

THURSDAY, 16 JULY 2009

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE C—NATURAL RESOURCES, MINES AND ENERGY AND TRADE

Estimates Committee C Members

Mr ER Moorhead (Chair)
Ms P-K Croft
Mr DF Gibson
Mr SA Kilburn
Mrs RN Menkens
Mr JW Seeney
Ms ECM van Litsenburg

In Attendance

Hon. S Robertson, Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy and Minister for Trade
Department of Environment and Resource Management
Mr J Bradley, Director-General (Acting)
Ms D Best, Deputy Director-General, Water and Corporate Services
Mr C Robson, Assistant Director-General, Land and Vegetation
Mr D Brown, Assistant Director-General, Regional Service Delivery
Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation
Mr P Henneken, Director-General
Ms K Stewart, Manager, Estimates
Mr D Hunt, Associate Director-General, Queensland Mines and Energy
Mr M Reside, Director, Cabinet Legislation and Liaison Officer (Acting)
Mr J Cole, Chief Officer, Office of Clean Energy
Mr R Whiddon, General Manager, Trade Queensland
Mr N Abdie, Principal Advisor, Trade Queensland

Committee met at 8.30 am

CHAIR: Good morning. I declare this meeting of Estimates Committee C open. I am Evan Moorhead, the member for Waterford and chair of the committee. Joining me on the committee are: Mr Jeff Seeney MP, member for Callide and deputy chair; Ms Peta-Kaye Croft MP, member for Broadwater; Mr David Gibson MP, member for Gympie; Mr Steve Kilburn MP, member for Chatsworth; Mrs Rosemary Menkens MP, member for Burdekin; and Ms Lillian van Litsenburg MP, member for Redcliffe. The committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the 2009-10 financial year as contained in the Appropriation Bill 2009 for the portfolios assigned to it by the order of appointment made on 3 June 2009.

The proceedings for today will commence at 8.30 am until 12.45 pm examining the portfolio of the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy and Minister for Trade. From 1.30 pm to 3.45 pm, the committee will then examine the portfolio of the Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women. From 4 pm to 5.45 pm, the committee will then examine the portfolio of the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning. The committee will suspend proceedings for the following breaks: morning tea from 10.15 am to 10.30 am, lunch from 12.45 pm to 1.30 pm, and afternoon tea from 3.45 pm to 4 pm.

The proceedings today are similar to parliament to the extent that members of the public cannot ask questions. In that regard, I remind visitors that in accordance with standing order 206 any person admitted to a public hearing of a committee may be excluded by order of the committee or at my discretion as chair. In relation to media coverage of the hearing, the committee has resolved that television film coverage and photography be allowed during my introductory comments and the opening statement of each minister, as well as for a short period during each changeover of ministerial advisers. The committee has also agreed to the live broadcast of the hearing via the Parliamentary Service's website and to receivers throughout the parliamentary precinct. I ask that all mobile phones and pagers now be switched off.

I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time limit for questions is one minute. Answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a double chime will sound at the end of each of these time limits. An extension of time to answer the question 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. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask departmental officers to identify themselves if the minister calls upon them to answer a question.

On behalf of the committee, I welcome the minister, departmental officers and members of the public to the hearing today and declare the proposed expenditure to be open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr ROBERTSON: Yes, I would. Four years ago when I last sat before an estimates committee as the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines in Queensland our state was in the grip of the worst drought on record. The combined capacity of Wivenhoe, Somerset and North Pine dams was 39.5 per cent and water restrictions had just been triggered. Today our dams are nearly 80 per cent full, but we also understand how quickly things can change. That is why the Bligh government is continuing to deliver on our commitment to construct a \$9 billion water grid to ensure South-East Queensland has the water security it needs to grow and prosper into the future. To date, this construction has involved 5,500 workers, the laying of more than 420 kilometres of pipe and the upgrade or construction of eight water treatment plants to diversify and conserve our water sources.

Thankfully, the water situation in Far North Queensland is vastly different. We find ourselves in the unique position of having waterways which are still in their pristine condition. The Bligh government is committed to protecting and preserving these wild rivers and is looking to declare a further eight pristine river basins following assessment in addition to the Wenlock. Funding is also being provided for an additional 10 wild rivers ranger positions, which is on top of the 20 rangers already performing valuable work on country and providing real jobs for Indigenous people in Cape York.

At this year's election, we committed ourselves to protect endangered regrowth vegetation and vegetation in riparian zones and priority reef catchments. We have kept that promise and consultation is ongoing to ensure that we get the long-term balance right between the environment and the economic interests of producers.

Energy is another part of my portfolio, and what remarkable changes we have seen since I commissioned the Somerville review just over five years ago to undertake a warts-and-all look at the electricity distribution sector in Queensland. The Somerville report provided a virtual blueprint to improve the security and reliability of the delivery of electricity in Queensland. Since 2004 we have seen more than \$11 billion invested on our network and generation expansion and upgrades, with a further \$3.2 billion to be spent this financial year. The Bligh government is also helping Queenslanders to access renewable energy through the Solar Hot Water Program, which will give up to 200,000 households the opportunity to purchase affordable solar hot-water systems.

With respect to my responsibilities as Minister for Trade, I am encouraged to see preliminary figures indicating Trade Queensland exceeded its targets for exports generated in 2008-09. At this stage, it is estimated that just over \$500 million of new projects can be directly attributed to support provided by Trade Queensland last financial year, up more than \$80 million from its estimates. In a background of tough global financial times, this is a great effort which we hope can be improved on this year.

While many parts of my portfolio are familiar to me, there have been numerous changes to the landscape in which they operate. I look forward to working with my new departments to deliver on our government's commitments.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We will now start the questioning. I call the member for Callide.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, I refer you initially to the Service Delivery Statements for your department on page 3-201. In the third dot point, you talk about assisting to build stronger Indigenous communities. On the next page, you also outline the government's intention to continue with wild rivers declarations

throughout the cape. Minister, how can you reconcile your purported interest in assisting to build stronger Indigenous communities with your continuing moves to take away any chance they have of establishing an economic base?

CHAIR: Minister, before you start answering, I ask the media to leave.

Mr ROBERTSON: Unfortunately, the premise of the member's question is wrong. The declaration of a river as a wild river does not stop economic development, and any reasonable reading of the wild rivers declarations for any of the rivers that have been so far declared—whether they be in the cape or the gulf—outlines in quite significant detail the range of economic opportunities that can coexist with a wild rivers declaration. Any reasonable reading of those documents outlines, for example, how much water gets set aside for community development purposes, how much water gets set aside for projects of state significance, how much water gets set aside for major job generating projects.

So what we have seen over the last number of months is quite a misleading debate being undertaken by some interests that do not represent the reality of what a wild rivers declaration means. These same people who continue this debate were also the people who were insistent with previous Premier Peter Beattie in putting forward an act of parliament which has been passed that hard-wires economic development opportunities into Cape York so that there can be no confusion whatsoever that a wild rivers declaration stops development.

In addition to that, existing economic activities are guaranteed in the declaration. So when I hear and see people on the television claiming that they have had access rights to river banks as graziers for the last X number of years and this has now stopped as a result of wild rivers declaration, either they have been misled or they have not read the guarantees for continuing access for existing enterprises in wild rivers areas. What I would love to see into the future is that those who have an interest in the Cape York and wild rivers declarations engage in a far more honest debate than what we have witnessed, particularly over the last number of months and even last night.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, noted Aboriginal leader Noel Pearson has described the wild rivers declarations as 'sheer insanity'. He says that the state will 'rip the future out from under Indigenous children's feet on the cape'. Minister, is Noel Pearson unreasonable? Is he wrong? Or do you know more about the situation on Cape York than Noel Pearson?

Mr ROBERTSON: No, I do not think Mr Pearson is wrong because only last night on *Lateline* he had this to say—

There is absolutely no disagreement on our part that those rivers should remain in the way that they have been managed by Aboriginal people for thousands of years and for the past 200 years. Cape York Peninsula hosts the most pristine rivers in the country, and all of those rivers bar a few are on Aboriginal land and that says everything about the stewardship of the traditional owners of the rivers on their land.

I sit alongside with Noel Pearson when he says comments like that, because we are as one in terms of wanting to continue to protect those wild rivers.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, what is it that you are protecting the wild rivers from? What is the imminent threat that you see that the rivers on Cape York need to be protected from?

Mr ROBERTSON: It is not about protecting these rivers from imminent threats. These issues have been debated in the parliament now for numbers of years—in fact, with the support of your side of politics, if I recall correctly. It is a legislated mechanism to ensure that development does not have an impact on those pristine values that we are seeking to protect. It does not stop development, but like any development that occurs in any part of this state or indeed this country it gets informed in terms of the approval process by legislation to ensure that, for example, vegetation is not cleared to an extent more than is necessary, that—

Mr SEENEY: The Vegetation Management Act does that surely.

CHAIR: Order!

Mr ROBERTSON: Correct. You are quite right, but that is what the Wild Rivers Act does, doesn't it? It calls up those particular—

Mr SEENEY: Which apply anyway.

Mr ROBERTSON: That is right, so what is your problem?

Mr SEENEY: So what are you protecting it from? The Vegetation Management Act protects it from the element that you are talking about. The question is: what is the great threat to these rivers? Given that you agreed Noel Pearson as an Aboriginal leader—

CHAIR: I think we have the comment. That is the original question, member for Callide. We will let the minister finish his answer and you will have a supplementary opportunity.

Mr ROBERTSON: Those very things resulted in your side of politics supporting the wild rivers legislation is the answer. You surely would have known that, in supporting the legislation that was debated back in 2006.

Mr SEENEY: That is not right. That is quite dishonest, and you know it.

CHAIR: Thank you. Member for Callide.

Mr SEENEY: The Aboriginal community is preparing to take court action about the government's declaration of these areas. Have you made any provision in these budget documents to defend such a court action? Would your department be involved in defending such a court action? Do you think it is appropriate for the Queensland government to spend taxpayers' money opposing the right of Aboriginal people on the cape to establish an economic base?

Mr ROBERTSON: No, we fully support Aboriginal people establishing economic bases on the cape.

Mr SEENEY: So have you made any provision in these budget documents to oppose or respond to the sort of litigation that is being prepared by Aboriginal leaders on behalf of the Aboriginal communities on the cape?

Mr ROBERTSON: In terms of the general provision of funds to the department, if additional money is required for legal action that may be launched by whomever, then that is a matter that gets taken to the Cabinet Budget Review Committee during the year, but I do not foresee any significant change to the estimates that are before this committee to meet any such challenge. If the challenge is about protecting Indigenous people's aspirations for economic development, then we agree with those aspirations and they are hard-wired into the wild rivers declarations. I encourage anyone who has an interest in this matter to read those declarations and they will see quite clearly what it is that I am referring to.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, when did you last meet Aboriginal leaders from the cape to talk about the wild rivers situation?

Mr ROBERTSON: I have had a standing offer to meet with the Pearson brothers and others now since I came into this portfolio a number of months ago.

Mr SEENEY: But you haven't?

Mr ROBERTSON: Unfortunately they have not taken up that offer, but we continue to make those offers. In the meantime I have met with representatives of the Cape York Land Council. I was hoping that the Pearsons would have attended the most recent meeting of the Cape York Tenure Resolution Implementation Group, but for whatever reason they were unable to attend. Nevertheless, their representatives had an opportunity to meet with me. My door remains open at any time to meet with Noel or Gerhard in relation to this or any other matter. In fact, we are trying to organise a meeting for me to travel to Cairns, so keen am I to sit down with these gentlemen to discuss these issues.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, when did you last visit any of the communities that were affected by these wild rivers declarations?

Mr ROBERTSON: I was in Lockhart River about three weeks ago at a native title determination. It was a great day.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, are you suggesting that you were not made aware of the concerns that these communities had when you visited Lockhart River, as you say you did?

Mr ROBERTSON: Sorry?

Mr SEENEY: Are you suggesting that you were not made aware of the concerns?

Mr ROBERTSON: How on earth could you come to that conclusion?

Mr SEENEY: Okay. Well, I will put the question to you more directly. Were the concerns of the Aboriginal people on the cape expressed to you on your visit to Lockhart River? And did you dismiss them, or did you take any account of those concerns?

Mr ROBERTSON: No-one raised with me during my time in Lockhart River any concern with respect to the wild rivers declaration.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, was the wild rivers declaration part of the government's election promises to any other conservation groups? Were they, like the vegetation management moratorium, a political payback to any particular group?

Mr ROBERTSON: No, and nor was the vegetation management announcement. I reject that. That is an offensive statement.

CHAIR: Member for Callide, I would ask that you not put argumentative statements within your question.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, what, then, do you see as future development opportunities for the cape communities given that this morning you are apparently rejecting the claims by Aboriginal leaders that these wild rivers declarations serve as an impediment to the types of development that they see as being essential for an economic base for those communities? What do you see as the future for the cape?

Mr ROBERTSON: I take it that you have read those wild river declarations?

Mr SEENEY: Absolutely.

Mr ROBERTSON: So you would know what is outlined in them?

Mr SEENEY: I reject your implied suggestion that my question is answered in those wild rivers declarations. My question to you directly is: what development opportunities do you see for the Aboriginal communities on the cape? What do you and your government which you serve to represent here this morning see as the future for Cape York generally and the Aboriginal communities that have to build an economic base there sooner or later?

Mr ROBERTSON: Economic development can continue to occur in wild rivers areas. Activities that are not affected by a wild river declaration include stock grazing, taking water for stock or domestic purposes; weed and pest management; and improving pasture. I would remind you of my opening statement in which I talked about the wild river rangers who have been employed in the cape as a direct result of job-creating opportunities from wild rivers.

Although certain types of development are prohibited, the following developments are permitted in high-preservation areas: tourism, such as fishing charters and tours; facilities, such as accommodation and camping grounds; out-stations; residential development; specified work such as roads, railways, powerlines; low-impact exploration for mining; vegetation clearing for necessary infrastructure; and small-scale fuel storage.

In the preservation area, which represents the vast majority of the wild river area, all developments in addition to those listed above can continue to occur including agriculture, such as cropping; animal husbandry such as feedlots; in-stream dams and weirs; environmentally relevant activities, for example, aquaculture, grow-out ponds, fish farms, surface mining and petroleum activities. I think there is a wide range of activities that fit within those definitions that can be carried out in both high-preservation and preservation areas in a wild river declared area.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, that brings the questioning back to the question I asked you previously, then. What is it that you are protecting the area from? If all of that development can occur and the Aboriginal communities have no need to be concerned about being able to engage in those developments as part of building an economic base, what is it that you are ruling out? What is it that you are protecting the area from?

Mr ROBERTSON: Purely these wild river declarations as contained in the legislation are about how development is conducted so it does not impact on the pristine values of those river systems. It is as simple as that. I suspect it is because it was so simple that is why you supported the legislation back in 2006.

Mr SEENEY: Once again, for the sake of the record, Mr Chairman, the minister is dishonest in claiming that.

CHAIR: Member for Callide, your job is to ask the questions and it is the minister's job to answer them. If you have another question, I will give you the call.

Mr SEENEY: Mr Chairman, surely I also have the right to correct that sort of blatant dishonesty which is meant to deflect the line of questioning.

CHAIR: Member for Callide, if you are suggesting that the minister is misleading the committee, you need to put that in writing so that can be considered by the Speaker and the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee. This is not the place to debate that. This is your opportunity to ask questions of the minister.

Mr SEENEY: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, isn't the real fact that the wild rivers declarations that you have undertaken are simply a political payoff to conservation groups in the south-east corner that have absolutely no consideration of the effects or the long-term future for the Aboriginal communities in the cape?

Mr ROBERTSON: Apart from that being an offensive suggestion, the answer is simply no. I would remind you that at all times we have sought to engage local Indigenous communities in the process of wild rivers declarations, including hiring or contracting Balkanu for some \$30,000 to conduct consultations in the most recent wild river declarations, so that we could be assured that that consultation with Indigenous people was conducted at a high and quality level.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, I turn to the issue of World Heritage listing for Cape York. Has your department been involved in any negotiations or any consideration of the issue of World Heritage listing? And do you know what the government's attitude is towards World Heritage listing of Cape York?

Mr ROBERTSON: In relation to ministerial responsibility, that rests with my colleague the minister—

Mr SEENEY: But my question was—

Mr ROBERTSON: No, hang on; I am trying to help you. That is the principal responsibility of my colleague Minister Kate Jones, but in relation to involvement by the department the answer is yes. In fact, it was a topic of discussion at the most recent Cape York Tenure Resolution Implementation Group meeting held here in parliament about three or four weeks ago attended by me, Minister Jones and federal minister Peter Garrett as well as representatives of the Cape York Land Council and others.

Mr SEENEY: You are not prepared to give us any indication of what your department's attitude is towards the issue of World Heritage listing?

Mr ROBERTSON: We are supportive of it.

Mr SEENEY: You support World Heritage listing of Cape York?

Mr ROBERTSON: We will be working with the federal government and stakeholder groups—landholders, conservation groups and Indigenous groups—to progress that matter, but ultimately it is the responsibility of the Commonwealth government.

Mr SEENEY: So, Minister, in summary, the situation that Cape York Aboriginal communities face is that your government is going to continue with the wild rivers listing, you support World Heritage listing of the cape, and you still somehow believe that that is not going to impact on the economic development opportunities of Cape York Aboriginals?

Mr ROBERTSON: That is exactly why our parliament passed the Cape York Peninsula Heritage Act that provides legislative support for the economic aspirations of Indigenous people and other landholders on Cape York. I would remind you that one of Queensland's biggest development projects under consideration at this point in time—that is, the Aurukun bauxite leases—is located in Cape York. If that project progresses, then that will be a major economic shot in the arm for Cape York and the ability of Indigenous people to secure employment in a project such as that.

That is why the proponents of that plan are already working with communities such as the Aurukun community to hopefully identify training opportunities early on for Indigenous people. So, if that project does get up and running, local Indigenous people have an opportunity to get a start in that project. That is just one of a number of projects that are underway in Cape York or planned for Cape York, underscoring our commitment not just to protect the environment of Cape York, and that is something that is world-class, but also to recognise Indigenous aspirations for economic development.

CHAIR: We will now move on to government members questions.

Mr SEENEY: Mr Chair, I had 50 seconds.

CHAIR: I call the member for Callide.

Mr SEENEY: Well, I will because there was one question in relation to wild rivers that I believe should be asked, and that is in relation to the proposed declaration for Coopers Creek. Can you give us an indication of the government's attitude towards the irrigation entitlements that currently exist on Coopers Creek?

Mr ROBERTSON: I am aware generally of the debate that is underway in that part of western Queensland, particularly in relation to whether sleeper and dozer licences should be allowed to be enacted. It is a difficult issue. I am aware that the community out there in some respects is split. There are some very strong views. In fact, I met with the representatives of the flood plain association—what are they called?

Ms Best: The western river alliance.

Mr ROBERTSON: I met with the western river alliance early this week and heard how they would like to see a wild river declaration process and a water resource planning process, because I think the Cooper is currently up for renewal. I can assure you, member for Callide, that I will be considering those issues very carefully and will be listening to both sides of the argument. I will be happy to hear from you and your colleagues, particularly Vaughan Johnson, to get your feedback as to where you think the community is at and how we might resolve those somewhat competing interests that we see out in that part of the world.

I think we both agree that it is a unique environment that needs to be handled delicately, because there are some very good enterprises out there that are being able to market themselves as organic beef producers. They do not want to lose that edge that they have been able to establish through working in a pretty clean 'green' environment. There are also obviously some aspirations for other types of development to occur out there that may not be complementary to that organic marketing edge that has been established. They are some of the issues that have to be taken into consideration in moving forward with these kinds of initiatives.

CHAIR: Minister, I refer you to page 3-239 of the Service Delivery Statements of your department. Can you provide the committee with an update on the status of the water grid?

Mr ROBERTSON: Thank you, Chairman. The Queensland government is delivering on its commitment to construct a \$9 billion water grid to provide South-East Queensland with the water security it needs to both grow and prosper. Five of the largest water projects are now being commissioned with construction costs of some \$4.6 billion. These projects include three interconnector pipelines, the Gold Coast desalination plant and the purified recycled water scheme.

To date, this construction has involved, as I mentioned in my opening statement, some 5½ thousand workers and over 12 million hours of work. Over 420 kilometres of pipe has been laid and eight new treatment plants constructed or upgraded to diversify and conserve our water resources. To date, the following volumes have been supplied by the grid: the Northern Pipeline Interconnector some

3,908 megalitres; the southern regional water pipeline some 11,835 megalitres; the Eastern Pipeline Interconnector some 1,345 megalitres; the Gold Coast desalination plant some 4,700 megalitres; and the Western Corridor Recycled Water Project some 20,800 megalitres.

Several key pieces of the water grid are still to be delivered which include: Hinze Dam stage 3, due for completion by 31 December 2010 and currently on schedule; the Wyaralong Dam, construction has now commenced and it is due for completion by 31 December 2011; and Traveston Crossing Dam, with proposed completion by early 2017, subject to final approvals.

The government is also committed to construction of the Northern Pipeline Interconnector stage 2 from the Sunshine Coast to Brisbane which is due to commence later this year. On commissioning, the pipeline will be able to move up to 65 million litres of water a day in either direction providing the majority of the Sunshine Coast community with the same high level of water security experienced by the rest of South-East Queensland. Following construction of the Traveston Crossing Dam, the water grid will have the capacity to deliver more than 600,000 megalitres of water a year to South-East Queensland. The completed grid will dramatically improve the reliability of the water supply even with high series population growth and an allowance for a 10 per cent reduction in dam yields due to climate change. The grid is expected to meet the needs of South-East Queensland until at least 2028.

Ms van LITSENBURG: I refer to page 3-239 of the Service Delivery Statement and I ask: can you outline the institutional arrangements for the next phase of water reform in South-East Queensland?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for the question. The government in conjunction with South-East Queensland councils has agreed that reforms to the provision of the region's urban water services are both necessary and overdue. Stage 1 involved a comprehensive reform of the bulk water sector with the commencement of operations of the South-East Queensland water grid on 1 July 2008.

This included establishment of three large bulk water businesses to operate the region's bulk water—that is, SEQWater, LinkWater and WaterSecure. This replaces the former fragmented structure under which bulk water service provision for the region was delivered. In the second stage of reforms three new integrated retailer distributor entities will be established to be jointly owned by local councils. They will be based on the geographic boundaries that align with the boundaries of the owner councils and will be responsible for water reticulation, sewage treatment and retail services.

