferring land for the delivery of the station.

In terms of some of the improved planning and procedures, we have put in place a number of improvements. We have recently appointed a new director to the Facilities Management Branch who is doing an exceptional job. I have a great deal of confidence in his abilities. The branch has also been restructured, and appropriately qualified personnel are being recruited with relevant qualifications and experience in town planning, project development and construction.

There has been a very concerted effort to make sure that the capital works program which we have identified for this year is capable of being delivered. As I have indicated, no-one can give an absolute guarantee about the delivery of a capital works program, but I know from the regular briefings I

receive that this has been very well thought out and a lot of effort has gone into making sure that these projects are appropriately timed over a number of years, where that is required, to ensure that they can be delivered.

The Queensland Ambulance Service and the QFRS have also reviewed their strategic plans, allowing the implementation of a rolling program of projects phased over multiple years, as I have indicated. That will avoid what has happened in the past, where a number of very significant projects have simply been listed in one year, which in hindsight has simply not been able to be achieved.

I could go through a number of specific instances about what is happening with particular projects, but in terms of your general question I am confident that appropriate structural changes have been made to our capital works program in the department. I am as confident as I can be, given all the limitations of delivering the program, that we are well on track and are capable of delivering the one we have identified this year.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, what funding is allocated in the budget to address the findings of the Auditor-General's report into the Rural Fire Service? I understand there is a budget item to allow a second issue of clothing for firefighters who travel away from their local station to fight fires interstate. Is there a specific amount in the budget to address the Auditor-General's report into the Rural Fire Service?

**Mr ROBERTS:** To identify a specific dollar amount, the answer is probably no. However, unless I can be told otherwise, considerable resources are being applied to addressing the issues that have been raised in the Auditor-General's report. As I indicated earlier in the session, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service recognised before the release of the Auditor-General's report that a number of the issues which he raised need to be addressed. It has put in place appropriate mechanisms internally—working groups and working committees—to progress those matters. I am confident, on the advice I have received, that they have been progressed quite well.

I am interested in the member for Mirani's targeting of the Rural Fire Service. I do not want to get too political here, but I have spoken to many, many members of the Rural Fire Service since I have been minister over the last 12 months. I will give you an example. I was at the opening of a rural fire station just a few short months ago. On the table as part of the opening was a display of old equipment. There were old metal backpacks and the like—

**Mr MALONE:** And I have used them all.

**Mr ROBERTS:** I am sure you have. There was even what looked like an old pick handle with a big lump of leather tied on the end of it which they used to beat the fire—'beaters', as I used to call them. I made the comment, 'Gee, that stuff must have come from the Dark Ages.' The response was quite surprising. The response was, 'No, Minister, we used a lot of this equipment right up till the late 1980s.'

**Mr MALONE:** Very effectively.

**Mr ROBERTS:** And very effectively. There is another comment I would make about where the Rural Fire Service has come in the years since the Labor government has been in place. I will not advise who said this but I will use his words, and that is, 'We have taken the Rural Fire Service from the stone age to the jet age compared to what occurred under the National Party.' In my view, the National Party absolutely neglected the Rural Fire Service. It took it for granted—

**Mr MALONE:** It is 20 years since we were—

**Mr ROBERTS:**—and over the past few years since Labor has been in power we have progressively and significantly upgraded resources. To give you an example, in 1997-98 the funding provided, when you were last in government, was about \$9.7 million. This financial year it is \$28.2 million—a trebling of the funding over that period.

**Mr MALONE:** Ten years ago!

**CHAIR:** Member for Mirani, you have asked the question and the minister is answering it.

**Mr ROBERTS:** The advances that have been made have been quite significant. To give you an example, let us look at the fleet. I have spoken to people who can recall not too long ago they were still driving around in second-hand Blitzers from the Second World War.

**Mr MALONE:** They still do in some cases.

**CHAIR:** Thanks, Minister.

**Mr ROBERTS:** I have a lot more information if the committee would allow me to present it.

**CHAIR:** Only with the consent of the questioner.

**Mr ROBERTS:** Do you want to hear about the vehicles?

**Mr MALONE:** Not really.

**Mr ROBERTS:** Well, I am sure you don't because it is a good story.

**Mr MALONE:** Well, I travel around too, Minister, so I know as much you do.

**CHAIR:** Order! We have moved on. Minister, the member for Mirani earlier asked you a question about the Ethical Standards Unit. Is there any more information you can provide the committee on the Ethical Standards Unit?