This stage 2 reform model differs from the state's previous model which envisaged the establishment of a single distribution entity for the region and three separate stand-alone retailers. However, as result of the concerns of councils about the cost and the perceived complexity of these arrangements, in May 2009 I asked councils to come forward with an alternative reform model to deliver the key objectives at a lower cost. That had the full support of all South-East Queensland councils. We have listened to those concerns and are prepared to move forward with them to implement a new model for the benefit of the region.

The second stage of reforms will also involve development of a comprehensive regulatory regime incorporating economic regulation, asset management and water quality. In addition, it will also include the development of customer service standards and land use planning arrangements that are consistent across the region. These new arrangements will provide assurances to the South-East Queensland community that urban water services are being delivered safely and efficiently. These reforms also mean greater transparency of cost and service performance and improved capacity to manage drought and greater efficiency to manage storages at a regional level.

Mr KILBURN: I refer to page 3-242 of the Service Delivery Statement and ask: can the minister explain the growth in the operational budget for the Queensland Water Commission and what the commission will be delivering for Queenslanders in 2009-10?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for the question. As a ex-firefighter I am sure he has a real interest in secure water supplies. The commission's 2008-09 forecast expenditure of \$28.5 million reflects its considerable achievements in securing South-East Queensland's water supplies for the future, including implementation and monitoring of water restrictions, monitoring performance against contractual obligations of bulk water grid entities, market rules administration for the water grid and advice on essential climate resilient water sources including investigation of potential desalination sites, subregional water cycle planning for the Mount Lindesay-North Beaudesert area and continued development and implementation of a long-term regional water supply strategy.

During 2009-10 the commission's significant work program will include further studies into potential desalination sites, delivering ongoing institutional reforms, finalising the South-East Queensland water strategy, engaging with urban planners, land developers and councils, developing responses to management of energy and carbon impacts of the water grid, implementing long-term water efficiency strategies and regulatory solutions to permanent water efficiency and providing advice on the continued development of long-term regional water security options.

Announced savings of \$22 million over four years in the commission's budget will be realised through reduced communication programs and corporate overheads with the consolidation of its corporate and communication services into the Department of Environment and Resource

Management. The commission's published \$28.1 million budget for 2009-10 already represented a \$3.2 million reduction from the initial estimated budget of \$31.3 million. These savings came through reductions in corporate services of \$1.1 million and communications expenditure of \$2.1 million.

The \$3.2 million savings offset planned increases in activities required in 2009-10 such as desalination siting investigation, subregional and local water supply studies, major regulatory reform projects and increased costs associated with enterprise bargaining. Without cutting jobs, a further reduction of \$2.3 million in corporate communications costs and lower priority projects represents total savings of some \$5.5 million for 2009-10. With the commission's corporate and communications teams merged with the department further savings will be delivered in 2009-10 and sustained thereafter.

In addition, resulting from the government's commitment to implement reforms identified in the Webb and Weller review, the commission's board of three commissioners has been simplified to a single commissioner model. Amendments to the commission structure or budget do not change its core functions or the important work it continues to undertake throughout Queensland.

Ms CROFT: I refer to pages 12 and 13 of Budget Paper No. 3 and ask: can the minister outline the actions that have been taken since the release of the Pascoe report into the fluoride dosing incident at North Pine?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for Broadwater. On Friday, 26 June 2009 the final report into the North Pine fluoride incident was released by the state government. The report found the overdosing occurred as a result of equipment failures at the North Pine fluoride dosing facility to which the SEQWater operators did not respond appropriately. There were a number of recommendations by the independent investigator as well as a series of comprehensive compliance actions issued by the Office of the Water Supply Regulator.

SEQWater has been given strict deadlines to which it is required to deliver against these compliance actions. All actions are required to be completed and reported to the regulator by the end of this year. I am pleased to be able to report that SEQWater has started work on all immediate actions required by the regulator. In addition, the vast majority of other compliance actions are also underway. Most importantly, steps have already been taken to ensure no existing fluoride dosing facility can operate when the corresponding water treatment plant is offline. SEQWater operators have been instructed to manually disable all fluoride dosing facilities when water treatment plants are offline. Other key initiatives across all SEQWater fluoride facilities include the development of enhanced training for operators, including the management of documentation and reporting, as well as the development of an interlocking control system to ensure no fluoride dosing facility can operate if the water treatment plant is offline.

A review is also underway into the hazard assessment of each fluoride facility including upgrading the existing emergency response plans. Following the North Pine incident, SEQWater conducted an immediate review of all fluoride dosing facilities, including an assessment of equipment performance. Importantly, no similar sets of circumstances were identified.

SEQWater will be conducting a further, more detailed review of all fluoride dosing facilities over the next six months. This incident should never have occurred and SEQWater has been made well aware of its responsibilities to ensure that it does not happen again.

CHAIR: Minister, I refer you to the agency budget highlights document and ask: can the minister provide an update on the vegetation moratorium and the consultation process to date?

Mr ROBERTSON: As has been mentioned earlier, the Blich government made an election commitment on 15 March 2009 for a moratorium on the clearing of endangered regrowth vegetation while the government consults with stakeholder groups about ways of improving vegetation clearing laws. This commitment was made in response to the latest Statewide Landcover and Trees Study which showed a continued high rate of clearing of regrowth vegetation.

The Vegetation Management (Regrowth Clearing Moratorium) Bill 2009 was assented to on 30 April 2009, giving effect to the moratorium from 8 April 2009 to 7 July 2009. That moratorium has since been extended for a further three months until 7 October 2009 to ensure proper consideration of the large number of submissions received from stakeholders and landholders. The department has received close to 400 submissions. Not surprisingly the majority are from rural landholders.

The submissions are currently being considered to assist in the development of future protection arrangements for regrowth vegetation and regrowth mapping and to ensure the necessary certainty is provided for landholders and rural industries. My department has also been consulting with key stakeholders to seek their views on options for future protection of regrowth. This consultation is occurring with stakeholders such as AgForce, Queensland Farmers Federation, Timber Queensland, World Wildlife Fund, Wildlife Queensland, the Urban Development Institute of Australia Queensland branch, the Cement Concrete & Aggregates Australia, the Australian Bankers Association as well as major rural lenders.

In addition, senior departmental staff have toured brigalow country as the management of this land was raised as a key issue in the public submissions. A range of options for the future protection of high-value vegetation regrowth are now being considered. It is important to government that any future arrangements recognise good management practices of current sustainable rural enterprises and consider the potential impact on these enterprises and rural communities as a whole.

As part of the consultation process the mapping was identified as a key issue. I am committed to ensuring the most current mapping data and scientifically robust approaches are used for future regrowth mapping. This will ensure that urban areas and crops that were mapped as endangered regrowth on the moratorium map are excluded in any future map. Whilst the moratorium does not affect these areas, the department is committed to developing mapping that is the most representative of high-value regrowth the government is seeking to protect.

Ms van LITSENBURG: I refer to the agency's budget highlights document and ask: can you provide an update on how mapping issues associated with the moratorium will be addressed?

Mr ROBERTSON: Thank you, member for Redcliffe. At the start of the regrowth moratorium a map was produced to help landholders identify areas affected by the moratorium. There have been some concerns raised about the accuracy of this map.

Mr SEENEY: That is because there was not much accuracy.

Mr ROBERTSON: Come now. You are not going to run this old one out again? I thought something might have changed over five years but clearly not. The moratorium map was developed as a template.

Mr SEENEY: The point—

Mr ROBERTSON: I was provoked.

Mr SEENEY: I was provoked.

CHAIR: I think there is a bit of provocation on both sides, Minister. Can you come back to the question.

Mr ROBERTSON: It could be a long four hours. The moratorium map was developed as a temporary measure to protect high-value regrowth vegetation while the government consults with stakeholders to finalise the long-term arrangements for regrowth protection. Moratorium regrowth vegetation areas which are marked as blue on the moratorium map were identified using satellite imagery. As a result, suburbs and towns which have plenty of trees and shrubs or areas that have been cleared since the date the satellite imagery was captured may appear as moratorium regrowth vegetation areas on the map.

However, the map is only a part of the moratorium arrangements and indicates areas where people should check further with my Department of Environment and Resource Management about whether the moratorium affects them. The map needs to be considered in conjunction with the legislation, which provides exemptions for clearing in urban areas and routine management activity, such as clearing for firebreaks and maintaining fences and infrastructure. That is the point that we have made absolutely clear all along.

Many landholders have contacted departmental vegetation management officers who have explained the map and the effect, if any, of the moratorium on their property. Landholders can also access easy-to-understand guides from the department's website to assist in determining the effect of the moratorium map. Many property owners who viewed the moratorium maps and who worked through the guides have found their properties were not affected. For example, where vegetation is shown as blue on the moratorium map and the landholder has a property map of assessable vegetation identifying the area as category X, it is exempt from the moratorium.

My department is now working to ensure that the most current mapping data and scientifically robust approaches are used for future regrowth mapping. This includes new mapping methodologies to exclude urban areas and crops that were mapped as endangered regrowth on the moratorium map.

My department is committed to developing mapping that is the most representative of the high-value regrowth that the government is seeking to protect. If any landholder has a concern about the moratorium map, or indeed the vegetation maps that can be generated through my department's website, I encourage them, as I always do, to contact the department and work through those issues to ensure that the mapping that is available in the future is as accurate as possible. Many landholders have taken the opportunity to do that, and I encourage more to do exactly that.

Mr KILBURN: Minister, I refer you to page 3-201 at dot point 1 and page 3-202 of the Service Delivery Statements and ask: can the minister provide an update on the advances in spatial information and how this will contribute to the economy?

Mr ROBERTSON: Thank you. Online services such as Google Earth and the popularity of in-car navigation have changed forever the way citizens think about location based or spatial information. The government is a primary generator and collector of spatial data, with as much as 80 per cent of government data having a spatial component.

Spatial technologies are widely used in natural resource and environmental management, as I have just discussed in my previous answer, and also in the fields of geoscience, biosecurity, emergency management, defence, planning, construction, transport and utilities. Nearly every sector of the economy relies daily on spatial information.

The contribution to the Australian economy of spatial technology through services and efficiency gains is considerable. The independent report by ACIL Tasman titled *The value of spatial information* estimated that in 2006-07 spatial information and technologies contributed between \$6.4 billion and \$12.5 billion to Australia's gross domestic product. For Queensland, on a per capita basis that equates to between \$14.5 million and \$28.3 million.

An example of where the Queensland government is advancing spatial technologies for the benefit of citizens and industry is the new electronic access for registry lodgement system. This important project is developing spatial technologies to improve digital flow of cadastral survey information within and between the government and surveying industry. Detailed project planning and design is on schedule for completion this July, with construction of the technologies expected to commence in August and the new online business process and services available in the second half of 2010.

I anticipate another busy year for those in the department involved in providing spatial capabilities and services to support the business of government. The increasing recognition that spatial capabilities can assist with the development and evaluation of policy, the delivery of government services to citizens and the improvement of internal business processes will only continue to develop.

Mr SEENEY: I refer you to the Service Delivery Statements on page 3-242, which deals with the budget for the Water Commission. My question relates to a number of statements that the Premier made in May 2009, when she promised that \$7 million would be cut from the Water Commission's budget, and in February 2009, when the figure to be cut from the Water Commission's budget was going to be \$15 million. Can you show me in these budget documents where those cuts have been made to the Water Commission budget?

Mr ROBERTSON: I have actually provided that information already in terms of my answer to one of the government members, but I am happy to go through it again. Since its commencement in 2006 the Queensland Water Commission has played a major role in the planning and implementation of the \$9 billion water grid.

Mr SEENEY: I am interested in the budget cuts, Minister. The question related to the budget cuts.

Mr ROBERTSON: I was getting to that.

Mr SEENEY: I have learned to be patient.

Mr ROBERTSON: And I have learned to be patient with you, too. The commission's published estimated expenditure for 2008-09 is \$28.5 million. That is an increase in the estimated actual operating expenditure above the published budget for 2008-09. That principally relates to additional expenditure on developing and undertaking communication campaigns to achieve targeted residential water consumption and further development of the Waterhub modular information management system to deliver accurate regional water consumption data for forecast and infrastructure planning.

The published \$28.1 million budget for the commission represents a \$3.2 million reduction from the QWC budget as it would have been in 2009-10, which would have been \$31.3 million without the government's announced savings measures.

Mr SEENEY: So sorry to interrupt—

Mr ROBERTSON: No—

Mr SEENEY: Does that mean that, rather than cutting, you just did not give them an increase? Is that the crux of your answer? Rather than cutting the budget, you just did not give them an increase and you are counting that as a budget cut?

Mr ROBERTSON: Are you right?

Mr SEENEY: I am right.

Mr ROBERTSON: Okay.

Mr SEENEY: Do you want a hand to answer it?

Mr ROBERTSON: No. As I was saying, the published \$28.1 million budget for the commission represents a \$3.2 million reduction from the QWC budget as it would have been in 2009-10. So the budget—

Mr SEENEY: So yes—

Mr ROBERTSON: The budget for 2009-10 was scheduled to be \$31.3 million. As a result of taking action to reduce that budget, we have seen that budget for 2009-10 come in at \$28.1 million, which is a \$3.2 million reduction. That saving came about through reductions in corporate services, which was cut by \$1.1 million in 2009-10, and communications expenditure cut by \$2.1 million. This

saving offsets the increases in front-line commission services required to be delivered in 2009-10, including desalination siting investigations, subregional and local water supply studies and major regulatory reform projects. So that would have increased the budget by some \$2.6 million.

However, since finalisation of the commission's published budget, there have been additional savings. So in addition to that which has been published, there has been further work undertaken to identify further savings. As I have mentioned earlier in response to a question from the government members, a further \$2.3 million will be achieved in terms of reduced expenditure from the 2009-10 forward estimates published in the Service Delivery Statements, meaning the equivalent 2009-10 expenditure is expected to be \$25.8 million rather than the \$28.1 million published in the budget. So work continues.

Mr SEENEY: Thank you. Minister, does that not make the whole budgeting process a farce? Does it not make claims of budget cuts a farce when you can claim that the budget cuts are actually increases that you did not deliver? You did not give them an increase; therefore that is a budget cut? That is the crux of your answer and does that not make a farce—

CHAIR: Member for Callide. Minister.

Mr SEENEY: I have not finished my question, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: There was a question there.

Mr ROBERTSON: It would be helpful if you had listened to the answer that was previously provided, because what I have just indicated is that work continues to reduce expenditure in the Queensland Water Commission. I was just outlining that a further \$2.3 million has been identified for reduced expenditure post publication of the budget. So that represents a saving of some \$5.5 million in 2009-10, with the remainder of the total announced savings of \$22 million over four years being achieved over the following three years.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, what will the people of Queensland get for the \$28 million—which I presume it will remain at—that the government will spend on the Queensland Water Commission this year?

Mr ROBERTSON: The Water Act 2000 prescribes the commission's main functions—namely, to advise the minister of the day on matters relating to water supply and demand management for water and the delivery of desired levels of service objectives for water supply to the South-East Queensland region and designated regions; and to facilitate and implement regional water security programs and ensure compliance with the water security proposals and with commission water restrictions.

The commission's significant work program is continuing in relation to planning and implementation of demand management practices for residential and non-residential water use; providing advice to the government on ongoing institutional reform, including the development of regulatory frameworks relating to economic regulation codes, asset management, explicit water grid-wide planning through the system operating plan and the emergency management plans and customer protection; and providing advice to the government on the ongoing development of regional water security options, including finalisation of the South-East Queensland water strategy.

The functions of the commission remain critical for ensuring water supply security in South-East Queensland and beyond. After all, it is the Queensland Water Commission. Beyond 2008-09, the commission will continue to conduct further studies into potential desalination sites; deliver ongoing institutional reform, including establishing retail and distribution entities and economic and asset regulatory frameworks; finalise and implement the final South-East Queensland water strategy; engage broadly with urban planners, land developers and councils; develop responses to the emerging needs of managing energy and carbon impacts of the water grid; implement long-term water efficiency strategies and regulatory solutions to permanent water efficiency; and implement efficiency measures with domestic water users to ensure the post drought targets are achieved once introduced on 1 December—later this year.

So in terms of the expenditure that is anticipated with the Queensland Water Commission, as reduced as it is from previous levels nevertheless, the work of the QWC remains important across a range of tasks that they have responsibility for.

Mr SEENEY: Once again referring to the Water Commission and its budget, in 2006 in the parliament the Premier estimated that the costs for the Water Commission when he set it up would be between \$2 million and \$2.5 million. Since then the budget has blown out every year, with apparently the only reduction now a stop to the increase. Can you tell us what the Water Commission has achieved that could not have been achieved using the resources of your department?

Mr ROBERTSON: I do not think there are any credible critiques of the work performed by the Queensland Water Commission over the last number of years in terms of how quickly and effectively it put in place a range of strategies and initiatives to secure South-East Queensland's water supply. I think the outstanding result that has reverberated literally around the world in terms of what the QWC was able to achieve was long-term change in customer behaviour in how not just industry but also ordinary South-East Queenslanders now view water and now use water.

The fact that the target of 140 litres per person per day was reached, and to a large extent has been sustained even though our dams are in a much healthier condition, speaks volumes for the effectiveness of the campaign that the Queensland Water Commission implemented to get us through the worst drought on record. I think that is probably the pinnacle of a range of other achievements that could be listed.

For anyone to question the investment that was made in the Queensland Water Commission in terms of what it produced, frankly, I do not think is credible in any way. The fact that there has been international recognition for what the Queensland Water Commission has achieved I think, as I said, speaks—and no pun intended—volumes for the work that it has achieved over the past few years.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, the summation of that answer would be that the Water Commission has run a publicity campaign to reduce the consumption of water in Brisbane. Can I take you back to—

Mr ROBERTSON: That is absolute nonsense.

Mr SEENEY: That is the summation of the question.

Mr ROBERTSON: I have heard some spin in my time from you, member for Callide, but not to that level.

Mr SEENEY: Can I remind you—

Mr ROBERTSON: Please do not paraphrase.

Mr SEENEY: Can I remind you of the crux of my question? What is it that they have achieved that your department could not have achieved? Why is it that your department could not have run that same publicity campaign to achieve those markers without the great blow-out in the budget from the Water Commission that we have seen year after year?

Mr ROBERTSON: There has not been a blow-out in the budget. That is just absolute nonsense.

Mr SEENEY: It blew out from \$2 million to \$28 million.

CHAIR: Order!

Mr ROBERTSON: No wonder nobody takes you seriously.

CHAIR: Member for Callide, I have given you a fair shake in terms of asking a question and as soon as the minister starts to answer it you then jump down his throat.

Mr ROBERTSON: He is a recidivist. I reject his interpretation of my answer that all the QWC did was run a publicity campaign. I have made it quite clear that that was the pinnacle of a range of initiatives, both infrastructure related and related to behavioural change—behavioural change both in industrial customers and in domestic customers.

In terms of the initial allocation by the former Premier, that was before the full work program had been developed for the Queensland Water Commission. Once that work program was developed, budget allocations were appropriated accordingly. That is not a blow-out; that is funding a properly considered work program following the establishment of the Water Commission. Everybody knows that. This is why it is just simply spin that the member for Callide is engaging in.

In terms of what the Queensland Water Commission delivered, it got South-East Queensland through the worst drought on record. That is what it achieved. It was provided with legislative powers to get in there and do the work using those powers as quickly, effectively and efficiently as possible. That is why today we have a secure water supply for South-East Queensland now and well into the future.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, in the section that relates to the Water Commission in the budget documents there is no table setting out the staffing levels, unlike the budget documents that relate to the department as a whole. Minister, is there some reason why you have not reported about the staffing levels of the Water Commission? Can you give us a reason why those full-time equivalent staffing levels have not been included in the budget documents for the Water Commission?

Mr ROBERTSON: I will let my director-general answer that question.

Mr Bradley: The short answer is that there is no particular reason why the budget documents do not spell out staffing. It is a statutory body, so it is in a separate category to the Department of Environment and Resource Management. In terms of its full-time equivalents, the commission's staffing levels remain at the same level they have been, apart from the significant change which the minister referred to previously where the communications and corporate services staff are being transferred to the Department of Environment and Resource Management through a departmental administrative notice.

What the minister was making clear there was that we are seeking to achieve synergies and efficiency in the way we manage corporate services to the commission as a separate statutory authority while still keeping its separation and independent chair under the single-commissioner model. In terms of the staffing complement of the commission, the answer is that it remains unchanged.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, I took it from the answer that was given by the acting director-general that some staffing elements of the Water Commission are being transferred to the department, and that reinforces what you said. Is it true that the communications staff of the Water Commission are being transferred to the department? How many staff are involved in the communications section of the Water Commission? Will there be anything left in the Water Commission when you transfer the communications and publicity staff out? Now I am getting confused.

Mr ROBERTSON: I will invite my acting director-general to assist you in that regard.

Mr Bradley: In terms of the commission's staff who are being transferred, as the Premier announced shortly after the restructure within government, the government elected to seek to find synergies through the merging of corporate services and communication activities within the Queensland Water Commission and to take those back into the department. They will be provided under a service level agreement from the department to the commission. In order to give effect to that, the staff who are involved in those activities in corporate services and in communications will be transferred to the Department of Environment and Resource Management. This means that we can get better use out of the existing resources—both financial and human resources—that are involved in undertaking a range of corporate service activities, from HR, finance et cetera through to the communications activities that the commission undertakes.

In terms of the staffing levels within that communication division, again they remain unchanged from the discussion last year in that there are 7.4 staff involved in the media and public relations unit of the commission. Those staff will come over to the Department of Environment and Resource Management and we will be ensuring that we get an integrated approach to the provision of corporate services and communication services across the portfolio. Clearly there are very linked functions, and some of the communication activities and strengths that the commission has developed through its successful campaigns are things where we see there will be opportunities for learning and insight across the communication activities of the Department of Environment and Resource Management as a whole.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, I once again refer you to the Service Delivery Statements on page 3-239 at dot point 2, which says in regard to the Water Commission that one of its duties was monitoring performance of South-East Queensland bulk water entities against their contractual obligations. Yesterday I downloaded from the website the monthly progress reports for May 2009, which are the latest ones which I am sure you are familiar with. There is a whole list of projects requiring attention that I would love the time to be able to go through one at a time. However, I think it is a fair summation to say that every project that falls within that monitoring responsibility of the Water Commission is listed as requiring attention. Not one project has met its contractual obligations. Minister, does this reflect any success at all in relation to the Water Commission?

Mr ROBERTSON: It might be useful if the member could hand that document across.

Mr SEENEY: It is printed off the commission website, but I am happy to give it to you. It is a monthly report that is required under the Water Regulation 2002. I would have thought, Minister, it would have been on your desk before anybody else got it.

Mr ROBERTSON: I have found over the years that it is always worthwhile checking what document you quote from, because more often than not—

Mr SEENEY: Do not deflect from the answer.

Mr ROBERTSON:—they have been found to be somewhat different from how you describe them. That is purely ensuring that—

Mr SEENEY: That is a clever little technique to try to deflect away from the question.

Mr ROBERTSON: I think the record actually demonstrates that you have been caught out, on more than one occasion, handing over dodgy documents.

CHAIR: Minister and member for Callide, I know you are old friends but we might come back to the question.

Mr ROBERTSON: We have missed each other.

CHAIR: I know, but we might just get back to the question.

Mr ROBERTSON: I will ask my acting director-general to provide a response.

Mr Bradley: The key thing to make clear is the commission's role in relation to the publication of those monthly reports. We are responsible under the Water Act 2000 for monitoring implementation of the 26 projects specified under the Water Regulation 2002 which are, as you say, being delivered by a number of different water service providers. Those arrangements were put in place when the government introduced the Water Amendment Regulation (No. 6) 2006 in August of that year which required specific actions to be undertaken by a range of state or local government entities in order to implement projects that would achieve water security.

Those projects included the most significant infrastructure program since the Snowy Mountains hydro scheme in terms of the size and scale of the South-East Queensland water grid, a \$9 billion program which has delivered a significant transformation in urban water security in South-East Queensland. The projects that have been delivered there include the desalination plant and Western Corridor Recycled Water Project, both of which have been internationally recognised in terms of the awards that have been provided to them, both for the speed of their delivery and the technical design of those membrane based facilities. There are some world scale projects that have been delivered under that water emergency regulation project.

The commission reports under a program that the now Premier—then Deputy Premier—committed to on a monthly basis to provide transparency to the status of those projects. Against each issue the water service provider is required to identify what has occurred in complying with the regulation requirement, any reasons for slippage or delay and how those measures are being brought on track to address any delays which are occurring on the project.

Mr ROBERTSON: I will just note that, as I mentioned, it is always worthwhile checking the document that is put forward by the member for Callide because what he has outlined to this estimates hearing is nothing short of just spin.

Mr SEENEY: Can I have it back, then? You can print your own off the commission website.

Mr ROBERTSON: Absolutely.

Mr SEENEY: It is printed off the commission website.

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

Ms CROFT: I understand that the Bligh government supports in principle recommendation 47 of the Webb-Weller review that category 2 water boards should be abolished and their responsibilities transferred to local governments. Can you please advise what process and consultation your department is undertaking with local authorities and the water boards themselves, and what savings and efficiencies are anticipated to be achieved?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for Broadwater for the question. When the Premier commissioned the independent review of government bodies in 2008 the purpose of the review was to reduce bureaucracy and unnecessary red tape, improve the overall efficiency of government bodies and maintain the integrity and security of necessary regulatory functions. Recommendation 47 of the review proposed that category 2 water boards be abolished and their responsibilities be transferred to local government.

The review also stated that local government should have the flexibility to determine the provision of local water services to the community themselves. In this respect, there are a number of options. Responsibilities could be delegated to local boards or alternative non-government institutional arrangements could be established such as local cooperatives or incorporated associations. The government supports this recommendation in principle, recognising that the recommended changes will bring efficiencies. For example, the alignment of specific water service functions within local government will result in less government oversight and reporting requirements, freeing up resources for water service provision. The full extent of efficiencies will be determined during consultation as transfer options are investigated by local government water bodies and my department.

The government's response to the review, whilst supportive, makes it clear that it will take time to determine institutional arrangements appropriate to local circumstances. There are a number of outstanding issues to work through including the transfer of assets, existing liabilities and resourcing matters. We will ensure that we will work closely with local government and water boards to resolve any concerns they may have and that appropriate institutional arrangements are investigated and carefully implemented according to necessary regulatory functions.

I have recently written to each water board outlining the outcome of the Webb-Weller review and that we look forward to working with them to establish appropriate institutional arrangements. The government certainly recognises their dedication to providing water services to the local community.

My department has also recently met with the Local Government Association of Queensland on the matter of the review and will be working in collaboration with local government on the implementation of recommendation 47. I just say particularly for the benefit of the member for Burdekin that those letters that I have referred to, having gone out to all water boards, do represent a position by government to ensure that the local interests that he has been advocating on behalf of the North and South Burdekin water boards will be taken into account. We are genuine about wanting to ensure, in terms of reviewing the role and levels of operation of these organisations, that, as I said, local circumstances are taken into account. Whilst I have been unable to agree to a meeting that you have requested, nevertheless I am aware of your specific issues and they will be taken into account in due course.

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

Ms van LITSENBURG: Minister, I refer to page 3-202 of the Service Delivery Statement. I note that an additional 10 wild river rangers will be employed. Can you advise how they will be employed, the nature of the work they will perform and where, and the positive outcomes the government has seen from the employment of the existing 20 wild river rangers?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for Redcliffe for the question. As I have already discussed, the Wild River Rangers Program provides protection for the world-class natural and cultural values of the Gulf of Carpentaria and Cape York while also creating much needed employment and economic development opportunities in remote Indigenous communities.

The Wild River Rangers Program is delivering on the Queensland government's commitment to better engage the traditional land management skills of Indigenous people to manage Queensland's wild rivers. The Wild River Rangers Program will be expanded in Queensland with additional funding of \$5 million over four years to employ an additional 10 rangers. That means that we are delivering on our commitments. Rangers will be employed through contracts with councils or community organisations to work with landholders, communities and traditional owners.

The rangers will implement a wide range of activities including weed and feral animal control, fire management, fencing of wetlands, erosion mitigation, cultural heritage management, transfer of traditional knowledge, community education and visitor management. New rangers will receive nationally accredited training so that they can safely, effectively and efficiently undertake these contracted activities. They will also be provided with relevant and culturally appropriate mentoring and support.

Initial placements for negotiation with local Indigenous communities include Hinchinbrook Island and the eastern Staaten River catchment. Other negotiations are likely to include the northern Cape York Peninsula area and additional rangers for established groups throughout the Gulf of Carpentaria and Cape York Peninsula.

An evaluation of the program completed earlier this year found that the achievements of the Wild River Rangers Program in its first year are significant, especially considering the challenging geographic and socioeconomic environment in which the program operates. All 20 rangers were employed within nine months and have received nationally accredited and customised on-the-job training supported with intensive personal mentoring by program administrators. They are based in Burketown and Doomadgee—six of them; three of them in Normanton; one in Kowanyama; four in Pormpuraaw; three in Mapoon; and three in Chuulangun. The majority of these areas are Aboriginal owned or controlled and are considered to be of outstanding national and international significance in terms of their natural and cultural features. The outcomes realised by the program also contribute to broader Queensland and Commonwealth government Indigenous policies and initiatives as well as wider ecological, social, cultural and economic benefits.

The program has also supported the development of a land management economy for Aboriginal communities by giving them the core capacity to deliver a range of land management services and supporting them to use these skills in an entrepreneurial approach to access multiple investment sources through fee-for-service contracts and other resourcing arrangements.

Mr KILBURN: I refer to page 3-202 of the Service Delivery Statement. Could the minister outline the consultation that took place leading up to the declaration of the Archer, Lockhart and Stewart basins as wild rivers and the outcomes of the declarations on the local economy?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for Chatsworth for the question. The declarations of the three wild river areas, the Archer, Stewart and Lockhart River basins, followed significant consultation. The department held over 100 meetings in remote areas of Cape York Peninsula, talking to over 300 people in that time. To aid the consultation process the government engaged the Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation to assist in identifying the traditional owners in the three proposed declaration areas and to facilitate meetings with them.

The consultation process was targeted particularly at those stakeholders who lived in or had a connection with the three specific areas. To that end, the department met with local business operators, pastoralists, lease holders, mining companies and their representatives, as well as traditional owners and Indigenous groups. During this open and informative consultation process, the wild rivers proposals were outlined to all parties and it was clearly articulated that declaring an area as a wild river does not restrict development in these areas. Rather, it allows development to proceed while taking into account the sensitivity of the wild river's natural values. There are no constraints on existing authorised developments. A wild river declaration is not retrospective. The declarations do allow economic development opportunities provided that the river, its banks and tributaries are not unduly impacted upon. For example, within the high-preservation area, which is the area immediately adjacent to a river, there are no constraints on grazing activities. Similarly, the construction and maintenance of outstations, roads and facilities for tourism are not prohibited in a high-preservation area. It is the high-impact developments such as intensive agricultural, intensive animal husbandry, instream dams and weirs, surface mining and aquaculture that are restricted in a high-preservation area.

In terms of impacts on the local economy, all existing business operations are continuing and are not impacted by a wild rivers declaration. Now, I am aware that there was a temporary bridge closure on the Coen River and this had the potential to restrict heavy-vehicle traffic north of Coen. The Main Roads department was able to quickly implement an alternative route, and this was done entirely within the provisions of the wild river declaration as well as other legislation. This example demonstrates that a wild rivers declaration does not halt all operations near or in a river and that development activities can and will continue to occur into the future.

CHAIR: Minister, I refer to page 3-202 of the Service Delivery Statement. I see that the Bligh government is intending to extend wild rivers protection to a further eight wild river areas in the next year as part of the Bligh government delivering on its commitments. Can the minister advise the committee of the consultation that will take place, particularly with Indigenous stakeholders as part of the declaration process?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for Waterford for the question. The government has consulted widely on the initial nine wild river nominations. This is particularly so when one looks at the most recent declarations of the Archer, Stewart and Lockhart wild river areas. As I mentioned previously, the department held over 100 meetings in the remote areas of Cape York Peninsula, talking to over 300 people during those times. This focused consultation will occur again as the government progresses the declaration proposals for a further eight wild river areas in addition to the Wenlock Basin on Cape York Peninsula over the next year.

The department has already identified the key people to contact for those areas and will ensure that all stakeholders will be provided with an opportunity to participate in the consultation process. Unfortunately, there continues to be a lot of misinformation out there and the department is working to address this. The consultation process is about getting the facts out so that people can make informed comment. For example, the department has given special attention to ensuring that stakeholders with little knowledge of the requirements involved with development activities are provided with relevant and accessible information. To achieve this, pictorial support materials, along with innovative mapping design and consultation methods appropriate for the target audience, are utilised and continually improved. A wild rivers DVD targeting Indigenous stakeholders was prepared by the department. This featured recognised community leaders speaking on the attributes of the act, along with high-resolution imagery of Cape York and its unspoilt rivers. The DVD was broadcast across the Imparja Television network.

While the innovative use of pictorial support material along with broader educational support from the DVD production has resulted in a range of materials to assist understanding of the Wild Rivers Act and its intent, this cannot replace the need for face-to-face on-ground meetings with stakeholders who may be affected by proposed wild river areas. The government is committed to ensuring that this continues in an effective manner. What that means is that we recognise that, in terms of the population that we are seeking to consult with, we need to understand the special circumstances and environment in which they live and tailor our consultation accordingly. What may work in the suburbs of Brisbane in community consultation does not work in Indigenous communities in remote locations in Cape York. That is why we need to be sensitive and always on the lookout for better ways to improve the way that we communicate in those environments.

One of the things that I have done since coming into this portfolio is ensure that the release of the results of our consultation occurs at the time of the declaration. Past practice has been that that material is published some time after the declaration. Understandably that leads to expressed concerns that people have not been listened to. I think that can be improved, which is why I have brought forward the release of those documents in the future—to ensure that people can be assured that comments they have made have been listened to and responded to as a way to further improve how we engage with stakeholders in such matters.

Ms van LITSENBURG: I refer to page 3-202 of the Service Delivery Statement and ask: can you outline what will be achieved with the \$4.9 million commitment to continue the water metering program across Queensland?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for Redcliffe for that question. Metering is a cornerstone of Queensland's water reforms and is delivering on our commitment to support sustainable water consumption so that users receive their fair share of the resource and ensure environmental needs are met. This initiative is also delivering on our commitment under the National Water Initiative Agreement with the Commonwealth government.

Since the program started in 2005, approximately 1,300 new meters have been installed in 24 areas around the state. Water use information gathered by these meters is already supporting the planning of the state's water resources. Over the next four years the additional funding will provide for installation of new water meters on irrigation offtakes across the state. These meters will ensure that irrigator access to scarce groundwater and unsupplemented stream flows is consistent with their entitlement and is sustainable.

The additional funding provided this financial year will allow approximately 1,000 new meters to be installed in key areas in Central, South-West and South-East Queensland. This significant increase in installation rate and the program of works over the next four years will provide accurate information about water usage in key irrigation areas. The Department of Environment and Resource Management will continue to manage the program, making sure that technical standards are being met and maximising the economies of scale to reduce costs. The program has been established on a user-pays basis, with an annual meter service charged to cut the costs of reading and meter maintenance as well as repay the cost of establishment.

The department is working with key stakeholders and groups in each of the project areas, such as Dalrymple Creek and Condamine River alluvium groundwater users in the southern and central Darling Downs and the users in the Pioneer Valley water resource plan area west of Mackay, to ensure that licensees have access to the best information available about the program of works and implications that relate to their particular works.

The metering program is also contributing to local economies, with virtually all meter installations undertaken by local contractors with ongoing expenditure for maintenance and reading. An estimated \$2.5 million has been injected so far into regional economies since 2005, when the program commenced. With the increase in the rate of installation of new meters this figure will also increase, further supporting regional communities.

CHAIR: I call the member for Chatsworth.

Mr KILBURN: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, I refer to page 3-202 of the Service Delivery Statement and ask: can the minister provide a update on what has been achieved to date and the future directions of the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Fund?

Mr ROBERTSON: Thank you. The Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative is a jointly funded initiative of the Commonwealth and state governments and participating bore owners. It assists landholders to rehabilitate bores and replace bore drains with pipe systems to reduce water wastage and to preserve the pressure of the Great Artesian Basin. Most of the water discharged from the Great Artesian Basin into bore drains is lost through evaporation and seepage. Despite a substantial number of bores now being fully controlled with water distributed by pipelines to tanks and troughs, a significant volume of outflow from the basin is still wasted because of insufficient bore drain systems.

The Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative is necessary to restore artesian pressure and helps landowners to improve management practices, use water more wisely and reduce adverse environmental impacts. The initiative has been operating since 1999. To date the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative and its predecessor programs are responsible for the rehabilitation of 563 bores in the basin. Over 280 bores have been piped resulting in the shutdown of approximately 10,720 kilometres of bore drains, and water savings are estimated at 170,000 megalitres per annum.

The Queensland government announced in the 2009-10 budget that it will commit a further \$46.5 million to phase 3 of the initiatives, starting with \$7.3 million in this financial year. Under an agreement with the Commonwealth and the Queensland government, landholders in the Queensland section of the Great Artesian Basin will be able to continue to obtain up to 80 per cent government funding to cap uncontrolled bores and pipe open bore drains. Over the next five years the two governments will provide around \$90 million towards capping and piping the bores. This will further reduce water wastage and address pressure decline as well as provide for enhanced environmental outcomes. This will be the third five-year phase of this 15-year initiative.

This new phase will build on the existing work of GABSI phase 1 and 2 and will provide added emphasis on ensuring the recovery of groundwater-fed springs. This will be achieved by placing a higher prioritisation on works that will lead to water pressure recovery at high-value springs. The cooperative approach to addressing a significant natural resource issue has been enormously successful. Combined with Queensland's water resource planning activities in the Great Artesian Basin, the continued investment in this initiative has significantly contributed towards securing a sustainable future for the water resources in the basin in Queensland.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, I refer again to the Water Commission's review of performance on page 3-239 of the Service Delivery Statement. I quote from this report from the Queensland Water Commission which you somewhat surprisingly described as pure spin.

Mr ROBERTSON: No. It is a good report. It is just that your interpretation is spin.

Mr SEENEY: One of the Water Commission's duties was to monitor the performance of these entities against the 2002 regulation with regard to, and I quote—

Mr ROBERTSON: What page are you quoting from?

Mr SEENEY: Page 2. It states—

Timelines for completion of the actions and target water volumes to be achieved were outlined in the Regulation.

It is quite clear from the Service Delivery Statement that monitoring that performance was a responsibility of the Water Commission. Minister, can you confirm that none of the major elements of the emergency regulation in 2002—being either the Southern Regional Water Pipeline, the Eastern Pipeline Interconnector, the Western Corridor Recycled Water Project, the South-East Queensland desalination project, the Moreton Bay Regional Council recycled water project, the Gold Coast City Council recycled water project or the Northern Pipeline Interconnector—have met the requirements of the 2002 regulation?

Mr ROBERTSON: I ask the acting director-general to provide you with that answer.

Mr Bradley: In relation to the regulation, the monthly reports have been provided since the commencement of the regulation. Against each of those projects there will have been variations against the expected time, cost and scope outcomes. Indeed, the initial stage of the regulation was for proponents to respond to the government with a preferred or a proposed project plan in terms of how to deliver the project against the requirements of the regulation.

In relation to those major infrastructure initiatives that have been identified, let me give some examples. In relation to the Eastern Pipeline Interconnector, that relied on the production of water from bore fields on North Stradbroke Island. There was an assessment of the sustainability of the ability to produce water from those bore fields which was required, and that was obviously taken into account in the overall project delivery and would have impacted on project performance. In relation to the Southern Regional Water Pipeline, I can confirm that it was constructed by the regulation date of 30 November 2008 and is fully operational. The Tugun desalination plant substantially achieved its construction within the originally regulated time frame of November 2008. It has had a series of commissioning issues which have been the matter of public reports both through the monthly reporting process that the commission undertakes and through separate communications directly from WaterSecure.

But, again, the recognition in terms of this reporting cycle is to make sure that there is detailed information on each of those projects available. The reporting cycle was established at a point at which the water security of the region was significantly under threat and there was a need at that time to make sure that the commission was reporting on the delivery of projects which were contributing to the government's drought response over that period of time. So that transparency has been maintained, although against individual projects there will have been variations against the time, scope and cost outcomes originally specified under the regulation.

Mr SEENEY: I thank the acting director-general for his input. I ask the minister again: in terms of any creditable review of performance of the Water Commission, the fact that none of those major elements of the 2002 regulation have met their time lines for completion or their target water volumes should be considered to be a better indication of the success, or more correctly the failure, of the Water Commission than the claimed success of its public relations campaign.

Mr ROBERTSON: Again, any fair reading of this document would suggest otherwise. In terms of the section that you were in fact quoting from—and this is again why I always need to check any document that you put forward—let us work through what this actually says. It states—

2 Program Overview and Drought Strategy Impacts

Project Status

All nominated Service Providers submitted project reports in accordance with the Regulation.

It goes on to talk about projects that have been completed. It states—

As at the end of May 2009 the following projects have been completed:

- Brisbane Aquifer project;
- Gold Coast to Logan transfer project;
- Cedar Grove Weir;
- Bromelton off-stream storage;
- Brisbane City Council—substitute recycled water to industrial customers;
- Domestic Retrofit Program

Those projects have been completed. It goes on—

Furthermore, construction has been completed for a number of other projects which are now in the commissioning or proving period phase, including:

- Southern Regional Water Pipeline;
- Eastern Pipeline Interconnector;
- Eastern Pipeline Interconnector—sustainable take from Leslie Harrison Dam, while maintaining existing groundwater supply from North Stradbroke Island;
- Western Corridor Recycled Water Project;
- South East Queensland (Gold Coast) Desalination Project;
- Moreton Bay Regional Council—substitute recycled water to industrial customers;
- Gold Coast City Council—substitute recycled water to industrial customers; and Northern Pipeline Interconnector Stage 1

And it goes on—

Mr SEENEY: The next line is the interesting one that you do not want to read out. There is a whole section devoted to issues.

CHAIR: Member for Callide, you will get another opportunity to ask a question after this. Minister, can you answer this one?

Mr ROBERTSON: See, that is where the spin comes in.

Mr SEENEY: I knew he was going to stop there, Mr Chairman.

Mr ROBERTSON: Your first question in opening this section was to suggest that no project that the Queensland Water Commission was responsible for had been completed.

Mr SEENEY: I said none of the major projects.

CHAIR: Member for Callide.

Mr ROBERTSON: So the Brisbane aquifer project, the Gold Coast to Logan transfer project, the Cedar Grove Weir, the Bromelton off-stream storage, the substitute recycled water to industrial customers of BCC and the domestic retrofit program—none of them are major projects according to you.

Mr SEENEY: That is right. They were not major projects under the regulation.

CHAIR: Order!

Mr ROBERTSON: No, no, no.

Mr SEENEY: Yes, yes, yes.

Mr ROBERTSON: Even when you go through the details of these projects you will find details of where infrastructure has been constructed and has been finalised.

Mr SEENEY: None of them have met the requirements under the regulation—not one.

CHAIR: Member for Callide, this is going to take longer if you keep interrupting the minister's answer. I will have to extend his time. I call the minister.

Mr ROBERTSON: Thank you. What I am suggesting to you is that this report contains a lot of information. Yes, I am sure you want to highlight some projects that are still ongoing. But you cannot get away from the fact that you misrepresented quite deliberately when you referred to this document first that no projects had been completed when page 2, the very page you quoted from, lists in graphic detail those projects that have been completed and those infrastructure projects that have been completed but are going through the commissioning or proving period phase. Let us have a bit of honesty in terms of this discussion for a change.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, in relation to the fact that none of the major projects have met the time lines for actions or the target water volumes that were outlined in the 2002 regulation, can I direct you to one of those major projects which is the Gold Coast desalination project. A question on notice that was asked by my colleague the member for Currumbin to your colleague the Minister for Infrastructure indicated directly that responsibility for comment about that project now rests with you. Can you outline to the committee the situation that currently exists with the Gold Coast desalination project and what the government is doing in relation to addressing the off-site impacts that are being experienced by residents in the immediate area?