**Mr ROBERTS:** The advice I received from the department is that the Ethical Standards Unit does engage consultants and professional services to undertake some ethical standards investigations. The total cost incurred by the unit for these investigations in 2007-08 was \$148,724. Ethical standards investigations during the 2007-08 financial year are as follows: Ashdale Integrity Solutions, \$85,925; LKA, \$54,902; and Special Intelligence Services, \$7,897. That is the specific detail in relation to that issue. I might get the director-general to outline changes to some of the processes.

**Mr McGowan:** When appointed director-general, I, too, was concerned about the ESU process, which effectively was taking responsibility away from managers whose job it is to manage. We have changed that process so that issues are now to be managed locally and referred to ESU only if they are a criminal offence or are likely to result in serious disciplinary action, whereas the previous process was that the initial referral was to ESU. In accordance with the two reviews—Fire and Ambulance—we expect to save a considerable amount of money in the use of contractors and consultants this year. But the important thing is that managers need to manage, and the ESU processes were actually taking that responsibility away from managers under the previous regime.

**Mr FENLON:** Minister, I refer to code 1 ambulance response time measures reported on page 2-97 of the Service Delivery Statements. How do your target response times for 2008-09 compare with 2007-08? And how will they be reported in the future in line with your commitment on 29 April for online six-month reports?

**Mr ROBERTS:** Thank you for that question. I might clarify an issue that was raised earlier, Mr Chair. The State Digital Road Network, I am advised, is not forwarded to the United States for loading onto our system.

In relation to this question, prior to this financial year the Queensland Ambulance Service, through its annual reports and Ministerial Portfolio Statement, reported code 1 response times as a percentage of code 1 incidents attended to in less than 10 minutes and at the 90th percentile. However, one of the key issues with that is that that did not provide a direct comparison of our service with, in particular, interstate services. The need to provide that opportunity for comparison was an issue which has been raised by the Auditor-General, to provide more transparency and information to the public about how our Ambulance Service, for example, compares in terms of performance with others.

In the 2008-09 financial year the reporting standard for code 1 response times in the Service Delivery Statements will comply with the national reporting standards as reported in the *Report on Government Services*—that is, that we will report on both the 50th percentile and the 90th percentile in terms of the time it takes to respond. The target in the 2008-09 financial year for the 50th percentile will be 8.2 minutes and the target for the 90th percentile will be 16.5 minutes. Those performance targets have been established through an analysis of historical data and projections of future demand and the service's capability.

The approach of using a national performance framework is also consistent, as I have indicated, with the Auditor-General's report which indicated that each department's performance information should provide a comparison to similar organisations in other jurisdictions and that performance measures should not differ markedly from those agreed to by state ministers with our interstate and Australian government counterparts.

In the 2006-07 financial year, performance at the 50th percentile was 8.2 minutes and 16.7 minutes at the 90th percentile. In the 2007-08 financial year, performance at the 50th percentile was 8.3 minutes, six seconds difference, and 16.5 minutes at the 90th percentile, 12 seconds difference. As I indicated earlier, I believe that is an outstanding result in view of the continued growth of code 1 incidents. There was an increase of 15.74 per cent in the lights and siren emergencies compared with the 2006-07 financial year. If we look at the old measure, the Queensland Ambulance Service attended 14,356 more code 1 incidents in less than 10 minutes under the response time measurements than last financial year.

**Mrs ATTWOOD:** I refer to page 2-92 of the Service Delivery Statements where it states that one of the department's strategic directions is ensuring best practice capability, competency and safety practices that support our staff and our volunteer workforce. How is the Queensland Ambulance Service expanding the scope of practice for paramedics working in isolated communities to boost patient care and deliver diverse healthcare services?

**Mr ROBERTS:** As a general comment, the Queensland Ambulance Service is recognised not just nationally but internationally for the advances that it has made in the clinical capabilities of its paramedics. I attended a gathering of people from all the over the world soon after I became minister. I was approached by many people from Canada, the United States and New Zealand, all of whom were exceptionally interested and keen to learn about what we are doing in terms of the provision of clinical skills to our paramedics. They were particularly interested in our Rural and Remote Paramedic Program

which, in many respects, leads the way in Australia and in some ways, we could claim, internationally in providing paramedics, particularly those who work in regional and remote areas, with a broader range of skills which can help them not just deliver paramedic services but also provide a support role to our medical practitioners. I am very proud of what our paramedics do and very proud of the level of training that we provide.