Mr ROBERTSON: Just so we are clear, the delineation of ministerial responsibility is that responsibility for construction rests with my colleague the Minister for Infrastructure, and that includes the commissioning phase. Once that project has finished its commissioning phase and is formally handed over, then that is where I have direct ministerial responsibility. So that is where the line is drawn. However, I can inform you that today the desalination plant on the Gold Coast is running at 100 per cent capacity. It is producing around 133 megalitres per day and has been doing so for about seven days as part of a 30-day test. So the plant is operating during this commissioning phase. That is not denying that there have been issues, and they have been discussed quite openly over the last couple of weeks.

In terms of the issues that were highlighted particularly at the Gold Coast community cabinet or around that time, the Premier has requested both my colleague the Minister for Infrastructure and me to understand or appreciate the issues that have been highlighted particularly by the rugby league club down there and has requested that we meet with them. That meeting is currently being arranged. I think it needs to be understood that one of the issues that will have to be looked at is, as I understand it, that the rugby league club is actually constructed on top of a former landfill site. So all issues, including any possible impact of the construction of the desal plant, will be taken into consideration. As I understand it though, there have been some quite active discussions between the project proponents and the local community in its various iterations, whether it be the sports club or the local homeowners et cetera. That in my view has to continue and as a result of it having been brought to the attention of the Premier, as I said, both my colleague Minister Hinchliffe and I will be meeting with the sports club in the not-too-distant future.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, in relation to another one of those major projects, the Western Corridor Recycled Water Project, it has been constructed to have a capacity to produce in excess of 230 megalitres per day. It is currently producing somewhere around 30 megalitres per day. Minister, is it the government's intention that this massively expensive infrastructure is going to continue to operate at a tiny fraction of its design volume or is the government going to source other customers for the recycled water that it produces?

Mr ROBERTSON: The simple answer is yes. The government will continue to source users for recycled water in addition to those industrial customers who are already taking this particular product.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, can you confirm that the only customers at the moment are the government owned generators at Tarong and Swanbank?

Mr ROBERTSON: I do not think there is any secret to that. A major part of getting this project up and running was to get those electricity generators off our drinking water supplies as part of the drought management strategy. Of course they are going to be foundation customers for the use of recycled water. That has been something that I understand you guys were actually very supportive of.

Mr SEENEY: That is right. But my question was: can you confirm that they are the only customers?

Mr ROBERTSON: At this point in time, however, there have been other customers identified as potential users, and discussions are ongoing with them in terms of quantity and price.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, can you provide the committee with an indication of what other potential uses are being considered for this recycled water?

CHAIR: You have one minute, Minister.

Mr ROBERTSON: Yes, there are two that I can inform you about, and I just need to be a bit careful, I suspect, in terms of any commercial-in-confidence arrangements. Both Incitec Pivot and Boral, which are located near Gibson Island, are also potential users of the recycled water. They are comparatively big users. They would be the kinds of customers that you would want to sign up to use this product. Of course, there are also our friends from Lockyer Valley. How could we forget them?

CHAIR: The committee will take a short break.

Proceedings suspended from 10.15 am to 10.32 am

CHAIR: We will resume the hearing. I call the member for Callide.

Mr SEENEY: I thought the minister would make an opening statement.

CHAIR: There is only one opening statement. I am sure he will give you another one, if you want.

Mr SEENEY: I was prepared to listen again to the minister's words of wisdom. Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, I refer to page 2-11 of the Service Delivery Statements where you talk about reducing electricity bills for Queenslanders. I have here an electricity bill that I paid.

Mr ROBERTSON: Sorry, what is the reference?

Mr SEENEY: The reference is the third dot point above the heading of 'Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries'. It talks about ways to save energy and reduce electricity bills, and it says that the department is releasing 30,000 Home EnergyWise kits et cetera. It is about electricity bills.

Mr ROBERTSON: I always have to check, don't !!

Mr SEENEY: You do, but you would be surprised to find anything about electricity bills in the budget for mines and energy, I am sure. Minister, I have here an electricity bill that I paid in March 2006 which shows that I paid 13.49c per kilowatt hour for tariff 11. Minister, can you tell the committee what tariff 11 is worth today?

Mr ROBERTSON: It is worth about 18.3c or 18.4c. It has increased significantly over the last couple of years.

Mr SEENEY: You are pretty close, Minister.

Mr ROBERTSON: That was off the top of my head.

Mr SEENEY: The Energex website this morning shows that it is worth 18.84c per kilowatt hour, which is something like a 40 per cent increase. Minister, how do you explain to the people of Queensland a 40 per cent increase in their basic electricity tariff over a period of three years?

Mr ROBERTSON: I think the government has been at pains to explain to the community the reasons for the increase in electricity prices. I have made the point since coming into this portfolio that nobody, myself included, likes to see electricity prices increased to the extent that they have been. But if what we have in place in Queensland is a system whereby increases reflect the true cost of generating, transmitting, distributing and retailing electricity, then the people of Queensland can be assured that sufficient investment is going into our electricity network to meet not just our needs as a population that is growing at about two per cent a year but also our needs we have in terms of our behaviours as customers, given that we are increasingly energy hungry. Domestic customers are increasing their demand for electricity at about 3.5 per cent a year, almost double the rate of population growth.

As a result, this raises challenges. Those challenges were articulated very well in the Somerville report that I commissioned five years and five days ago: that unless you have sufficient investment going into your generating, distribution, transmission and retail system you end up with an underinvestment that then has a direct impact on the reliability of the supply to households and the commercial sector. I have made the point now on a number of occasions as Minister for Energy that I will not allow Queensland to return to those days of unnecessarily interrupted supply. If we are to commit ourselves to that, then we need to have the money to invest in our networks to meet a growing and increasingly energy-hungry population, and that is what we are doing. Regrettably, that results in price increases such as you have outlined.

However, when you look at what is happening throughout the rest of the country, the people of Queensland can be assured that the increases that are being experienced here are still less than the increases that are being experienced generally across the rest of this country. So it is not a Queensland-specific problem that we are having to deal with here; it is one where all jurisdictions, all states and territories, are having to face up to increased costs of getting electricity to people's homes.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, when I paid that electricity bill back in 2006, it was about the time the then Premier guaranteed the people of Queensland that they would be no worse off—they are his words, not mine—following the deregulation of the electricity industry. Minister, do you think consumers such as me who are paying 40 per cent more now than we were in 2006 are worse off because of the deregulation that the government undertook of the electricity industry?

Mr ROBERTSON: I am pleased to hear you accurately report what the former Premier said, and the answer is, yes, people are not worse off as a result of the deregulation of the retail sector that was formerly run by Energex and Ergon. What we have in place now in Queensland is a very transparent pricing process whereby retailers, distributors, transmitters and generators all have to basically open their books for full analysis to ensure that the price increases being sought are not excessive in terms of the costs they have to meet. As I said, nobody likes seeing these increases, let alone you and let alone me. But what I am convinced about as a result of the determinations that the Queensland Competition Authority has made is that it has exhaustively grilled the various components of the supply chain of electricity, if I can use that term, to ensure the increases that are requested by the various segments can be justified in terms of the quantum that they seek.

We have seen significant increases in the cost of steel, significant increases in the cost of coal and other increases. They all feed into the final price that you and I pay on our electricity bills. But we should always be assured that we have processes in place to ensure that those price increases are not excessive based on the cost pressures that they are having to deal with.

I have made the point on a number of occasions that the difference between a taxpayer and an electricity customer is paper thin. We have a choice: either we have cost-reflective electricity accounts or taxpayers put their hands in their pockets to subsidise the generators, transmitters, distributors and retailers so they can continue to operate. If we do not do that, then what I referred to before will happen. We will have an underinvestment in our electricity network that will result in a decrease in the reliability of supply. I have been there and I do not want to see Queensland return to that level of unreliability again.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, in recent times you have made some comments about demand-side management strategies as a technique to address this issue of ever-increasing electricity prices. Can you give the same assurance to the people of Queensland that the Premier gave back in 2006 that your demand-side management strategies will not leave any Queensland electricity consumers worse off?

Mr ROBERTSON: I must admit I have noted some reporting of an alleged outcome of a ministerial council meeting I attended a week or so ago that suggested that our investigations into smart metering were about looking to put in place further increases in electricity prices. That is in no way part of what we are trying to achieve here. What we are trying to achieve is looking at what products can be offered to consumers to help them reduce their electricity bills, not increase them. The whole purpose of our investigations and trials of smart metering is to determine whether the claims made by those who have been big promoters of smart meters that there will be reduced electricity usage actually do get realised. That is the whole purpose of having those trials. Those trials are not being held to see if we can further bump up the price of electricity and get more money from consumers. It would be patently a nonsense to go down that path.

I have made this point publicly as well: I have an open mind on the smart meters project. I will be looking very carefully at those trials that will be conducted here in Queensland and indeed nationally to see whether the claims do in fact stack up: that it is a good and cost-effective way to go to help people reduce their electricity usage and therefore the bills they would otherwise pay. I have an open mind. I am not a big promoter of them. I perhaps lean a degree to being a bit of a sceptic but, as I said, that is the purpose of holding those trials. That matter was discussed at some length at the ministerial council meeting on energy a week or so ago.

In fact I note, member for Callide, that back in 2006 when we announced the deregulation of the retail side of electricity you actually came out in support of it. It was a very fine press release that you put out praising the government for going down this path, because you thought we might actually see more cost-reflective and more efficient pricing. I hope you have maintained that level of support for that direction we have taken.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, does the department of mines and energy have a corporate communications unit? Can you tell me how many people are employed in it?

Mr ROBERTSON: I will ask associate director-general Dan Hunt to provide that.

Mr Hunt: At 30 June 2009 the mines and energy corporate communications team had nine full-time equivalent officers in media and communication roles. There are a further two officers engaged by the Office of Clean Energy.

Mr ROBERTSON: So the answer is yes.

Mr SEENEY: The answer is, yes, they have a corporate communications unit and there are nine people employed in it?

Mr Hunt: Yes.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, I will table a copy of mines and energy department key departmental contacts. Listed there is a whole range of contacts under a corporate communications unit that to my count runs to 18—from Kate Southwell, the director, right through to Russell Newell, the graphic design multimedia person. By my count, there is a media manager, a marketing and communications manager, a principal communications officer, about five communications officers, a principal media officer, an assistant principal media officer, two graphic designers and a marketing manager. It is an incredible list for a corporate communications unit in a department such as mines and energy. Does it reinforce the view that the department, like the rest of the government, is all about spin rather than delivery? And how does that list reconcile with the answer that you have just given the committee?

Mr Hunt: Mr Seenev, I am sorry, I gave you the media and communication staff numbers. We also have two staff engaged in marketing activities and 3.4 full-time equivalents categorised as information staff for a total of 14.4 staff.

Mr ROBERTSON: Full-time equivalents.

Mr Hunt: 'Marketing' includes staff who support industry through events and sponsorships, promote Queensland products, industries and regions; 'information' includes staff who publish information in a range of distribution channels; 'media' includes staff who prepare, distribute and monitor media releases, liaise with the media and manage media issues; and 'communication' includes staff who develop and implement a communications plan to support core business priorities.

In relation to the sorts of things that we put out, we have media campaigns for certain events. We publish a quarterly *Queensland Government Mining Journal*, which has been in print now for 125 years, I think. So there is a range of positive activities that those people are engaged in.

Ms van LITSENBURG: Minister, I note that page 2-26 of the Service Delivery Statement relates to the regulation of retail electricity, and I ask: will you outline for the benefit of the committee members what would occur if retail electricity prices increased by CPI?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for the question. As part of the debate about the price increases that have been experienced in Queensland and in other states and territories, there have been some calls for us to intervene and limit price increases to only the level of CPI. That, of course, would be a very populist way to go, but that comes at a real cost.

In 2007, full retail competition for domestic customers and small businesses was introduced in Queensland with a new electricity tariff pricing to ensure actual increases in electricity costs are reflected in tariff increases and to maintain the uniform tariff policy across Queensland. The mechanism to calculate annual increases is the benchmark retail cost index, which is based on year-on-year changes in the cost of supplying electricity to consumers. The BRCI replaced the previous CPI retail price index.

Independent consultants PricewaterhouseCoopers estimated that from 2007 to 2010 the difference between the nominal revenue received from consumers with the BRCI and the nominal revenue received from CPI escalation of retail electricity prices is approximately \$955 million. That means that, if the government reverted to a CPI based escalation, the shortfall of \$955 million could only be addressed in the following ways—that is, to provide a subsidy of \$955 million to private retailers, Origin and AGL, and an additional subsidy to Ergon Energy from the state government. This would mean about a billion dollars less for important government services such as health or education. Alternatively—and this is what I mentioned before in relation to Mr Seenev's question—it would mean a reduction in expenditure on maintaining and building the electricity distribution network. That means a return to the pre-Somerville 2004 days, with major impacts on the Queensland industry and therefore employment. These measures are not sustainable financially and will not provide a secure and reliable supply of electricity.

In addition, each year the subsidy would likely increase, reflecting the compounding divergence between the true cost of supply and retail electricity prices indexed by CPI. This would also reduce private sector confidence in the energy sector, remove the incentive for new retailers to enter the Queensland market and reduce investment in energy infrastructure in Queensland for the foreseeable future.

Queensland's demand for electricity continues to grow. To maintain safe and reliable access to electricity for Queenslanders between 2005-06 and 2009-10, Queensland will have spent almost \$9 billion on electricity transmission and distribution infrastructure to cope with increased energy demand. A reduction in network expenditure would severely impact reliability of security and supply. As I mentioned earlier, that would be unacceptable to me as Minister for Energy.

Mr KILBURN: Minister, page 81 of Budget Paper No. 2 refers to the new regulatory pricing determination being made by the Australian Energy Regulator. Could the minister please outline details of this reset for the benefit of the committee?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for the question. As the committee knows, the benchmark retail cost index—that is, the price that consumers pay for electricity—is made up of three components: the cost of generation, the cost of distribution and the cost to retailers. From 1 July 2010 the Australian Energy Regulator, the AER, will determine what price Energex and Ergon will be able to charge for the cost of distribution of electricity—that is, the network price—over the next five years.

Since the Somerville report in 2004, the state government has been delivering on its commitment to invest significantly in the poles, lines and transformers that distribute electricity across the state. This almost \$8.1 billion investment has been necessary because of our strong population growth and increasing peak demand. Over the next five years, this investment will continue to grow. The aim of the regulatory reset process is to ensure that we continue to invest in the necessary infrastructure that Queensland needs while ensuring that the price paid for electricity reflects the true cost of delivery.

This is a regulated process that is open and transparent and occurs in all states within the national electricity market. From 1 July both Ergon and Energex were required to submit their regulatory proposal to the AER. Once the submissions are deemed compliant, I understand that the AER will open a public consultation process which includes public forums on the distributors' submissions. Once completed, they will publish a draft determination and then engage in further public consultation, not dissimilar to the way that the QCA has gone about its business. A final determination will be made in around April next year for commencement on 1 July 2010.

In April this year the AER determined prices that New South Wales distributors can charge. The initial once-off revenue increases range from 12.58 per cent to 17.86 per cent. South Australia is also currently going through the same process as Queensland, with very large increases anticipated. While no-one likes increased electricity prices, it is important that the prices reflect the true cost of electricity so Queensland does not go back to the bad old days of blackouts and service cuts.

Ms CROFT: Minister, I refer to page 2-26 of the Service Delivery Statements and Queensland mines and energy's delivery of regulatory functions. One of those functions relates to legislation and regulation supporting the supply of gas to retail customers. Can you please update the committee on the Queensland Competition Authority review of the retail gas market and whether you have accepted its recommendations?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for the question. In December 2008 a review by the Queensland Competition Authority of gas pricing and competition for small customers concluded: competition in the retail gas market is low as the profitability levels are insufficient to attract new entrants; and below-cost tariffs, competition for electricity as fuel for appliances and capacity constraints on the Roma-Brisbane pipeline act as barriers to entry and future competition.

As a result, they recommend not to re-regulate Queensland's retail gas market. Prior to the review, residential gas prices were estimated to be around one-third below cost-reflective levels for very small customers, 11 to 14 per cent for average residential customers and two to seven per cent below for large family customers. The Queensland residential gas market is generally characterised by low levels of uptake among households with access to the network and very low average annual consumption, with approximately 80 per cent of gas used for hot-water systems.

There are a number of factors which contribute to the small size of the Queensland residential gas market. Firstly, average residential gas consumption in Queensland is significantly less than that of Victoria, where the cooler climate creates high demand for gas based heating. Queensland's low level of gas consumption sees distribution costs form 60 per cent of average residential gas bills in Queensland—almost twice that of Victoria.

Secondly, Queensland's lower retail electricity prices when compared to other states meant it was cheaper as a fuel for hot-water systems. Thirdly, consumers have expressed a strong preference for solar and heat-pump hot-water systems on cost and environmental grounds. While gas water heaters are cheaper to purchase, the total costs of solar and heat-pump systems are substantially less than natural gas when applicable rebates and life cycle costs are taken into account.

Given recent moves towards phasing out electric hot-water systems and promoting alternative energy sources, gas hot-water heating is likely to face increasing competition from solar and geothermal technologies. Re-regulation of gas prices would not assist in the development of Queensland's gas market. Low levels of competition and low residential gas uptake are related to low underlying demand for residential gas, the competitiveness of alternative energy sources and below-cost tariffs. An Australian Energy Market Commission review of competition in the Queensland gas market is scheduled for 2012, providing a further opportunity to assess the market against benchmark data provided by the QCA review.

CHAIR: Minister, the budget documents make numerous mentions of the government's Q2 targets. With particular reference to the target of 'fair, supporting safe and caring communities', what is the government doing to support the residents of Collingwood Park?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for that question. The 2009-10 budget includes an additional \$5.6 million for Collingwood Park, bringing the government's total financial assistance package to \$15.6 million. While the Queensland government is not liable for any damage associated with the subsidence events that have affected up to 40 properties in Collingwood Park, we are still providing this assistance because we believe it is the right thing to do. It is the sign of a good and caring government.

To date, the Queensland government has purchased 17 properties as a result of the 2008 subsidence event. Negotiations are continuing with one owner in relation to a settlement date for one further property. Nine of these properties have been purchased because they have been deemed not cost effective to repair and are being demolished. The remaining properties have been purchased due to the special circumstances of the property owners and the hardships they have faced. The government is continuing to assess such cases individually and it is possible further purchases may eventuate.

The additional \$5.6 million in 2009-10 will fund any further potential statutory and special circumstance purchases and more repairs and importantly allow detailed investigation into possible solutions for longer term remediation of the area. The government is now pursuing further detailed geotechnical studies to determine the technical and economic viability of stabilising the undermined areas of the Westfalen No. 3 and New Redbank collieries through backfilling.

Our assistance to Collingwood Park residents has gone well beyond just the purchase of the worst-affected houses and investigations to provide a long-term solution for the suburb. We provided emergency assistance and alternative accommodation for seven families in the immediate aftermath of the 2008 event. We provided counselling and support services for residents in the months after the subsidence. We established an onsite office at Collingwood Park to provide residents with a central point of contact for mine subsidence issues and support.

The Collingwood Park mine subsidence response team within Queensland Mines and Energy has dealt with more than 600 phone and field inquiries from residents. A monitoring and inspection program has been conducted by independent structural engineers for an identified 31 properties with mine subsidence related damage. From those inspections a repair program has been rolled out and repairs of seven properties have already been completed and contractors are finalising repairs on two more. A further eight property owners have agreed to the repairs. The response team is waiting for agreement from a further eight property owners. The committee should be assured that we will continue to provide fair and caring support for the Collingwood Park community.

Ms van LITSENBURG: I note that page 2-6 of the Service Delivery Statement refers to \$12 million in expenditure in 2009-10 as part of the four-year \$29.1 million Smart Mining—Future Prosperity program which commenced in 2006. Will the minister please inform the committee of the benefits that have flowed from this program to date and what other benefits the government expects to see in the future?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for the question. Queensland relies heavily on mining for its prosperity. A sustainable mining industry requires an active and ongoing program of exploration. This is an expensive, long-term and high-risk process. To compete in this environment, the government must demonstrate support for the mining industry. The \$29.08 million Smart Mining—Future Prosperity program began in 2006-07 with the target of increasing exploration investment in Queensland to \$540 million by 2009, and it has achieved this target. In 2007-08 exploration expenditure in Queensland was \$563.2 million. Despite the economic downturn, exploration expenditure continues at a high level, totalling \$484.7 million in the first nine months of 2008-09.

The Smart Mining—Future Prosperity program has also focused on a number of greenfield and unexplored areas. Airborne geophysical surveys have been completed over the Normanton and south-west Queensland areas and are in progress in Cape York. The results of a deep crustal seismic reflection survey through the entire earth's crust from Cloncurry to Croydon to Mount Surprise to Charters Towers were released in Townsville in June 2009. The seismic profile identified for the first time the Millungera Basin, a new sedimentary basin, as well as other previously unknown major crustal features which indicate potential for further discoveries of mines and energy resources.

Grants under the Smart Mining—Future Prosperity program are being used to assist with the drilling of new exploration targets which are helping to kick-start exploration in parts of the state which are unexplored or underexplored. In the first three rounds of these grant initiatives 83 projects received more than \$6.88 million and 20 technical successes have been reported to date. In the north-north-west alone, 57 new exploration projects are focusing on gold, silver, base metals, nickel, iron, mineral sands and diamonds. The Smart Mining—Future Prosperity program has been successful in attracting exploration investment and the government is supporting this exploration with our streamlining initiative.

CHAIR: I call the member for Callide.

Mr SEENEY: In the department's budget figures can you tell us how much money is allocated to sponsorship and what the department is sponsoring?

Mr ROBERTSON: I invite Associate Director-General Dan Hunt to provide that information.

Mr Hunt: During the 2008-09 financial year Mines and Energy approved \$112,000 in sponsorship funding. The sorts of things that that sponsorship goes to is: the Queensland Resources Expo in Rockhampton for which we allocated \$15,000; the Mining 2009 Resources Convention, which is a major mining conference held towards the end of the year every year in Brisbane, for which we provided \$25,000; the Safety Institute of Australia for which we provided \$5,000; the Illuminating Engineering Society of Australia Awards for which we provided \$5,000; the Greenfest sustainability festival for which we provided \$5,000; the North Queensland Energy Forum for which we provide \$2,500; the 19th World Congress of Soil Science to be held in 2010 was provided \$25,000 towards its development; and for a book on human factors in mining equipment which is a safety analysis of the human influence in accidents we provided \$30,000.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, it is the last one of those sponsorships that I am interested in—that is, the book sponsorship of \$30,000. Can you tell us who the \$30,000 was paid to and who wrote the book? It seems an awfully large amount of money—\$30,000.

Mr ROBERTSON: We will have to take that question on notice if that is okay with you. We will get that information to you.

Mr SEENEY: So nobody in the department knows who the \$30,000 went to?

Mr ROBERTSON: As I said, we will take that on notice and we will get that information to you as soon as possible.

Mr SEENEY: Does the department have a particular policy about sponsorship? The list that the director-general read out from the briefing note he read very accurately. I followed it on my copy. How is that list of sponsorship arrived at? What is the department's policy on sponsorship?

Mr Hunt: The department has a policy on sponsorship which specifies the circumstances under which sponsorship will be provided. We respond to requests for sponsorship from a range of sources. The sorts of benefits—and I will read from the briefing note again—

Mr SEENEY: I will follow along, if you like. I will make sure your draft is the same as mine.

Mr Hunt: So the sponsorships brought a range of benefits to the government, Queensland industries and the community, including promoting mining industry safety and health, supporting exploration investment in Queensland, advancing the Queensland government's commitment to clean energy and fostering research in industry partnerships and showcasing Queensland's geoscientific achievements and endeavours. Safety is a primary objective for the department.

Mr SEENEY: I look forward to receiving the answer to that question on notice. Minister, can you advise the committee what discussions you have had with your federal colleagues about the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme and what case you have put to your federal colleagues about the impact that that scheme will have on the Queensland mining industry generally and the coal industry in particular?

Mr ROBERTSON: The discussions that I have had with my colleague Senator Wong at the Murray-Darling ministerial council meeting are consistent with the position outlined by the Premier during her estimates hearing earlier this week and the letter that she has sent to Minister Combet—that is, we have legitimate concerns with respect to the impact of CPRS on the mining industry, in particular the coal industry, and its associated stakeholders. We are seeking from the Commonwealth an appreciation of those special circumstances and asking for further consideration to be given to providing assistance to that particular sector.

Meanwhile, I have also had discussions with my colleague the minister for energy, Martin Ferguson, expressing how keen we are to ensure that Queensland gets its fair share of the carbon capture and storage technologies and projects. We want to get at least one of those flagship projects in Queensland. I used that opportunity to again state our responsible concerns about the impact of the CPRS on our coal industry. We will continue to take those responsible approaches with our colleagues in Canberra and try to work through these issues over time.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, do you agree that CPRS in its current form will have a devastating effect on the Queensland coal industry in particular and the Queensland economy generally?

Mr ROBERTSON: Queensland's position is that which is outlined in the Premier's letter to Minister Combet.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, as the minister responsible for the mining industry in Queensland, should you not have a particular responsibility to be expressing the concerns of the mining industry, the concerns that were outlined by Michael Roche yesterday for example at the conference here in Brisbane? Do you not have a responsibility to be expressing those concerns to your federal colleagues?

Mr ROBERTSON: That is why I support the letter that was sent by the Premier to Minister Combet which was outlined earlier this week. That is why I have taken the opportunity in meetings with Senator Wong and Minister Ferguson to discuss the concerns outlined in this letter.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, in the current budget documents that we are considering what is the government's commitment to clean coal projects? What are the commitments the government has made to clean coal projects?

Mr ROBERTSON: They are substantial.

Mr SEENEY: What are they?

Mr ROBERTSON: I am surprised you do not know.

Mr SEENEY: I am asking you. The test is to see whether you know. That is the reason for the question. I am trying to determine how genuine your concern is. An indication of that concern would be for you to be able to tell me what the figures are.

Mr ROBERTSON: Excitable, isn't he? I think we can support that by the significant and very serious amount of money that we have put on the table for demonstration projects. ZeroGen is one. The formation of the Clean Coal Council which is the body that was established by the Premier to—

Mr SEENEY: Just as well for briefing notes, isn't it?

Mr ROBERTSON: Come on!

Mr SEENEY: I have probably got that one too.

Mr ROBERTSON: Do you? I am surprised you need to ask the question then. I, along with the Premier, meet with the Clean Coal Council on a regular basis. I think there have been three meetings that I have attended since coming into this portfolio. The Clean Coal Council, among other things, is responsible for assessing the ZeroGen project. There is a second project that is under consideration which is associated with the Wandoan development. They are, in many respects, competing to be our preferred project that will go forward for further funding from the Commonwealth under their flagship program.

In terms of the funding, the \$900 million for the Australian Coal Association Low Emission Technology, or ACALET, comprises a \$300 million commitment by the Queensland government from the Queensland Future Growth Fund and a commitment from the black coalmining industry's voluntary fund of \$600 million over the next 10 years through the COAL21 Fund. The Clean Coal Council continues to provide advice to government in the assessment of those two projects that I have mentioned previously. It is vital, in my view, that one of those projects gets flagship funding from the Commonwealth but also further industry funding as well. If those technologies can be proved via a demonstration project, then that will be an important component to secure the future of our coal industry and the royalties that it generates for Queensland in the years and decades to come.

Mr KILBURN: Minister, with reference to page 2-7 of the Service Delivery Statements and the mention of the industry ambassadors, what measures are contained in the budget to ensure that Queensland is promoted internationally as a premium destination for resource exploration?

Mr ROBERTSON: To support the long-term growth of investment in minerals and energy exploration in Queensland, the Bligh government is establishing Queensland resource industry ambassadors. Exploration for mineral and energy resources is a global industry. Decisions on when and where companies will commit to exploration are governed by numerous factors, including but not limited to prospectivity, policy settings and sovereign risk. Queensland needs to be recognised throughout the world as a preferred destination for exploration investment and resource development if the state is to fully capitalise on its resources and value-adding potential.

The government's \$49.08 million Smart Exploration and Smart Mining—Future Prosperity programs have been the basis for the successful promotion of mining exploration in Queensland in recent years. These programs are primarily structured to target and to provide incentives for investment in exploration state-wide. The program has been successful in attracting and leveraging exploration to Queensland, as demonstrated by the uptake of exploration tenure and growth in exploration expenditure. To consolidate further the gains made already, the ambassadors, with the participation of high-profile private sector representatives, will promote and highlight the benefits of investing in

Queensland's mining resource industries. My department's investigations into a similar successful group in South Australia indicate that this type of initiative can be very effective and mutually beneficial for the government and the private sector.

Queensland resource industry ambassadors, with departmental senior officers, will likely target high-profile international and Australian resource conferences to promote the Queensland story from a private sector perspective. The Queensland resource industry ambassadors comprise a group of senior resource industry leaders who are unpaid individuals offering a private sector view of what Queensland has to offer in relation to exploration development potential. Ambassadors will not receive salaries, travelling allowances, benefits or other payments. As private sector senior executives, the ambassadors would regularly attend meetings and conferences, both in Australia and overseas, as paid employees of their companies usually on company business and sometimes presenting papers in their own right. The operating model of the program seeks to gain leverage from the personal status of these individuals to act as Queensland exploration ambassadors who will work with Queensland Mines and Energy executives to promote opportunities for exploration and resource development in Queensland.

Ms CROFT: I refer the minister to page 2-6 of the Service Delivery Statements and the reference to streamlining the state's mining and petroleum exploration and development approval processes. I ask: can the minister provide to the committee further detail as to the current and future progress of this project?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for the question. Earlier this year—in February—the Bligh government announced that it would fast-track around a dozen key mining projects to help stimulate and support the mining sector as well as create new jobs in regional Queensland. By streamlining the process we will be able to create more than 1,500 construction jobs in the regions.

New mines mean new jobs. Not only that, local communities and businesses rely heavily on the money spent by mining companies and their workers. That is why the Bligh government is taking steps to fast-track these projects—following due process, of course—as quickly as possible.

Mines and Energy work with the department of natural resources and water, the Environmental Protection Agency—or now what is known as DERM—the Department of Infrastructure and Planning and other government agencies to identify areas of regulatory overlap and to streamline approval processes. We are closely monitoring our standing mine lease applications and working directly with companies on actions that we can take to speed up the process. We are also talking to the Rudd government about ways to expedite Commonwealth approvals for key projects.

There are two components to the process, the first being to focus on current applications and the approval system and identify priority projects for streamlining processes. The second component is to develop and implement a case management approach to guide mineral and petroleum exploration and development projects through streamlined approval processes across all relevant agencies. Key streamlining initiatives that have been identified to date and which are undergoing detailed investigation are (1) to rewrite guidelines to clearly articulate the requirements and the quality of information required for environmental impact assessments to reduce the number of iterations; (2) system enhancements and a case management database, including electronic web flow between agencies; and (3) native title initiatives around the right-to-negotiate process and the expedited procedure for exploration permits.

During the 2009-10 financial year, it is expected that the process of case management of existing applications will result in the grant of at least 10 priority tenure applications. The potential for job creation from mining lease applications for coal is significant. Subject to decisions to proceed, all projects currently under assessment by Queensland Mines and Energy could directly create 5,000 construction and over 3,600 ongoing operational jobs within the next two years.

My department and the Queensland Resources Council are establishing a joint working party to progress the streamlining initiatives. The draft terms of reference for this working party are under consideration by the associate director-general for Queensland Mines and Energy. A draft report detailing the streamlining approvals initiatives is due next month for consideration by the working party.

CHAIR: Minister, with reference to page 2-11 of the Service Delivery Statements and the mention of low-emission technology demonstration projects, what is the government's commitment to the development of low-emission coal technologies and associated industries?

Mr ROBERTSON: The Queensland government enacted the Clean Coal Technology Special Agreement Act in June 2007, recognising the importance of the value of the coal industry to Queensland in terms of an export product and low-cost fuel for electricity generation and the need to ensure a sustainable future for this part of the state's economy. The Queensland government and the Australian black coal industry have a combined funding commitment of \$900 million to accelerate the development and deployment of low-emission coal technologies to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions from coal fired generation. The act established the Queensland Clean Coal Council, which comprises representatives from government and the coal industry, to advise the government on funding priorities from the combined commitment and other issues to achieve the objective of accelerating the development and deployment of low-emission coal technologies.

The \$900 million is comprised, as I mentioned before, of a \$300 million commitment by the Queensland government and the black coal mining industry's voluntary fund of \$600 million over the next 10 years through the COAL21 Fund. The COAL21 Fund is managed by ACA Low Emissions Technologies Ltd. Participating coal producers have agreed to pay a voluntary levy of 10c per tonne of saleable coal to the COAL21 Fund from 1 April 2007, increasing to 20c per tonne from 1 July 2007. To date, the Queensland Clean Coal Council has recommended to the Premier over \$256 million of funding allocations from the \$900 million joint commitment.

As I mentioned before, there are a number of low-emission coal technology demonstration projects in Queensland. Two projects receiving funding through the Queensland Clean Coal Council are the Callide OxyFuel Project, which has commenced site works to demonstrate oxy-firing technology, and ZeroGen, which received the Queensland Clean Coal Council's in-principle support in June 2009 to undertake a prefeasibility study for a commercial scale demonstration of an integrated gasification combined cycle with carbon capture and storage. Other activities are underway, including the CSIRO-Tarong postcombustion capture pilot plant. The Queensland government has commenced the identification of safe storage sites for CO₂ through its Carbon Geostorage Initiative and is in the process of implementing appropriate regulatory frameworks for carbon geostorage. The Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2009 provides a system to secure tenure for the storage of CO₂.

Collaboration at national and international levels is also critical to accelerating the deployment of low-emission coal technologies. The Queensland government is a keen participant in the National Low Emissions Coal Council, which has been established to coordinate the effort on national low-emission coal projects and research and development activities. The Queensland government is a foundation member of the Global Carbon Capture and Storage Institute, which will coordinate a strategy for investment in 20 industrial scale low-emission coal demonstration projects with carbon capture and storage globally.

CHAIR: Thank you. I call the member for Callide. We are now moving to the GOC part of the consideration.

Mr SEENEY: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, in the list of departmental contacts that I provided you before, under the Office of Clean Energy I count a listing of 35 staff members. In the budget documents listed as an output for the Office of Clean Energy—

Mr ROBERTSON: What page are you referring to?

Mr SEENEY: I am referring to page 2-27, top of the page, the target estimated for the Clean Energy Services output for 2009-10. Apparently you believe that the Office of Clean Energy is going to come up with just six policy initiatives for the year. That does not seem like much for 35 staff to do. Can you tell us what the Office of Clean Energy is supposed to do and how it justifies a staffing of 35 to come up with six policy initiatives?

Mr ROBERTSON: One of the most important projects that they have delivered on is the recent release of the renewable energy strategy. A lot of work went into that, and if you have read it—and I certainly hope you have—you would see outlined throughout that strategy a range of projects throughout the state, including in rural and regional Queensland, for investment in renewable energy projects. In addition, which would keep 35 people very busy, they also have responsibility to implement our election commitment in terms of the Solar Hot Water Program. That is a very labour-intensive project in terms of bringing industry—

Mr SEENEY: It is a Commonwealth scheme.

CHAIR: Member for Callide. You have asked the question. It is the minister's opportunity.

Mr SEENEY: It is a Commonwealth—

CHAIR: You can ask another question if you do not like the minister's answer.

Mr ROBERTSON: I am shocked by your level of ignorance—I really am—because I would have thought you—

Mr SEENEY: I am shocked by your level of naivety. It is a Commonwealth scheme administered by the Commonwealth government.

CHAIR: Member for Callide.

Mr ROBERTSON: In addition to the Commonwealth solar hot-water scheme, Queensland has also its own solar hot-water scheme. It is an election commitment of ours, which leverages off—

Mr SEENEY: Which passes the application to the Commonwealth.

CHAIR: Member for Callide.

Mr SEENEY: I am sorry, Mr Chairman.

Mr ROBERTSON: Unbelievable. It is actually about leveraging off the Commonwealth's scheme to bring down the price of standard installed solar hot-water units to a level of \$500 for ordinary customers and \$100 for pensioners. That is in addition to the Commonwealth's scheme. That is

targeting 200,000 households over the next three years to have installed a solar hot-water system. Currently, Queensland's installation rate is around 20,000 a year. That is in addition to the Commonwealth effort.

I am frankly shocked that you would not understand that, member for Callide. That actually requires a lot of work to be done by the Office of Clean Energy to bring industry under that umbrella to provide installed units at those particular price points. There is a lot of work that goes into that in terms of logistics, in terms of rolling out such a program throughout the state, not just in South-East Queensland. That is the kind of work that the Office of Clean Energy is doing.

I will also be tasking the Office of Clean Energy with a range of additional projects, as work permits. But it is wrong to say, just looking at that measure, that that somehow allows for a criticism to be made about the work rate of these officers. These are major projects that they are involved in. They are time consuming and resource intensive.

Mr SEENEY: Can you explain that, even though there are some 35 staff in the Office of Clean Energy, a firm called Consulting Partners, or a Mr Miley, has been engaged at a cost of \$1,500 per day as a consultant to oversight the implementation of the Queensland Solar Hot Water Program which, as I said, is a federal program to which the state passes the applications? Why was it necessary to have your associate director-general, Mr Dan Hunt, on 15 April 2009 approve an increase to the remuneration to this consultant for \$1,500 a day to oversight a program when there are 34 other staff in the department and the program is a Commonwealth program anyway?

Mr ROBERTSON: It is not a Commonwealth initiative. I wish you would stop being so misleading in your comments. Let us stop this nonsense. You are spinning yourself out of control here. It is not a Commonwealth program; it is a separate Queensland program that leverages off the Commonwealth initiative to bring down the price of installed units to \$500 and \$100 respectively. The Commonwealth program does not deliver that. In order to make that available throughout Queensland into communities such as yours, a lot of work and a lot of effort are required. It also requires particular skills and capabilities. I will ask my associate director-general to provide the information in respect of this particular individual.

Mr SEENEY: Would you like a copy of your brief?

Mr Henneken: As the minister has outlined, this is a very substantial program. Some 200,000 solar hot-water systems over three years is, as I said, a very substantial commitment. We do need a logistics expert in the department. Mr Miley is a logistics expert. He is involved with us in setting up all of the processes around the program—that is, setting up the processes around application forms, the legals around all of that and the processes around the renewable energy certificates. We had a tender, and quite a considerable number of providers tendered for the supply of solar hot-water systems. That required very extensive negotiations. That required extensive systems analysis in terms of how the providers and the processes for linking people with providers and all of that were to be established. In the current environment, the amount of money spent on that is well and truly justified from a procurement point of view.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, do you think \$1,500 a day is an appropriate amount of money to pay a consultant to assist a department that already has 35 staff charged with producing six policy initiatives for the year?

Mr ROBERTSON: I hope you did listen to what the director-general had to say, but when you are talking about an individual who has specific skills and skills that would not ordinarily be available in a comparatively small office like that, then of course it is appropriate to bring in consultants. I would have thought that would be a more efficient way to go than having a person with such skills, capabilities and logistics being brought on permanently. That would make no sense to me. Of course from time to time you need to bring on individuals with particular skills to assist with particular projects, and that would appear to be what has happened on this occasion.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, you are indicating to the committee that there is nobody in the Office of Clean Energy who has the ability to administer the solar hot-water scheme, that you had to pay a consultant \$1,500 a day.

Mr ROBERTSON: No, I did not say that at all.

Mr SEENEY: Can you indicate the selection process that was involved for the appointment of Mr Miley as a consultant for \$1,500 a day?

Mr ROBERTSON: The selection process would be a standard selection process based on the particular skills that were being sourced from the market.

Mr SEENEY: This briefing note that I have says that on 15 April Dan Hunt approved a departure from the competitive process and the direct engagement of Consulting Partners Pty Ltd was approved to provide key personnel Mr Paul Miley. Can you indicate to the committee why there was a departure from the competitive process and why Mr Miley was engaged directly without that competitive process at \$1,500 a day to do a job that all sensible analysis would suggest the Office of Clean Energy should have been able to do itself?

Mr Hunt: The departure from normal process, I believe, was justified on the grounds of urgency and the specific skills that Mr Miley possessed at the time that were required to quickly implement an election commitment of the government.

Mr ROBERTSON: There is nothing unusual about that. That is the discretion that directors-general have in terms of meeting the specific needs of particular projects. I reject once again your statement that in relation to the particular skills of this consultant they would ordinarily be provided or be apparent within an office of that size. That is simply not correct.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, can you outline to the committee both the elements of the urgency that warranted the departure from the normal process and the particular skills that Mr Miley has that justified the payment of \$1,500 a day?

Mr ROBERTSON: The urgency was attached to our commitment to get our program launched by 1 July, hence the decision taken in April to bring particular skills into the office that were to be used for establishing the logistical side of the rollout of that particular program.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, I ask the second part of the question again which you chose to ignore: what skills does Mr Miley have that warranted the payment of \$1,500 a day and the abandonment of all normal appointment processes for such contractors?

Mr ROBERTSON: I will ask Dr John Cole to provide you with assistance with that matter.

Dr Cole: The reason we departed from normal process in the sense of addressing the urgency of delivering on an election commitment was that the intention of the government was to launch the program from 1 July. If you recall, the election was held in March. We had very little time to actually put together a very complex piece of infrastructure delivery.

As the director-general has already indicated, this program has several important components. Mr Miley was appointed because of his previous experience working with the energy sector and his reputation as a project manager being able to quickly deliver complicated logistics management processes that complemented what is essentially an office that is strong in policy, but amongst the staff that we have we do not have longstanding expertise in this area. The proposition involved in the Solar Hot Water Program also involves the essential retention of a logistics manager and, in fact, a public tender has been called for that and we are in the process right now of negotiating that, as we are with a separate tender for the supply, delivery and installation of solar hot-water systems. So there are two components.

As the director-general pointed out, there are a variety of different components including eligibility considerations, the application process and the processing of 28,000 registrations to start with. When it is fully implemented, this program will involve the daily installation of somewhere between 250 and 350 solar hot-water systems. It is a major piece of infrastructure involving many hundreds of millions of dollars. As the minister has indicated, this has been leveraged off a federal program, but it is a significantly major state process that we are involved in here.

Mr ROBERTSON: I think it also needs to be appreciated that one of the reasons for the urgency was the desire by the industry itself for us to finalise the arrangements for our Solar Hot Water Program as quickly as possible. The reason why it was treated with such urgency was at the urging of the industry to put these measures in place as quickly as possible.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, a number of times this morning we have heard the purchase of solar hot-water systems described by your department as being 'complicated' and 'complex'. Minister, what does that say about the capacity of the Office of Clean Energy to tackle any of the other big issues in the energy sector if it considers the purchase of solar hot-water systems to be so complex and complicated that it has to pay an outside consultant \$1,500 a day to administer the applications to the Commonwealth scheme?

Mr ROBERTSON: What is implicit in that question is that you clearly do not understand what this program is about.

Mr SEENEY: Perhaps you could outline the complexity and the complications of the scheme.

Mr ROBERTSON: I am happy to, because if it ends up making you a brighter member I am happy to help.

CHAIR: Minister, I just ask that both you and the member for Callide refer the matters through the chair. I have been trying to be fairly informal and allow comments back and forth. If we are going to keep getting off track like this, I ask you to direct your comments through the chair.

Mr ROBERTSON: Your first error is to refer to it as a program for the purchase of solar hot-water systems. This is not a program where the Queensland government or the Office of Clean Energy purchases solar hot-water systems. It is a program that, in leveraging off the Commonwealth's subsidy program or rebate program, we work with industry on to establish a standing offer arrangement with nominated companies to provide throughout Queensland standard solar hot-water units installed at a final price to the consumer of \$500 or \$100 for pensioners. So it is not simply someone going down the

road and buying 200,000 units, storing them in a warehouse somewhere and then feeding them out on the basis of applications by customers. For you to represent it that way—and that is clearly what you were doing; it is implicit in your words—that is not the case and it would be dishonest for you to continue to represent it that way.

CHAIR: Minister, do you mind directing your comments through the chair, please.