The delivery of healthcare services to rural and remote communities provides significant challenges to the service. The current skills and labour shortages affect our services as much as they do any other employer and therefore we need to develop these new approaches to address that demand. The Graduate Certificate of Rural and Remote Paramedic Practice has been developed in collaboration with James Cook University. Some 18 paramedics graduated with the certificate in December 2007. There was an additional person who graduated in March 2008. We are expecting a further 25 officers to graduate soon. They are currently progressing through the program.

Those paramedics are engaged in locations across the state—from Horn Island in the far north to Texas in the south-west. As I have indicated, they are there to undertake duties which are beyond those more traditional duties of a paramedic. They provide an excellent service to the communities in which they work.

The graduate certificate provides paramedics with an extended scope of practice and the skills to identify and respond to the health needs of their community and, as I have said, provide expanded support to medical and nursing staff. Funding for the Isolated Practice Area Paramedic program was a 2004 election commitment and includes \$100,000 per annum to fund a clinical support officer position on an ongoing basis to provide support to the 44 paramedics trained in delivering isolated practice services.

**Ms van LITSENBURG:** Minister, I refer you to page 2-97 of the Service Delivery Statements where it details the Queensland Ambulance Service's target cardiac arrest survived event rate. How is the introduction of the new drugs through the so-called reperfusion strategy assisting to improve the survival rate?

**Mr ROBERTS:** This is another area where the Queensland Ambulance Service leads the nation. I will say a bit more about my personal experiences with this strategy in a moment. As I have indicated, the Ambulance Service is at the forefront of the delivery of patient care to the community. We are the first service in Australia to deliver a statewide program for the early reperfusion of patients suffering a heart attack.

Basically, what this involves is the administering of a number of drugs which are very expensive. One of them I understand is in the vicinity of \$1,400 to \$1,500 a shot. These are drugs which can be administered to patients who experience a heart attack in the prehospital environment. These are people who are out in the community. They could be in their home or at their local bowls club. Previously these drugs could only be administered once you got through the hospital door. Our intensive care paramedics across the state are now trained and authorised to use these very powerful drugs which can save people's lives.

I recently visited Rockhampton to create some public awareness about the rollout of this strategy. I met the first person whose life had been saved by these drugs. I do not want to identify this individual. He is with us today because of the professionalism of our paramedics. The advanced care paramedics identified the need for these particular drugs to be administered. This is a situation where our advanced care paramedics and our intensive care paramedics work in partnership. You cannot have an intensive care paramedic at every incident. The advanced care paramedics in this incident identified an opportunity to use these drugs. They immediately called the intensive care paramedic, who administered the drug and this guy's life was saved. Of course, the gratitude that he showed towards the paramedic was quite moving.

There have been many instances of that recorded across Queensland. I reiterate the point that we are the first ambulance service in the country to have the capability and skills in our intensive care paramedics to get these drugs to people out in the field. I am very proud of the paramedics, both intensive care and advanced care, who work together to administer them. I am very proud of the service in the way in which it has led Australia in delivering these lifesaving drugs to Queenslanders.

**CHAIR:** Minister, I refer to the record number of 255 additional ambulance officers being recruited in 2007-08 and the target of 250 extra officers in 2008-09 as provided on pages 2-94 and 2-92 of the Service Delivery Statements. How many of these additional officers have been recruited from overseas, from which countries and what qualifications must these officers possess before joining the QAS?

**Mr ROBERTS:** This is following on from some earlier detail in response to a question from the member for Mirani. I want to put a bit more detail on the record. In the 2007-08 financial year the government delivered another record budget—255 officers last year and another 250 officers this year. We have redirected funding from the audit to create and support the recruitment of 100 of the 250 to be allocated this year. As I have indicated, over 60 of those were recruited prior to the end of the financial year.

The focus of our recruitment campaign has obviously been on Queensland paramedics. If we can recruit qualified people in Queensland and interstate then that is our choice. But we have, as I have indicated, focused quite significantly on the United Kingdom. In terms of that program, qualified paramedics must provide evidence of qualifications to a level equivalent to an advanced care paramedic. That is one of the key reasons we have focused on the United Kingdom. As I have indicated, the United Kingdom is a key focus because of the level of skills and qualifications of the people there. We do have a labour agreement for 125 permanent residency agreements per annum. We believe that 125 is sufficient.

In terms of the numbers, I will seek some further information about how many we have recruited so far. I did mention this earlier. We have recruited 113 paramedics from the United Kingdom. They have integrated very well within the service. We hope that the offers that we have made to the latest group will also result in a significant number accepting employment and starting work in Queensland.