Mr ROBERTSON: It would be dishonest of him to continue to represent it that way, Mr Chairman. What I have tried to outline is a program that requires interested companies to be part of a standing offer arrangement to supply standard units. So it is about industry capacity, industry capability; it is not about the Queensland government running a distribution scheme. This is about bringing industry together so that it can supply these units at the nominated amount not just here in Brisbane, because that would be the easiest thing to achieve, but also right throughout Queensland. That takes skills, capabilities and expertise.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, in the list of departmental contacts that I referred to that lists 35 staff in the Office of Clean Energy, there is also a section called the Future Technologies Division with a considerable number of staff. There is also a section called the Organisational Positioning and Stakeholder Relations Section. I am also aware that there is an Office of Climate Change. Minister, there is an extraordinary amount of duplication in this area, yet you still seem to be trying to suggest to the committee that the provision of a solar hot-water scheme is so complex that it cannot be handled within the department. Can you outline how those sections of the department work together? How do they coordinate with the Office of Climate Change, which I understand is under the responsibility of the Minister for the Environment, and how many other consultants will all of those sections need to employ at \$1,500 a day in order to be able to fulfil your expectations?

Mr ROBERTSON: Once again the member is deliberately misleading in his question by now suggesting that the solar hot-water scheme is being run outside of the Office of Clean Energy by a consultant. That consultant has been brought in to assist the Office of Clean Energy because of the particular skills that that individual has, along with the other skills that are part of the Office of Clean Energy. Let us just maintain at least a modicum of accuracy in terms of the current arrangements.

All departments and all offices will engage contractors at various points in time to provide assistance. That has been recognised across all governments—yourselves included—as a cost-effective way to bring in specialist advice and skills at particular points in time, and that will continue to be the case. When you look at the renewable energy strategy what you see is a vast array of initiatives, most of which will be the direct responsibility of the Office of Clean Energy to conduct. So it is wrong to say or suggest, as the member for Callide is, that the Solar Hot Water Program is the only initiative being handled by the Office of Clean Energy. Any fair reading of the renewable energy strategy would suggest that there is a very challenging workload on the range of initiatives that has been highlighted in that strategy.

In addition to that, there are wider responsibilities that come quite clearly under the Office of Climate Change. Climate change is not just about clean energy; it is about a much wider agenda, and that is the responsibility that the Office of Climate Change has. But in terms of specific responsibilities to run the clean energy component of our climate change response, that is why we have the Office of Clean Energy.

CHAIR: Before we go to government members' questions, member for Callide, the document you tabled, the key contacts list, has a photocopying error.

Mr SEENEY: I think it has been rectified.

CHAIR: You are happy to table the complete copy of the document?

Mr SEENEY: I am happy to do whatever is required.

CHAIR: If possible can you table a complete copy of the document. I call the member for Chatsworth.

Mr KILBURN: I heard the minister mention earlier that it has been five years and five days since he commissioned the Somerville report. Energex and Ergon's capital investment for this year is on pages 64 and 68 of the Capital Statement. Can you outline for the benefit of the committee how much new infrastructure this government has invested into the network in South-East Queensland over this time?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for the question. As the committee would no doubt be aware, a major focus of the Somerville report was the need for more money to be invested in electricity infrastructure to increase the ability of the network to provide a secure and reliable electricity supply for all Queenslanders. Since June 2004 Energex has added 4,000 megavolt-amperes of network capacity to its South-East Queensland grid—capacity equivalent to the entire winter power demand for the states of Tasmania and South Australia combined. Between June 2004 and early May this year an additional 22 electricity substations, almost 8,000 new transformers and nearly 70,000 new street lights have been put in place. More than 5,586 kilometres of new underground cables and overhead powerlines have

been installed to cater for the growing community, taking the total amount of cable buried between local streets in South-East Queensland alone to more than 15,600 kilometres. Since mid-2004 an additional 170,000 customers have connected to the Energex network, an average of more than 700 new houses, units and businesses being added to the network every week.

This network augmentation has necessitated Energex investing an average of more than \$3.5 million a day upgrading and maintaining its electricity network. Given the vital importance of uninterrupted power supplies, Energex has continued to improve the reliability of its electricity network. For the bulk of people who live in the urban areas of Energex's network, the electricity supply reliability has improved over the past five years by more than 40 per cent. Much of this has been achieved since the Somerville report was released. However, there is still more work to be done and that is why the Bligh government is delivering on our commitment to continue rolling out capital upgrades throughout Queensland.

Ms CROFT: Just following on from the question from my colleague, the member for Chatsworth, can you please advise how the Bligh government will continue that investment in both South-East Queensland and also, importantly, through regional Queensland?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for the question. Both Energex and Ergon will continue to invest record levels of capital into their electricity networks in order to meet increasing electricity demand and continue to improve network reliability in line with the recommendations of the Queensland government's 2004 Electricity Distribution and Service Delivery Review.

During the 2009-10 financial year Energex will invest a record \$950 million in network projects with a further \$360 million allocated to the running and maintenance of the electricity network and a range of operational programs. These funds will underpin thousands of jobs and support local businesses during these difficult economic times. Projects range from major new bulk power supply substations and subtransmission powerlines through to much smaller but important upgrades to poles, wires and underground cables in local streets.

A key focus of this average \$3.5 million a day spend will be the delivery of a safe and reliable electricity supply to the 2.8 million people living in South-East Queensland. Over the past five years some 170,000 additional customers have been connected to the electricity network in South-East Queensland, more than 700 new connections every week. Population projections are suggesting that while this trend may slow slightly due to the economic downturn, significant funds will still need to be invested for the foreseeable future.

Significant investment is also being sought in regional Queensland. This financial year Ergon Energy will invest \$848.1 million in its distribution network. This is in addition to Ergon Energy's operating and maintenance budget of \$378.1 million for this financial year. The key feature of Ergon Energy's network management plan for 2009-10 to 2013-14 is the completion of a \$4 billion five-year capital investment program. This continued level of investment is the Bligh government delivering on our commitment to provide a 21st century network, develop infrastructure appropriate to the needs of a growing and technologically sophisticated community and support the continued economic development and prosperity of Queensland.

Ms van LITSENBURG: Minister, I refer to 2-21 of the Service Delivery Statement and ask: will you provide advice to the committee on the community service obligation payments to Ergon Energy to ensure those in regional Queensland pay the same as residents living in South-East Queensland?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for the question. The Queensland government is delivering on its commitment to ensure that the cost of electricity for regional and rural Queenslanders is the same as those living in South-East Queensland. The government's uniform tariff policy ensures all Queenslanders have access to an affordable electricity supply regardless of their geographical location. Due to the higher network costs and voltage loss factors associated with providing a regional electricity supply, the provision of electricity to regional and remote customers costs more than for metropolitan customers. Under community service obligations, Ergon Energy is compensated for the difference between the cost to supply and the revenue recovered from customers. Community service obligation claims are assessed and paid monthly to Ergon Energy by Queensland Mines and Energy. For the 2007-08 financial year total payments were \$625 million. The 2008-09 financial year budget for the community service obligation is \$499.8 million, corresponding to approximately \$760 per Ergon Energy customer. An exact figure is not certain at this time as the claim for June 2009 is yet to be processed. The CSO payment is a further example of the Queensland government's commitment to regional Queensland, something that we will continue into the future.

CHAIR: Minister, I refer to Energex's budgeted capital expenditure at page 59 of the Capital Statement. Can you outline the details of the Loganlea to Jimboomba powerline and in particular what consultation will be undertaken with affected landowners and the local community?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for the question. I appreciate your interest in relation to this matter as this has an impact on your community. Energex is proposing to construct a 21.9 kilometre, 110 kilovolt overhead subtransmission powerline from Powerlink's Loganlea substation to Energex's

Jimboomba substation via its Kingston substation at a cost of around about \$25 million. The powerline is needed to cater for load growth and to improve supply reliability in the Mount Lindesay and northern Beaudesert region.

Energex is aware of the public concerns which arise when it announces network augmentation projects and carefully considers all concerns when selecting line routes. In this particular instance, Energex identified and assessed four potential corridors, each of which was incorporated in its corridor selection report which was made available to the public in local libraries, on the Energex website and at the Logan City Council Chambers. A preferred route was chosen after consideration was given to social, environmental and economic factors associated with the line. Energex, in managing this project, has attempted to engage all affected parties, commencing its community engagement in December 2008 with a mailout to 15,000 local homes and businesses. A second newsletter was distributed in May this year updating progress on the project.

Energex has continued to meet with key stakeholders, including local members of parliament, local government councillors, representatives from the Department of Environment and Resource Management and the Department of Main Roads and directly affected landowners. Early community engagement identified concerns surrounding environmental impacts on the Logan River, visual amenity and the safety of construction along the river. A community group called VETO, Veto Energex Towers Organisation, was formed mostly representing directly affected landowners. Energex met with VETO on 9 March 2009 and again on 15 June regarding the initial assessment report which was released for public comment on that day.

Community consultation and information days were held on 28 and 30 May prior to release of the initial assessment report and Energex also wrote to affected landowners and stakeholders on 11 June inviting submissions on the report which was available for public comment until 3 July. I am also meeting with VETO representatives next month. My parliamentary secretary, Michael Choi, the member for Capalaba, met a delegation from VETO at the recent community cabinet meeting on the Gold Coast. Energex will continue to engage with the community and relevant stakeholders as it progresses through the community infrastructure designation process.

Mr KILBURN: Minister, carbon reduction is a significant issue that the electricity industry must face head-on. Can the minister outline what positive steps Queensland electricity GOCs are taking to limit the impact on their business and the environment?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for the question. The Queensland government owned energy corporations are undertaking a range of initiatives to reduce Queensland's carbon footprint while still ensuring security of electricity supply for all Queenslanders. CS Energy's generation portfolio carbon intensity is currently well below the national average. However, CS Energy intends to cut this by a further 50 per cent by 2030 through such initiatives as installing 500 megawatts of renewable generation by 2020, increasing the proportion of gas-fired generation in its portfolio at Mount Isa and possibly Swanbank, supporting the commercialisation of low-emission coal technologies through the Callide Oxyfuel Project and developing biosequestration projects to develop a carbon offset portfolio. Reducing greenhouse emissions is also a key priority for Tarong Energy. Seeking ways to make current processes more efficient, the corporation is upgrading the Tarong Power Station to increase the efficiency of the energy conversion process and lower the station's carbon footprint. Tarong Energy is also part of the CSIRO's post-combustion pilot plan research program, with a trial of this technology to be conducted at Tarong Power Station.

Another GOC, Stanwell Corporation, is investigating commercial gas contracts to broaden its generation portfolio and reduce overall carbon intensity. This gas strategy seeks to increase its upstream control of fuel sources to ensure long-term certainty of a lower emission fuel supply. Tarong Energy and Stanwell also joined the Queensland government and CSIRO in supporting research for low-emission coal technology through other stakeholders and the Centre for Low Emissions Technology in June 2000.

Powerlink is a signatory to the Commonwealth government's Greenhouse Challenge Plus program and has incorporated a number of energy efficiency and fleet management initiatives to reduce its greenhouse emissions in its everyday business operations. As Powerlink realises efficiency gains it is reinvesting these gains into the purchase of green electricity for its head office facilities, delivering a further reduction in emissions.

This year Energex increased its green energy purchases to 40 per cent, thereby becoming one of the largest buyers of green energy in Queensland. Energex's carbon offset program is also reaping some major rewards for the community with the planting of almost 300,000 native plants since 1996. Ergon Energy is similarly focused on opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through projects such as the Townsville Solar Cities initiative, the sustainable poles initiative and a trial of biodiesel on its remote and isolated grid systems. As the committee can see, all six Queensland government owned energy corporations are taking the challenge of a carbon constrained environment seriously and are focused on securing a low carbon energy supply for the future of all Queenslanders.

Ms CROFT: The Energy Ombudsman of Queensland plays a very important role in protecting Queensland consumers. Can you please outline how you plan to work with him to strengthen consumer protection even further?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for Broadwater for the question and, I must say, acknowledge your passion for the protection of consumer rights. As the member correctly points out, the Ombudsman plays an important role in protecting small retail electricity and gas customers—the mums and dads out there—from retailers who are not doing the right thing.

Earlier this year we saw one electricity retailer use a clause in a market contract to retrospectively increase prices. I find this action reprehensible and have directed the associate director-general of Queensland Mines and Energy to close this loophole in the Electricity Code. This work is close to completion and any retailer with this clause still in their market contracts will face action, including cancellation of their licence. I have also been informed about people being approached by a door-to-door salesperson trying to persuade them to sign up to a new electricity contract by providing untruthful information. While most retailers do the right thing, there are a couple who do not and I want to make sure that all are accountable for their actions.

That is why today I am announcing the formation of the retailers round table. Membership will consist of all retailers who hold electricity or gas retail licences in Queensland who market to small energy customers. In addition, I am also inviting the Queensland Council of Social Services and the Queensland Consumers Association to be members and represent consumer interests. The round table will meet three times a year to exchange views on issues affecting consumers, such as billing time lines and door-to-door selling standards without the burden of additional regulation.

Senior executives will be directly accountable to me and the Ombudsman, and by making small problems the responsibility of senior management I hope that retailers make changes at the grassroots of their organisations. The Ombudsman will also report to the group the number and types of complaints received since the previous meeting. I believe that the formation of the Queensland Energy Retailers Roundtable will foster goodwill through demonstrated service quality and customer service responsiveness. I am sure all members will support this important development for Queensland consumers.

I have now met with a number of retailers operating in the Queensland market and have made it perfectly clear to each and every one of them my expectation that they will operate with ethical practices. It has been reported to me that some of these retailers have been using backpackers who may not be as dedicated to maintaining the script that has been prepared for them by retailers and therefore engaging in behaviour which has raised concerns in the community in terms of retailing practices. Whilst I understand that it is difficult for retailers to monitor each and every one of their employees in terms of how they go about selling their product, that does not mean in my view that they should be let off the hook. I have stressed with each and every one of them my expectation that they will do everything reasonable in their power to ensure that their salespeople operate in an ethical way in selling their product to Queenslanders.

CHAIR: Minister, I refer to page 211 of the Service Delivery Statement in relation to the \$5 million for Ergon Energy to undertake a trial for use of alternative energy in isolated communities. Can you please provide details of this project, including the benefits to both the communities and the environment?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the chair for the question. Ergon Energy has commenced the isolated communities energy savings pilot in the northern peninsula area—Thursday Island and Horn Island. The pilot is trialling a range of demand management and energy efficiency initiatives targeted at isolated communities. It will also explore how renewable energy can be cost-effectively deployed. This range of targeted policies and programs is aimed at lowering household, business and government energy. It is anticipated that the trial will result in a range of benefits for both the environment and the communities in which it is implemented.

Ergon Energy anticipates that a 20 per cent reduction in electricity usage will be achieved throughout the trial. This also reduces reliance on diesel generation in these communities. Residential customers can expect a reduction of up to \$200 per year on electricity bills by participating in the trial. Achieving the 20 per cent reduction target will significantly reduce the Queensland government's community service obligation liability and has the potential to more than offset up-front funding provided for the pilot. Additionally, programs targeting community education will empower local communities to upskill and train local people and use local resources and products. There are a total of 33 isolated generation centres throughout Queensland. The outcomes of the pilot will determine whether energy conservation measures are rolled out to the remaining isolated communities.

Ms van LITSENBURG: The solar hot-water project commenced on 1 July. Can you please provide an update for the committee including the industry benefits as a result of the project?

Mr SEENEY: You will have to get a consultant to answer that one!

CHAIR: Member for Callide.

Mr SEENEY: It is too complex and complicated!

CHAIR: Minister.

Mr ROBERTSON: Is he finished?

CHAIR: He gets an opportunity to ask a question later and I hope that he does take that opportunity rather than interject.

Mr SEENEY: Ring Mr Miley. His number is on the list that I gave you. Ring Mr Miley. He will earn his 1,500 bucks.

CHAIR: Member for Callide. Minister.

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for the question. The Queensland government is delivering on its commitment to assisting Queenslanders to access affordable solar hot-water systems. Public interest in this program has been overwhelming. There is no doubt because it has been so popular and overwhelming that we have seen the attack on this program by the member for Callide today. In recent weeks 28,000 application packs have been sent to Queenslanders who registered their interest in the program prior to 1 July. The procurement process is in the final stages and the Queensland government anticipates the supply of solar and heat pump water heaters will be available for installation within coming weeks.

This is a good story for the Queensland solar water heating industry and for Queensland households. A core policy objective of the Queensland government's Solar Hot Water Program is to encourage the growth of Queensland's solar hot-water industry. With up to 200,000 systems being proposed for installation, the program provides industry with an enormous opportunity to increase the number of solar water heaters and heat pumps installed in Queensland households.

CHAIR: I call the member for Callide.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, referring once again to the Office of Clean Energy on page 27 of the Service Delivery Statement and reflecting on the answers that you gave to questions in the previous session, I draw your attention to this ad for an assistant director-general for the Office of Clean Energy on a salary of between \$200,000 and \$213,000 a year. Minister, can you explain why, given that the Office of Clean Energy has been in existence for little over six months and all the capacity issues that we spoke about earlier, there is a need to employ an assistant director-general on a salary of between \$200,000 and \$213,000 a year?

Mr ROBERTSON: Simply because the head of the Office of Clean Energy, Dr John Cole, who was at the table earlier, has tendered his resignation. He is taking up a position in academia that was offered some time ago. So that advertisement is to call for applicants to come forward to fill that role.

Mr SEENEY: I refer again to the briefing note that makes comment about the impending departure of the Office of Clean Energy's chief officer, Dr John Cole, and also the executive director of clean energy policy, Mr Murray Daniel. Minister, once again referring to this advertisement, it is for a position that is a long-term contract for three years. Can you tell the committee whether those two departing officers had similar long-term three-year contracts and what will happen to those contracts on their departure?

Mr ROBERTSON: Obviously I would not have direct knowledge of what the contracts for those two individuals involved. As I have said, Dr Cole has decided to take up a very senior position with academia.

Mr SEENEY: Presumably his contract would not be paid out.

CHAIR: Member for Callide, I am not going to let you interject.

Mr ROBERTSON: He has tendered his resignation. In relation to the second individual, he is still employed in government. He has taken up an alternative position as chief of staff in a minister's office.

Mr SEENEY: So I take it from that, Minister, you are indicating to the committee that there are no payouts for those contracts for those two positions.

Mr ROBERTSON: Again, I do not have that detail available to me. I will check up on it and see what the story is. That is not something that is routinely brought to the attention of ministers. Peter, if you can assist in any way I am happy to have that information provided.

Mr Henneken: As the minister has indicated, Dr Cole has resigned, so there is no payout in those circumstances. He has taken up an opportunity which for him is a great opportunity. Mr Daniel has taken up another opportunity and in that circumstance there will be no payout. As you clearly indicate, the position of Dr Cole has been advertised and we will look at the other position at a later stage.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, once again in relation to this ad for an assistant director-general's position on a salary of between \$200,000 and \$213,000 a year, can you indicate to the committee where the part of the job description for that position will be an ability to purchase solar hot-water systems?

Mr ROBERTSON: I do not think there is any point in providing an answer to such a question. These issues have been exhaustively determined. It really does not warrant an answer.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, we heard the proposition put here this morning that the purchase of solar hot-water systems is too complex and complicated for the Office of Clean Energy, with some 37 staff. You are now proposing to employ a new assistant director-general on a salary of over \$200,000 a year. Do you still expect that with the appointment of that new assistant director-general you will continue to pay Mr Miley his \$1,500 a day to administer the purchase of solar hot-water systems?

Mr ROBERTSON: Once again, the member misrepresents the role of both the Office of Clean Energy and the particular contractor to whom he refers. That particular contractor—I will say one more time—has been brought in for his specific skills in logistics. He is part of a much broader team that uses the skills of other officers in the Office of Clean Energy in other components of rolling out our program to target 200,000 additional households to have solar hot water installed over the next three years. So, in relation to the skills that I would expect of a senior officer of that salary range, I would expect first and foremost that officer to have a range of skills that will deliver the renewable energy strategy in all of its detail in the time frames that are laid out. The Solar Hot Water Program is but one component of the overall strategy and responsibilities of the Office of Clean Energy.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, can you indicate to the committee whether you or your directors-general or any of your senior staff have any knowledge of previous contracts that have been let to Mr Miley or indicate whether any further contract will be let to Mr Miley?

Mr ROBERTSON: I have no personal knowledge of previous contracts of this individual.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, can you take on notice a question regarding any previous contracts that have been let and give an indication to the committee, when you have time to check your department's records, whether or not any previous contracts have been let by your department or any other department? I do not suppose it would be fair to ask that question.

CHAIR: No. You can ask the minister about his department.

Mr SEENEY: Can you take on notice whether you are aware of any previous contracts that have been let by your department to Mr Miley? Will you take that question on notice and provide a response to the committee?

Mr ROBERTSON: I am not too sure what the question is now.

Mr SEENEY: The question is very simple. Have there been any previous contracts that warranted a payment of \$1,500 a day to Mr Miley?

Mr ROBERTSON: I will take that on notice.

CHAIR: The minister has taken that on notice.

Mr SEENEY: Can we move on to page 6 of the Service Delivery Statement which deals with the demand side management trial and some \$47 million that is going to be allocated to that trial. Minister, can you give an indication to the committee how that \$47 million is going to be spent by the GOCs that it is being allocated to?

Mr ROBERTSON: Which dot point are you referring to on page 6?

Mr SEENEY: On page 2-6 dot point 5 deals with the demand side management trial. I am sure you do not need to read the dot point to know where the \$47 million is going to be allocated, surely.

Mr ROBERTSON: No. I just wanted to know where it was on the page. I could not readily see it. Just take it easy. As members would know, electricity peak demand is a key driver of electricity infrastructure which is passed on to customers through increased electricity prices. Peak demand reduction measures are therefore an important tool for reducing upward pressure on electricity prices. In collaboration with Energex and Ergon, the Queensland government has developed a range of demand management initiatives to reduce customer energy costs.

This year we have committed \$47.7 million to the energy conservation and demand management program. This package comprises the residential target initiative which will provide residential customers with energy management options for major household energy appliances such as air conditioners and pool pumps. The demand management for commercial and industrial customers initiative will involve collaboration with industry to reduce their energy use; the reward based tariff work, which will analyse in the short term how best to reward customers for low energy use at peak demand times with existing technologies and in a future intelligent grid environment; and energy conservation communities, which will pilot voluntary programs incorporating energy conservation and demand management in selected towns throughout Queensland.

The package which has been developed in collaboration with electricity distributors Energex and Ergon is anticipated to achieve up to 40 megawatts in avoided supply infrastructure augmentation, which equates to approximately \$120 million in savings over the next couple of years. Project outcomes will inform the development of further initiatives to achieve greater improvements in the future.

Additionally, new demand management planning and reporting obligations have been recently introduced through the Electricity Regulation 2006. This will help focus the demand management activities of the state's electricity distribution entities Energex and Ergon by requiring distribution entities to identify opportunities to better manage customer demand and set firm targets for each year starting from 2009-10. The Queensland Competition Authority must provide its review of alternative tariff structures no later than 30 November 2009.

Ms CROFT: Minister, the Queensland Renewable Energy Fund outlines the Bligh government's commitment to 20 per cent renewable energy by 2020. Could you please advise what projects the government is committed to delivering as part of this target?

Mr ROBERTSON: Over the next three years, projects will include \$4.3 million for the new upgraded Birdsville geothermal power station, \$9 million to the Mackay Sugar cogeneration project, \$7.5 million to the CSIRO SolarGas project and \$5 million for the coastal geothermal energy initiative. The technologies that this funding is spread across demonstrate Queensland's natural advantages in renewable energy generation. For example, the Mackay project brings innovation to a mature technology utilising sugarcane waste, while the Birdsville project will apply new equipment to an existing geothermal resource. Emerging technologies, such as hot dry rocks using geothermal generation, will also contribute to Queensland's energy future, and the coastal geothermal energy mapping exercise will help locate those resources close to demand centres, such as cities and towns on the coast.

These projects will all play a part in contributing to the state's goal for renewable energy, which is to achieve at least 20 per cent of investment generated through the national Renewable Energy Target by 2020. The plan will help stimulate up to \$3.5 billion in new investment in Queensland, create up to 3,500 jobs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by more than 40 million tonnes by 2020. There are 10 initiatives in the plan targeting three focus areas: accelerating deployment of renewable energy projects, efficient and effective regulation to facilitate new renewable energy investment and smart industry jobs and investment.

One of the first projects to commence will be a feasibility study looking at possible locations for a large scale solar thermal power station. Additionally, the plan focuses on providing the right incentives, which may include non-financial measures such as access to land and infrastructure to encourage industry to move beyond business as usual and look for new opportunities.

CHAIR: Minister, I want to go back to one of the questions about pricing and the energy industry and GOCs. There are a number of components that contribute to the benchmark retail cost index, and that is mentioned in the Service Delivery Statements on page 2-26. Can you please outline what these are and how these prices are set?

Mr ROBERTSON: Under the Electricity Act 1994, regulated electricity prices are adjusted annually in line with the benchmark retail cost index. In broad terms, the benchmark retail cost index for a particular year is calculated by dividing the cost of supplying electricity to the state by the state's total electricity load. Essentially, consumers pay for the cost of purchasing electricity, including: the cost of complying with the expanded Commonwealth Renewable Energy Target and the Queensland Gas Scheme; network costs, which cover costs associated with the transmission and distribution of electricity—that is, the poles and wires that bring electricity to consumers; and retail costs, which cover reasonable costs incurred by retailers in providing their services, such as billing and overheads. As network and energy costs account for around 90.5 per cent of the total cost of supplying energy—the other 9.5 per cent being retail and costs—changes in these components will usually have the greatest impact on movements and the benchmark retail cost index from one year to the next.

Queensland's demand for electricity continues to grow. To maintain safe and reliable access to electricity for Queenslanders, in the five years from 2005-06 to 2009-10, Queensland will have spent almost \$9 billion on electricity transmission and distribution infrastructure to cope with increased demand. Queensland has two government owned distribution network service providers—Energex and Ergon. These businesses are regulated monopolies that move electricity from the high-voltage transmission network to residential and business customers via a network of powerlines, transformers and substations. Energex and Ergon must operate in accordance with distribution revenue determinations made by the Australian Energy Regulator.

On 1 July 2010, the Queensland distribution network service providers will enter a new five-year regulatory period. The Australian Energy Regulator's determination will provide each distribution network service provider with regulated revenue which may be collected from its distribution charges. Predictions of continuing demand growth and network expansion have been made by the providers in their submissions to the regulator.

CHAIR: That completes our consideration of the GOCs. We will now move on to Trade, and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition will be asking questions. There will be 15 minutes for questions from non-government members and 10 minutes for questions from government members.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Minister, I refer you to non-government question on notice No. 9, which sought details about the overseas staff of Trade Queensland, including the number of staff, the base salary of these staff, their expenses, their benefits and a range of other things. I note that in the answer

there was only a general indication of the base salary and the overall cost of running the office. Minister, why wasn't the information contained with regards to the living expenses and the general expenses of each of the particular people in question? In a nutshell, what is the cost of running Peter Beattie and the others?

Mr ROBERTSON: We just tried to be as accurate as possible. If you require further detailed information, I am happy to provide it on notice.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Well, the detailed information was asked for some three weeks ago with regards to the travel expenses of each staff member, the living expenses of each staff member and the other entitlements. One would have thought that three weeks was a fair enough time, but if you want more time I am more than happy to put it on notice.

CHAIR: Deputy Leader of the Opposition, you are asking the same question that the minister has just taken on notice. I will ask you to ask another question.

Mr ROBERTSON: I am happy to take it on notice.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Maybe you can get cracking on this one then.

CHAIR: Deputy Leader of the Opposition, please do not make argumentative statements as part of your question and please do not make those snide comments.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Before I go to the next question, can the committee give an indication of when one would expect the answers to that question?

CHAIR: The standing orders require that questions on notice have to be provided to the committee by the close of business tomorrow.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Further to the operation of the overseas trade offices, I would indicate to the minister the cost of running those offices as per his answer to question on notice No. 9. It appears to me that the most expensive offices provide less value for money than the least expensive offices. Minister, can you give an indication of why that is the case? To give you an example, the cost benefit for the office in Riyadh is almost \$500 for each dollar invested, but if you look at Los Angeles you are dealing with \$13 for each dollar invested.

Mr ROBERTSON: I do not think it would be appropriate to do a simple calculation such as that simply because each office operates in a different location with different cost structures attached to it. The cost of office accommodation, rental et cetera varies between locations. The important thing for me as minister is that we have a system in place to measure the performance of each of these offices and that those assessments are conducted on a regular basis to ensure we get value for money. Doing the exercise that you have just done is not a valid way of assessing the success or otherwise of any one particular office compared to another because you are not comparing apples with apples.

CHAIR: I should clarify my previous advice. The questions on notice are due Monday afternoon at 5 pm.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Will the minister outline what the key performance indicators are for these particular trade staff? I do not necessarily mean the number of meetings they undertake or the briefing notes they write. Is there an expectation on these trade commissioners and deputy commissioners that they will return a certain amount for each dollar invested?

Mr ROBERTSON: I will ask Mr Rob Whiddon to provide you with that answer.

Mr Whiddon: Yes, indeed Trade Queensland very much bases its work out on the field, especially its overseas offices, on strong KPIs which our commissioners are to meet. They have to provide a certain number of strategic projects each year, a certain number of clients per year, a certain number of outcomes in market development. They have to service divisions. There are a range of targets which need to be met and which are monitored monthly by Trade Queensland.

Whilst the cost of our overseas offices is large, it is very cost-effective for us and we are constantly reviewing where our overseas offices need to be located. Since becoming general manager, I have indicated both to the organisation but most importantly to business—because the organisation exists to service business clients—that our teams out in the field need to be in locations where Queensland businesses are wanting to do business and are going to get maximum effect and they need to work with business to meet the KPIs that we set. These KPIs are set in their contracts but reviewed each year to make sure that the targets have been met. Constantly, in my view, you need to keep raising the bar so that as new commissioners, for instance, settle into an environment and into a country they are going to perform better as they get more contacts and business feels more confident in dealing with them. So each of our commissioners, as I said, need to meet those criteria. They need to achieve a raft of KPIs.

I must say, overall, that our commissioners are achieving those KPIs and beating those targets. I think that is a fairly remarkable situation, given the economic climate we are currently in. I was concerned, as all members of the committee would have been, that the current economic downturn was going to make it very difficult for business in Queensland to achieve results overseas. Instead, what we

have seen is that we have reached our target for the year. Next year is going to be much more difficult—I have to admit that—but the target has been met and that is because commissioners have reached their KPIs and exceeded them in most cases.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Further to the KPI of the various commissioners, are there commissioners that are not reaching their KPIs? What KPIs are they falling short of? What action has been taken to address that underperformance? And who are those commissioners?

Mr Whiddon: All of our commissioners have reached their KPIs. I think the business outcomes which are shown in the answer to the question on notice indicate that there are some quite remarkable achievements happening. We in Trade Queensland require our clients whom we serve to sign an export impact form which attests that Trade Queensland has given specific assistance. That makes sure that we do not claim more than we should. We claim only what we have assisted.

This is the impact form which must be signed by senior executives of the companies concerned. It gives considerable detail of what Trade Queensland not only in our overseas offices but also in our head office here have provided by way of assistance to reach those targets. I think we had a KPI target of some \$420 million for this financial year. I thought that was going to be difficult to reach. I can advise the committee that we have in fact just exceeded \$500 million for the financial year, which indicates that all of our offices are working very strongly indeed.

Some of those offices are quite small. The ones in the Middle East are just commissioners with no support staff at this stage. What we need to do as an organisation is to review how the year has gone. As I say, next year is going to be tremendously difficult for us and for all Queensland business, but the interesting thing that I have noted is that the number of requests from companies for assistance has increased quite remarkably. It is pretty clear that what is happening is that companies which are doing it tough are looking at all the options they have, including looking to see whether there are overseas markets for their products and their services.

We are seeing strong interest in Queensland companies, especially in mining services, in Latin America, which is one of our best markets now. In the Middle East, while Dubai is very difficult, and as you would know the economy is not good, Abu Dhabi is very good for us. I think reaching the KPIs and having targets that are strong and achievable but which raise the bar a little more than you would normally ask is making sure that we all meet our targets.

Mr SPRINGBORG: In the answers to the question on notice and also in the answers we have had this morning, there seems to be a strong belief that these offices do provide a strong cost-benefit to Queensland. Has any analysis been done of how we compare with other Australian states which have cut back their presence in these jurisdictions? What is the trend comparison with regard to the amount of trade we are picking up vis-à-vis the other states?

Mr Whiddon: I thank you for the question, because I think it comes to the nub of whether these overseas offices are effective or not. I know that it has always been an issue of contention. I can assure the committee that the management of Trade Queensland and the government have been very strict in ensuring that we do have offices in locations which are going to help Queensland business, and that is the driving factor.

You have asked specifically about other states. The interesting thing is that other states are currently opening new offices or doing activity in additional countries. While we are remaining stable and have not opened new offices in new locations since I became general manager nearly 18 months ago, other states are doing so. I think the most interesting one is New South Wales, which you will recall closed all its overseas offices some years ago. They were fairly discreet about why they did that, but it was said to be a financial decision. They are now opening five offices around the world. If we are going to compete with other states, as I think we have to in some locations particularly, then we have to match them. As to how they are doing, I cannot answer that. Some of the states like Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia are becoming very active and are spending quite a deal of money. As I say, we have balanced our budget this financial year. The decision that we have to take is where our dollar is going to be best spent, and we have to be driven by Queensland business. If it looks like there are going to be more Queensland companies wanting to search out Latin America, then at some stage we should look to see whether we need someone on the ground.

In answer to your question, it is important to say that we are making sure that we are not out there competing with federal agencies and directly with other states for the sake of doing it. I have recently concluded an MOU—not just a piece of paper but a strictly guideline MOU—with Austrade. We are the first Australian state to do that to make sure that we work cooperatively with Austrade around the world and help each other with our limited resources. Just three weeks ago I signed an MOU with EFIC, the federal government's export finance agency. Again, we are the first state to do so. So we are making sure that we are effective, but I have to say that other states are very active around the world and are sending missions and are opening new offices.

Mr SPRINGBORG: My last question relates to the presence of our three mainland China offices—Guangzhou, Shanghai and Hong Kong—and also to the situation of the arrested Rio Tinto executive Stern Hu. Is any advice being provided out of those three mainland China offices to clients on mainland China or to any delegations or businesspeople undertaking delegations overseas as they contact Trade Queensland? And what is that particular advice?

Mr Whiddon: This is a pertinent question, and I think all Queenslanders would be concerned about what is happening. We have taken the view—rightly, I think—that this is a matter certainly at this stage for the Commonwealth government and have not been saying anything publicly. Our offices in China are reporting to me that business is occurring as usual. We therefore think that this is very much a matter for the Commonwealth and would stay out of it.

That being said, we think that the prognosis for trade and business in China is still excellent. It is a major trading partner for us. As you mention, there are a number of offices there. Again, we have to look at our resources, but certainly the fact that Expo will be held in Shanghai next year is I think tremendously important to Australia and the Australian government. All states are involved, as we are. I would think that would be reflected in how the Chinese government and Chinese business would see us, because they are wanting us to do good business there at the Expo.

As I say, it is our second largest trading partner after Japan. We are still getting a range of new inquiries about doing business in China. I am not seeing—admittedly at this early stage—that there is any reflection in business that they have some risk in doing so, but obviously we need to work with our offices. The good thing about China is that Queensland has some extraordinary commissioners—Mr Zhang in Shanghai and Simon Lee in Hong Kong, in particular. They have been there for many years. They have excellent relations in the upper echelons of the Chinese government, and they will certainly be able to guide business when still wanting to do activity in China.

Ms van LITSENBURG: Minister, on page 2-34 of the Service Delivery Agreement it is estimated that the value of exports generated by firms assisted by Trade Queensland is close to \$500 million. Can you advise how this was achieved in the current economic climate and what programs Trade Queensland has in place in specific markets to maintain this effort?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for Redcliffe for that question. As indicated by Mr Whiddon, preliminary figures indicate that Trade Queensland has far exceeded its targets for exports generated contained in the agency Service Delivery Statement for 2009-10. At this stage it is estimated that more than \$500 million of new exports can be directly attributable to exports supported by Trade Queensland. The key outcomes include 21 trade missions with 307 companies participating; and 66 inbound trade delegations and buyers missions, which are a cost-effective way to give Queensland exporters access to international buyers. As well Trade Queensland assisted 2,900 client firms, with 44 per cent of these businesses located in regional Queensland.

Despite a difficult global economic situation, Trade Queensland has continued to assist Queensland companies to achieve these outstanding results. It is a sign of the government's commitment to all stages of economic development, from growing new businesses right through to assisting firms to deliver Queensland's innovative goods and services to the world. This result delivers on our election promise to create and maintain jobs, and half a billion dollars in export success certainly does just that.

To achieve this result, Trade Queensland provides a range of specialist services, advice and assistance to Queensland companies looking to either gain a foothold or to increase their presence in overseas markets. Trade Queensland services companies' needs in a number of ways including maintaining an overseas presence in 16 key locations. These offices provide a range of specialist advice and assistance including market intelligence, identification of opportunities and leads, pre-mission market briefings, key as well as tailored trade and business missions, site visits and networking events with decision makers.

There are four contracted Queensland government special representatives as well as a contracted special adviser developing the relationship between Queensland and PNG and other Pacific island markets. Trade Queensland also delivers a range of exporter education services directly to Queensland exporters. The combination of these programs enables Queensland businesses to utilise the competitive strengths of the state's economy, both current and emerging, to expand their business and, with the support of the Bligh government, improve our economy.

Mr KILBURN: Minister, there has already been a lot said today about measuring the performance of Trade Queensland. Could you expand on how you assess the efficiencies of our trade commissioners, how you monitor their performance against what benchmarks and, more broadly, how they have performed in 2008-09?

Mr ROBERTSON: As Mr Whiddon has outlined, trade commissioners have a set of key performance indicators which are linked to overall Trade Queensland Service Delivery Statement performance measures. They also have their own annual targets and are subject to a rigorous performance reporting process.

Trade Queensland monitors commissioners' performance on a monthly basis, and further still their performance is formally reviewed each quarter by the Trade Queensland senior management team. On top of this, the benchmarks are continuously being reviewed to appropriately reflect the performance of the commissioners. Currently the commissioners report on such areas as the number of Trade Queensland strategic export projects they participate in and related outcomes, the value of export outcomes generated by client firms assisted, the number of exporter development initiatives undertaken, and the number of trade initiatives promoting Queensland products and services undertaken.

Additionally, the commissioners also assist with investment attraction to Queensland and report the number of investment leads they generate and any related investment dollar value. All dollar value outcomes by clients assisted are substantiated by export impact forms, which Mr Whiddon referred to previously, and endorsed by the exporter, acknowledging the importance of the assistance provided by Trade Queensland.

Trade commissioners have contributed significantly to Trade Queensland Service Delivery Statement outcomes for 2008-09. Trade commissioners have generated 76 investment leads and assisted \$329 million of direct investment into Queensland. They have also supported Trade Queensland's assistance to almost 3,000 Queensland businesses. Clearly, Queensland's trade commissioners play an important role in the export success of our state's businesses.

The Bligh government investment in trade commissioners delivers on our election commitment to protect and create jobs. Our trade commissioners are generating sufficient investment into Queensland and, just as importantly, are establishing partnerships that will deliver new jobs into Queensland's future. Examples of formal partnerships facilitated by trade commissioners include, as has been mentioned, signing of a statement of intent between the Queensland government and the Ministry of the Economy of the United Mexican States, a friendship state agreement with China's Guandong Province, a formal government-to-government agreement with the province of British Columbia in Canada and a number of innovation agreements in knowledge-intensive sectors such as biotech and clean tech.

I should say that in some of these areas our trade commissioners are concentrating on, particularly in terms of knowledge-intensive sectors like biotech and clean tech, a financial outcome is not always readily achievable. These are emerging industries and emerging sectors whereby a strategic investment of time by our commissioners will hopefully generate outcomes into the future.

This is quite different from the work to assist an exporter get a particular product, say, a widget, into a shopping centre in a particular part of the world. That is why I said in relation to the Leader of the Opposition's first question that it is not possible to compare apples with apples because each office is different in terms of the cost drivers. But also the activities of our trade commissioners vary according to the markets they are operating in or the leads that they are following.

Ms CROFT: Central Queensland is in crisis with rapidly falling export commodity prices, devastating regional towns and cities. What services can the government provide to regional exporters?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for Broadwater for the question. Trade Queensland is actively involved in assisting a broad range of businesses in regional Queensland. The agency works in conjunction with the industry development activities undertaken within the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation. Nearly half—that is, 44 per cent—of Queensland companies provided with export assistance by Trade Queensland are located in regional Queensland.

One way that Trade Queensland assists regional exporters is with a suite of services under the title Export Advisory Service. Through this Export Advisory Service Trade Queensland offers a range of products and services tailored to meet the export skills development needs of regional exporters. The Export Advisory Service's products and services include the 'Getting export smart' seminars—a five module export skills development program. For 2008-09 a total of 55 'Getting export smart' seminars were delivered in regional Queensland. Another product is the export master class workshop series which is a higher level, tightly focused workshop for experienced exporters. In 2008-09 a total of five master class workshops were delivered in regional Queensland.

The Mentoring for Export program, another Export Advisory Service service, provides export clients with the opportunity to discuss their export strategy with a panel of mentors drawn from government and industry. The government's export advisers are a one-stop shop and are able to link regional businesses through the overseas offices of Trade Queensland with suitable partners in a range of growth export markets.

Queensland's regions are home to some of Australia's top exporters. Regional Queensland businesses assisted by Trade Queensland achieved outstanding results in 2008-09. Out of the \$500 million total export outcomes supported by Trade Queensland around \$142 million or 28 per cent were achieved by regional exporters.

This government will not slash \$1 billion from the budget as promised by the opposition during the last election campaign. We will continue to support regional Queensland businesses with programs such as these delivered by Trade Queensland as maintaining—not cutting—funds for these programs creates jobs and delivers on our election commitments.

CHAIR: On page 2-15 of the Service Delivery Statement I note that Driving export growth for Queensland 2006-11 achieved its five-year knowledge-intensive export target two years early. Minister, can you please advise the committee on how this was achieved and what the aims of this program are for the future?

Mr ROBERTSON: Thank you for that question. First of all can I say that to achieve such a target two years earlier is an outstanding effort. I thank all of those involved in the strategy for their commitment.

On 23 July 2006 cabinet approved the Queensland government's five-year export strategy Driving export growth for Queensland 2006-11—in effect the export strategy. The export strategy was released on 9 October 2006 as a whole-of-government strategy. The export strategy achieved its target in the value knowledge-intensive exports in 2007-08 when such exports reached \$5 billion. As I said, this is remarkable result given it was originally targeted for 2011.

These knowledge-intensive exports are for the whole of Queensland, not just Trade Queensland. This demonstrates that there has been a shift in the composition of Queensland's economy to a more knowledge based focus. This milestone came about through several key initiatives undertaken by Trade Queensland, including the establishment of the Export Advisory Service delivering export advice and services mainly through the regional centres of the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation and other affiliates within the export advisory network. It also included: new trade representation in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, Riyadh in Saudi Arabia and Guangzhou in southern China; additional export advisors for India and South Korea; and new Tourism Queensland representation in Osaka in Japan and Mumbai in India and an enhanced presence in Shanghai in China.

The Latin America Mining Initiative, which commenced in April 2006 and concluded on 31 March 2009, and which focused on the key markets of Chile, Peru and Mexico, was a major contributor and generated \$54.2 million in export income by Queensland companies. In the latter part of 2009 a new whole-of-government export strategy that looks at new and emerging industry sectors, such as renewable energy and clean technology, will be developed and aim to open even more markets as we deliver on our election promise to create and maintain jobs.

CHAIR: The time allotted for the consideration of the expenditure estimates for the portfolio of the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy and Minister for Trade has now expired. Minister, on behalf all members of the committee can I thank you, your staff and the department for their assistance in our considerations.

Mr ROBERTSON: Thank you Chair and members.