**CHAIR:** We are now hearing a lot about the successful recruitment of new ambulance officers. Following on from this, can you advise the committee on what progress has been made to recruit new firefighters to the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, including efforts to attract volunteers to the Rural Fire Service?

**Mr ROBERTS:** The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service implements or utilises a continuous recruitment process which allows us to select the highest quality candidates. In the past there were cut-off dates for recruitment. We now have in a sense an open-ended recruitment process. That has been in place since around January 2005. After recruiting firefighters they graduate after completing 16 weeks of intensive training at our Whyte Island facility.

Over the past few years the number of recruits entering the fire service has increased significantly. Indeed, it will increase over the coming years as we, like many organisations, face, in terms of average age, an increasingly ageing workforce. They do a very good job, but obviously as more people move towards retirement we need to ensure that we have an active recruitment campaign to bring in, as early as possible, new recruits to replace the members who are moving on to retirement.

In 2007-08, as at 31 May, 74 operational staff separated from the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and 135 new firefighters were recruited. That was undertaken to provide staff to cover, amongst other things, the new Burpengary Fire Station which is currently operating a full-time service out of the Deception Bay auxiliary station but also to address those issues arising from the ageing workforce over the next 12 months.

A targeted marketing and recruitment campaign has been implemented in the regions to achieve an increase in the pool of suitable applicants where required. Specific marketing to attract female firefighters has resulted in more women applying and being successful in being selected for the service. The number of female applicants per month has doubled to six as a result.

Currently, there are 25 permanent female firefighters in the service. A number of those are in our calendar, which you might have seen promoted recently. We are encouraging everybody to buy that because the money goes to a good cause. A career as a firefighter is a very much sought after occupation for both males and females. It is interesting that proportionally there are not more but there are 169 auxiliary female firefighters which is quite significant. In terms of our rural firefighters, 24 per cent of rural volunteers are women. We really encourage women to consider the service in both the professional and the volunteer ranks of our fire service and we are actively encouraging them to do that.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I call the member for Mirani.

**Mr MALONE:** Thank you, Mr Chair. So many questions, so little time. Minister, in terms of the ESCAD system, I am still not clear on this issue. You indicated that the information is not uploaded in the US and therefore I assume that it is done locally. You are aware of the fact that I have called on you to instigate an open audit on the system. My concern is that we could have a situation where the technology is not uploaded or updated in time which may jeopardise those people who are relying on emergency services, and that just does not mean QAS and QFRS. Will the minister give me an indication of how the technology is loaded on to the system and if you are confident in the fact that that technology cannot fail? If not, will you instigate a clear open audit on the system by external consultants?

**Mr ROBERTS:** Just a couple of points. You are asking me very specific technical questions and I may need to seek some advice on that. In terms of your call for a review or an audit, you made that call last Friday—three days after I and the department had in fact instigated a review of the system. So you were three days too late.

**Mr MALONE:** I am calling for an open audit external to the department.

**Mr ROBERTS:** Let me tell you what we are going to do, and the department decided this at least three days before you—in fact, it was nearly four days, on the evening of the Tuesday of the last outage. An external independent review was initiated then, not on the Friday afterwards when you called for it. Before I talk about this, I just want to pay tribute to the professionalism, the expertise, the dedication and



the very hard work of our ESCAD team. They have put a lot of hard work into rolling out this system and I commend them on the exceptional job that they have done with what is probably, as I have said, the most significant technological upgrade in the service's history.

In terms of the review, we have sought advice from the Queensland government information officer in respect of the types of issues that we should be looking at and we have already engaged professional external consultants to look at various aspects of the system. So that matter I am confident of. Obviously we will need to consider and act upon those matters which are relevant to the system. In terms of the question about the uploading of this data, the advice I have is that we have in the past and will continue to upload that data ourselves. I will just seek some further clarification on that. As you would be aware, the database which underpins the new ESCAD system and also which underpins the current RightCAD and the PremierCAD system also requires regular updating of addresses and the like. My understanding, unless I am advised to the contrary, is that we would continue to progress those updates as and when required. The other important point to make is that, yes, there have been some instances which have been identified, but I just come back to the fundamental point here: this is a computer-aided dispatch system. What it does is it provides a recommendation to a very well-trained and very competent dispatcher who actually makes the decision as to which resource will be dispatched, not the computer system.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, I accept your situation. I was not aware that you had called for an independent inquiry. I am sorry. Maybe it did not hit the headlines in Mackay, but that is the constraints you have when you are an opposition spokesman.

**Mr ROBERTS:** We did make that public.

**Mr MALONE:** Fair enough. Getting back to the Ethical Standards Unit, my concerns relate to working with consultants, and I am pleased to hear that the director-general has made some comments in that regard. People who have made complaints to the Ethical Standards Unit were being hammered by these guys and basically they were there to protect middle and upper management rather than look after the people who were making their concerns felt. In terms of handing it back to management, I am aware of a number of cases where local management has taken a set to different people—and I am certainly not going to name names—and management has failed to address those local concerns locally. I am not sure where they go from that position to where they can get some redress in terms of the ethical standards within that region. Maybe you would like to make some comments about this issue. I feel that this is a very serious situation in determining the outcomes of concerns within the department in different areas.

**Mr ROBERTS:** Again, I can only respond generally to this issue. I expect that the Ethical Standards Unit will deal with issues impartially and professionally. If there are any specific instances where the member has an assertion—an allegation—of where they have not acted professionally or in your belief that they have not acted professionally—

**Mr MALONE:** I have raised that with you.

**Mr ROBERTS:**—I would expect that that information and evidence be provided for further investigation. But unless I see evidence to the contrary, I am confident that this is a very professional unit which approaches its task in the professional and impartial way that it should. If there are instances where local managers are not acting appropriately in terms of dealing with local issues, again those matters need to be drawn to more senior management and, if needed, passed through to my office. But I would encourage matters to be resolved internally within the department. Issues of harassment and bullying are just simply unacceptable. If people have legitimate complaints or issues that they require to be investigated, then they should be done professionally. If you have evidence or material to the contrary, I again invite you to provide that through to my director-general. In addition to obviously the governance that the department provides internally, a sample of matters which are dealt with by the Ethical Standards Unit are reviewed each year by the Crime and Misconduct Commission. So that again provides a quality assurance measure to ensure that they are acting appropriately.

**Mr MALONE:** Thank you, Minister. There is one case that I have raised with you, but obviously that did not get sorted. Considering the time we have, my next question is probably not of high importance. I am just wondering when the EMQ officers will receive their full uniform.

**Mr ROBERTS:** Please explain.

**Mr MALONE:** I think they have been waiting 12 months for the epaulets.

**Mr ROBERTS:** I will seek some advice. I am advised that we are working on the volunteers first. Of course they are the most important priority.

**Mr MALONE:** Absolutely.

**Mr ROBERTS:** We will then move on to the professional officers.

**Mr MALONE:** I got you on one anyway.

**Mr ROBERTS:** But I might just add that the lack of epaulets does not affect the capacity of EMQ to deliver the very good service that it provides across the state.

**Mr MALONE:** I am trying to end on a note of levity at this time of night, Minister.

**CHAIR:** There is time for one more question.

**Mr MALONE:** I think I might leave it at that. It is getting too late. I thank the minister and his staff for their forthrightness and we will meet back here next year.

**CHAIR:** There being no further questions, that concludes the examination of the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Emergency Services. Minister, I thank you, your ministerial staff and your departmental officers for your attendance today. The transcript of this part of the hearing will be available on the Hansard page of the parliament's web site within about two hours. That completes the committee's hearings into the matters referred to it by the parliament. Before I conclude, on behalf of the committee I thank the Hansard staff, the time keepers and attendants for their assistance as well as the research director staff, Jo Mathers and Jaana Hokkanen. As well, I particularly want to thank my fellow committee members and Deputy Chair, Jeff Seeney, for their attendance and assistance in the committee's hearing.

**Mr ROBERTS:** I would also like to thank the committee for the way in which it has conducted the hearings today. I would also like to give my appreciation to Hansard, which always does a fantastic job. With respect to my department and of course my own staff, I want to place on the record my sincere appreciation to them for the enormous amount of hours that go into preparations for estimates. I personally think the estimates process, despite recent criticism in the media, is in fact a very good accountability mechanism for government. It ensures that departmental officers and indeed ministers are on top of their portfolio. You look between all of the cracks and under all of the sheets of corrugated iron to make sure you are on top of the issues, and I think that is an important part of being held accountable and it is an important learning process as well. So I thank the departmental officers, my commissioners and my executive officers for their support and also the many departmental officers who have provided support over a long period of time.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I declare the public hearing closed.

**Committee adjourned at 5.50 pm**