Proceedings suspended from 12.51 pm to 1.30 pm

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE C—COMMUNITY SERVICES, HOUSING AND WOMEN**In Attendance**

Hon. KL Struthers, Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women

Ms C Whitton, Principal Advisor

Department of Communities

Ms L Apelt, Director-General

Mr I Fulton, Chief Financial Officer

Ms K Bullock, Director, Financial Services

Mr D Short, Director, Financial Services

Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian

Ms E Fraser, Commissioner

CHAIR: Estimates Committee C hearing is now resumed and the portfolios of the Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women will be examined. The proceedings today are similar to parliament to the extent that members of the public cannot ask questions. In that regard I remind visitors that, in accordance with standing order 206, any person admitted to a public hearing of a committee may be excluded by order of the committee or at the discretion of the chair.

In relation to media coverage of the hearing, the committee has resolved that television film coverage and photography be allowed during my introductory comments and the opening statement of each minister as well as for a short period during each changeover of ministerial advisers. The committee has also agreed to the live broadcast of the hearing via the Parliamentary Service's website and to receivers throughout the parliamentary precinct. I ask that all mobile phones and pagers be now switched off.

I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time limit for questions is one minute and that 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 the 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 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. For the benefit of Hansard can I ask departmental officers to identify themselves if the minister calls on them to answer a question.

I welcome the minister and her advisers today. I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms STRUTHERS: Thank you, Mr Chairman, I would. The 2009-10 state budget for the portfolios of Community Services and Housing and Women is a budget for tough times. It is a budget that meets our commitments to the people of Queensland. This budget is directed at strengthening and better coordinating services for people.

It includes an extra \$414 million over four years to alleviate increasing pressures for funded non-government organisations, including those arising from increased award rates provided by the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission to community service workers. This allocation recognises the valuable work they do in caring for our most vulnerable citizens.

The global recession means we have been forced to make some tough choices, but cutting back on community services was not negotiable. This budget further strengthens communities through the allocation of \$610,000 for youth justice conferences; \$170.2 million in capital funding to expand the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre in Townsville—this project is also a big jobs generator, creating more than 1,400 jobs; \$1.8 million for legal and support services for seniors; and \$2.7 million over two years to run a pilot program in Rockhampton on a new integrated approach to preventing domestic violence. This budget also includes unprecedented funding for housing and support for homeless people.

Youth justice conferencing is expanded in this budget because it works. It is where young people face the person they have wronged and take responsibility for their actions. Youth workers tell me it is a powerful process and a powerful deterrent. We know that the vast majority of young people do the right thing. Youth crime is down. In 2001 the rate of juvenile crime was around nine offences per 100 young people. It has now dropped to eight offences per 100 young people, even though the population of young people rose by almost 50,000 in the same period.

Jobs and job security are important in tough economic times. Our housing budget this year is a major jobs generator. On top of the state government's funds of \$140 million from the Queensland Future Growth Fund there is around \$977.2 million from the Nation Building and Jobs Plan and other national partnership agreements.

All up there is a record \$1.4 billion to build 4½ thousand new social housing dwellings right across the state. It is a win for people who need a roof over their heads and a win for workers in the building industry. We are planning and building now. Tenants will turn the key on these new homes over the coming months and over the next 3½ years.

Our record capital program includes more than \$196 million to build and upgrade housing for Indigenous people in remote communities. Better housing for Indigenous families will go a long way towards closing the gap of inequities in Indigenous health and economic status—a key commitment of this government.

We have also set aside more than \$56 million to help more than 176,000 households in the private market get access to affordable housing. The Bligh government will inject an extra \$200 million over four years to tackle homelessness. We have reached a landmark partnership agreement on homelessness. Queensland will contribute \$102 million over four years, with matching funds of \$99.5 million from the Commonwealth. These funds will go towards a range of reforms including more street-to-home initiatives for chronic homeless people in hot spots across the state, such as in Cairns, Mount Isa, Maryborough and the Gold Coast, and more assistance for people leaving protection services, correctional and health facilities.

Our package of concessions for seniors is the most comprehensive in the country. Now we have increased the electricity rebate to pensioners and seniors by 15 per cent, at a cost of \$15.5 million. This is to help ease the financial burden on seniors. We are recognising the role of volunteers, especially senior volunteers, through initiatives such as Golden Gurus. We are on track to meet our election commitment to boost the proportion of volunteers in Queensland by 50 per cent by 2020.

They are all big-ticket items, but this budget is about more than that. I am talking about initiatives like the Indigenous Youth Parliament. If I am asked to reflect on my time as a minister in the Bligh government I will remember one event above many others—that is, the day in this room when I welcomed 40 young Indigenous men and women to Parliament House for Queensland's first Indigenous Youth Parliament. It was an historic moment. Indigenous young people are tomorrow's leaders. This project will be funded again this year. I firmly believe that true reconciliation will not be achieved until Indigenous people take their rightful place in this parliament.

All of this effort is about planning and delivering. It is a budget to strengthen our communities and steer them through the difficult times ahead.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We will start questioning from non-government members. I call the member for Burdekin.

Mrs MENKENS: Good afternoon, Minister. With reference to page 3-31 of the Service Delivery Statement, can the minister list all other government departments her department has actively engaged in an effort to advocate for women? What measures are in place to determine the success of this engagement?

Ms STRUTHERS: I thank the member for her question. The Office for Women and the status of women generally is an important part of my portfolio activities. The Office for Women has a regional structure, with nine coordinators across the state. We are actively engaged in activities across the state including the Rural Women's Symposium that the Premier attended last year. Were you wanting me to list specific initiatives for the types of activities that are occurring on a daily basis?

Mrs MENKENS: Yes, the advocating for women—in which areas are you actually advocating, in which departments and in what areas?

Ms STRUTHERS: Some of the key priorities for government include women's economic prosperity, women's safety—they are two key areas. Staff in the Office for Women are actively engaged with agencies like Justice and Attorney-General, the police, and other areas of our communities department in order to advance those objectives. For instance, staff from the Office for Women have actively inputted into the new domestic violence strategy that I launched in Rockhampton last week. They actively work with the department of employment on initiatives in relation to women's employment. They are actively engaged with Justice and Attorney-General in relation to reforms in the legal system

and the current review of the domestic violence legislation. So both in the regional areas and in corporate office, this staff is very actively working across agencies. That is their role. They are facilitators. They do not have a big budget themselves; they try to facilitate action out of other agencies.

They do have funding, for instance, for the Women in Hard Hats project—trying to get more women into non-traditional areas of work: the construction industry, the mining industry, those sorts of areas. They have a small budget for that purpose. But generally, their role is to be facilitators, to remind all agencies of the gender impact of their working and the needs of women and girls specifically

Mrs MENKENS: What measures, though, are in place to actually determine the success of their engagement?

Ms STRUTHERS: Projects are evaluated. I might just seek some advice on the recent evaluation. The overall office itself, for instance, has just been evaluated. There was a review undertaken by Carolyn Mason in relation to the role of the office. It was a comprehensive review and I met with Carolyn Mason to go through the findings of that review.

In relation to specific activities like the Women on Boards strategy, the success of that is measured by how many women are on boards. We are over the 50 per cent target that we have been seeking. I think something like 56.11 per cent of the 221 new appointees to Queensland government boards were women. So there is certainly an indicator there that we are on track with that strategy.

With the Women in Hard Hats strategy, we have certainly had some success, but I must admit I am disappointed in the results that not only the Office for Women is achieving but the community is achieving in this area. There is still a very low proportion of women and girls who take up work in those non-traditional areas. Still something like 1.9 per cent or two per cent of the workforce in those areas are women. That is certainly an area that I am keeping an eye on and I want to see extended.

The director-general has advised me that in the specific work plan for the Office for Women there are performance indicators against each of those areas of their activity and some of those have clear targets in relation to the number of women assisted in various areas. So if you would like more detail, I can provide it.

Mrs MENKENS: Thank you.

Ms STRUTHERS: Does that give you a flavour of the work that they are doing? It is a very important area of government activity

Mrs MENKENS: With reference to the SDS, pages 3-15 and 3-18, will the minister provide the total number of dwellings that will be constructed with just the state's contribution to social housing?

Ms STRUTHERS: As the member knows, the state has been contributing significantly. We had a commitment of \$500 million in the 2007-08 budget under the Queensland Future Growth Fund for housing. That was a significant investment at the state level at that time because, as you would be aware, under the federal government the policy was primarily one of rent assistance to Australians in housing need rather than providing capital through the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement to the states and the territories. In fact, we were starved of capital funds, essentially, under those arrangements. So Queensland had to dig deep to find additional money.

I will just take advice on the specific number of dwellings, but the actual quantum of funding initially was on top of the existing spend in the Department of Housing. I am advised that it is primarily joint initiatives. I am happy to provide you with some detail on the current investment. In relation to the current breakdown of the Commonwealth-state contribution, just bear with me and I will get you the detail on that. I do not want to miss a dollar. Housing is a good news story, as the member would be aware. The Commonwealth contribution currently is at \$831 million and the state contribution is \$160.5 million.

Mrs MENKENS: With reference to pages 3-27 and 3-28 of the SDS, can you explain, therefore, why the state's contribution to social rental housing has dropped from \$73 million to \$45 million last year to this year and why Indigenous community housing has dropped from \$42 million to \$30 million?

Ms STRUTHERS: I am not aware that there is a drop in the state contribution. In fact, in these partnership agreements we have significant matching arrangements in some of them—

Mrs MENKENS: It is actually in the budget statement.

Ms STRUTHERS: Can you give me the specific reference again?

Mrs MENKENS: Pages 3-27 and 3-28.

CHAIR: Is that of the Service Delivery Statements?

Mrs MENKENS: Yes, of the SDS, pages 3-27 and 3-28, specifically page 3-28, halfway down.

Ms STRUTHERS: I am advised that there has not, in fact, been a drop but there is a carryover from the 2008-09 year to the 2009-10 financial year.

Mrs MENKENS: Underspent?

Ms STRUTHERS: Housing, as you would be aware, is a rolling program with the capital. It is not a decrease; it is simply the carryover to the next financial year. Just on that, I want to be very clear that we have significant investment in housing. Queensland has contributed a significant amount of money to that. I reiterate that in the last year or two in relation to homelessness and housing generally we are seeing unprecedented investment by all state and territory governments. I have been witness to that at the national ministerial council meetings, where all state and territory governments have been really providing significant support to their public housing and social housing sectors.

Mrs MENKENS: But do you find it acceptable that user charges pay for more of the housing budget than the state government contributions?

Ms STRUTHERS: I will seek some advice, but I might just comment generally. User charges may be referring to our rental income. I think you would expect that we get significant rental income. We have around 60,000 properties. Let us do the maths quickly on that: 25 per cent of people's income is contributing to that rental income. That is a whopping amount of money. I will get you some detail if you need that.

Mrs MENKENS: But it means that they are putting in more than you are putting in.

Ms STRUTHERS: I might just ask Ian Fulton, our chief financial officer who is a bit of a whiz on the number crunching to give us some further advice in relation to that.

Mr Fulton: The amount that is set out in the output summary is the output payment that the department receives from Treasury. In addition, there is a capital sum—an equity contribution—that is paid in. That amount for 2009-10 is \$160.5 million.

Mrs MENKENS: What is the total amount of state funding, excluding all the federal funding, that is being used to reduce the social housing waiting lists? You are saying that that is \$106 million.

Ms STRUTHERS: I appreciate what the member is trying to achieve here is, I guess, what responsibility we are taking. I am advised that the total state expenditure is \$371.4 million this financial year, with a homelessness contribution of \$41.3 million. That includes services, not just housing specifically. That is a significant investment from the Queensland government. I hope you are going to ask me about the Commonwealth contribution, because that is very significant.

Mrs MENKENS: So do you consider that sort of inequity in the funding to be a partnership or a subsidy?

Ms STRUTHERS: It is a partnership. We are matching funds, for instance, in the national partnership on homelessness. The Commonwealth is putting in about \$99.3 million; we are putting in \$102 million or so. That is a very welcome partnership and investment in the homelessness program. We are seeing \$1.1 billion or so in relation to Indigenous housing over the next 10 years. We have never seen that sort of investment prior to the Rudd government coming from the previous federal Howard government.

We are in a new era now in relation to recognition that housing needs to be front of mind for everybody. I can remember working both in my role as an MP and in my prior work at the Queensland Council of Social Service trying to get federal government recognition of housing. It had been pretty difficult under the leadership of John Howard, yet it is one of the most significant things in people's lives. As we know, a job and a secure, affordable, safe roof over your head are two key things that people need in their lives. I simply say that this current level of investment from the federal government puts that era of government to shame.

For 10 years we were starved of capital funds. Queensland had difficulty trying to provide the sort of housing we needed. As you know in your area, when people move into these units they are often the best houses in the street, the best units in the street. As I have said previously in the parliament, as one elderly woman said to me one day—and I have not forgotten this—I was opening a set of units at Acacia Ridge, the Patty Boyle units, and she gave me a big hug and said, 'I feel like I've won Lotto.' That is a tremendous feeling for people. We were deprived of that sort of opportunity. So I am very, very pleased to support and welcome the partnership agreements we are having with the federal government and it is a very, very important opportunity that we have at the moment.

Mrs MENKENS: Will the minister state the demographics most prevalent on the housing register, that is, clients demanding one-bedroom dwellings and so forth and those classified as disadvantaged? Which of those groups are afforded priority? The page reference is 3-28,

Ms STRUTHERS: You have asked an important question and I want to give you a comprehensive answer. I will just wait for some detail on that breakdown. But a couple of observations I would make that I am really pleased about are that currently 44 per cent of the primary tenants in our social housing are people aged 55 years and over. We are providing a lot of housing for seniors and we will continue to do so. Seniors, as you know, have significant needs.

We are also giving priority in our new system for our social register. The assessment process gives priority to women escaping domestic violence and their children, to people leaving mental health and other facilities and people with disabilities. We have a number of criteria that our staff work towards

in assessing very high need, high need and moderate need down to lower need. If I can provide a detailed breakdown, I will give that to you, but certainly the criteria that we work to is that all applicants must meet the eligibility criteria to receive assistance. They must be Australian citizens or permanent residents. There is an asset test in relation to property and liquid assets. There is an independent income test and a household income test. So there are a number of criteria. In relation to the appropriateness of their housing, we assess where they are currently living, how much need they have in relation to location—do they need to be near hospitals. There is a very, very detailed and comprehensive process of assessment that our staff go through.

Currently, 10.6 per cent of our applicants on our register have very high need, 32 per cent high need and down to lower need at 4.5 per cent. As I said, most of those people in that high-need category, or very high need are people escaping domestic violence, people with mental health issues, or disabilities—people who really need support as quickly as possible. Young people coming out of child protection are another high-need group.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, I refer to non-government question on notice No. 8. I ask the minister: what is the unit cost for the key programs offered by the Office for Women? Does she believe that it is value for money to spend \$3.659 million on an office that delivers \$0.64 million worth of programs?

Ms STRUTHERS: The achievements of the Office for Women, as I referred to earlier, have been significant. In terms of a number of the community leadership seminars, the Women in Hard Hats program, the Smart Women-Smart State Awards and the International Women's Day initiative state-wide, these are some great activities that I have been witness to throughout the regions in Queensland as well. You seem to be assuming that this office may not be achieving much. I am of the view and the review is of the view that the office plays a significant facilitative role in elevating the needs of women across government agencies across the community.

Mrs MENKENS: There seems to be an enormous discrepancy between the office administrative costs as compared with the project and the programs.

Ms STRUTHERS: One comment that I would make is that this office does not have a big grants program or anything like that, so its influence is probably hard to quantify because it is about facilitating and providing a mechanism of coordination and facilitation across government. I must acknowledge though that I have had a close look at the Office for Women in my time as minister. I have asked for some significant work to be done on a model that may mean actually positioning staff in those key agencies—that is, basically a hub and spoke model is what I am considering at the moment. I want some further work done on that. I would think that that might then provide an opportunity for the Brisbane based staff to actually work on a day-to-day basis in key agencies around the economic employment issues and other areas. I know that the nine staff in the regions, frankly, work their butts off—if I am allowed to say that; it is not unparliamentary, is it—because they actually have big regions to cover and the Brisbane staff are working across agencies here.

I would like to see a model where they are actually working alongside others, not just trying to facilitate action from what might be some distance, in a sense. I can give you some assurances that I am very mindful of the need for this sort of area of work to be taken seriously and for it to be supported well. In my view, that is not a big budget allocation. I do not see that as an issue. I think the influence has to be effective, and the review certainly indicated that it is, but I think there is scope for improvement. I am certainly looking at that.

Mrs MENKENS: With reference to homelessness amongst youth, can the minister provide a total for the number of youth held in detention centres in 2008-09 because they had no fixed abode?

Ms STRUTHERS: Again, you have touched on a really important issue here. One of the things that has concerned me in my time as minister—and I visited the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre in Townsville a month or so ago—is that a number of young people, particularly Indigenous people, are in detention on remand. I think 60-odd per cent are there on remand. They are people who have not been before the court, have not been deemed guilty of an offence necessarily and the presumption of innocence has to hold. But they are being held in detention, which is a significant punishment for someone who has not actually been through the full process of the court. We have initiatives like YBASS—the Youth Bail and Accommodation Support Service—operating across Brisbane. We have programs in Mount Isa for instance. When I was there recently the Mount Isa Youth Shelter was supporting young people so that they could—

Mrs MENKENS: I am looking at the ones who have no home; they are there because they have no fixed abode and they are actually—

Ms STRUTHERS: What we are trying to do is provide magistrates with confidence that if they are releasing young people on bail or on other conditions they can be accommodated by a youth shelter or support service. Some of the elders, particularly of the Aboriginal kids in Rockhampton and other parts of the state where I visited, are providing that sort of support.

The other initiative that I think will play a good role—and I will talk about this a little more, given that that is my one-minute warning—is Kids Under Cover. I met with an organisation which operates primarily out of Victoria but is looking to offer support in Queensland. Kids Under Cover has a very

practical support system of putting bungalows onto the back of houses, particularly where there is overcrowding, and this is occurring a lot in Indigenous families. Overcrowding is causing pressure on the family. My principal policy adviser tells me that her daughter is 21 and she would like one of these bungalows. They provide separate space—safe, secure space—on the back of a house and they are portable. They can be moved when the needs of that young adolescent or whomever have been fulfilled. They can actually be moved to another place. We are trying to throw a lot at this to be creative and innovative and to try to respond to the holistic needs of young people.

CHAIR: I call the member for Broadwater.

Ms CROFT: I refer to the Service Delivery Statement at page 3-6 and the massive funding injection that is being spent on social housing infrastructure here in Queensland, and I ask: how many workers will get jobs out of the construction of new social housing units to be rolled out on the Gold Coast and across the state over the next 3½ years?

Ms STRUTHERS: I thank the member for the question. I know that she has been pestering me about how much of this housing is going to the Gold Coast. I have been on the coast and visited a number of innovative housing projects, one that St Vincent de Paul is running and others that the Gold Coast Housing Co. has been involved in.

The Bligh government will not give up the fight for the workers of Queensland or those people who need help in finding a home. That is why the Queensland government, in partnership with the Australian government, will invest \$1.201 billion into around 4,500 new social housing dwellings over the next three years. The new dwellings will become part of Queensland's One Social Housing System, providing homes to those people who need our support to find a home. Not only are we building homes; we are delivering jobs. My department tells me that the massive program will provide an estimated 4,500 jobs over the next 12 months. This means that we will create or sustain much-needed jobs and business opportunities in the building industry for small companies, large developers, contractors and building suppliers. By June 2010, approximately 500 new dwellings will be completed across the state.

The member for Broadwater will be happy to know that phase 1 of the program is already delivering homes and jobs on the Gold Coast, with more to come. As I said, I visited some of these projects such as the St Vinnies project at Arundel—and if you have not seen it yet, get out there; it is a great project of wrap-around support services as well as the housing being provided in that precinct—and social housing units at Southport. The program is an important part of keeping our commitment to reducing homelessness and it also ensures our continued commitment to creating jobs right across the state.

Mr KILBURN: I refer to the Service Delivery Statements, in particular page 3-7 in relation to the homelessness national partnership agreement, and I can only agree with you, Minister, that it is a long overdue investment by the federal government in providing for what we all know is an important issue. I ask the minister to advise what steps the state government is taking to help meet the federal government's target to halve overall homelessness by 2020?

Ms STRUTHERS: I have a feeling that I am going to be a bit of a cracked record on some of this stuff, because it is so important and there is a good story to tell. As I have said, the Bligh government is tackling homelessness head-on. We are rising to the challenge of delivering homeless Queenslanders a better deal. From the 2006 census, we know that there is a very disturbing rate of homelessness across this state—around 26,000 people in total. That disturbs me as a minister; it disturbs me as someone who has worked with people in this situation directly in the past.

Homelessness has dropped in Queensland as a percentage of the population despite its significant numbers. One of the encouraging signs is that youth homelessness has dropped by 30 per cent in recent years. A recent national report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare clearly acknowledged that our Youth Support Coordinator program in Queensland was one of the contributing factors to this decrease in youth homelessness. But it is far too high.

We aim to halve homelessness in Queensland by 2020, and we are working with the Rudd government to achieve this. We know it will be hard work, but we are rolling up our sleeves and getting on with the job of delivering homeless people a better deal. As I have said, this means building around 4,500 new social housing dwellings as part of the massive \$1.2 billion state-wide construction program. We are delivering this infrastructure program in partnership with the Rudd government and in the new spirit of cooperative federalism. This building program marks a win for the homeless Queenslanders and the end of the blame game between the state and the Commonwealth. It puts to shame the 11 years of the former federal government and its inaction on homelessness.

One of the things that I have been really impressed by was the fact that when Kevin Rudd got elected one of his first significant policy papers was on homelessness. That to me signalled this is a person who really cares about the social issues as well as the economic issues affecting this nation. It is about more than just providing bricks and mortar; it is providing homeless people with the support services that they need, and that is where the \$200 million in funding comes into play.

Today I am pleased to announce that we are at the forefront of this problem. I referred earlier to the Kids Under Cover project. I want to announce during this session that we will invest more than \$950,000 in a unique project run by Kids Under Cover. It will receive six relocatable dwellings previously owned by the Department of Communities along with \$605,000 to assist with the purchase of 10 bungalows, which I referred to earlier. These bungalows will be placed in the backyard of the family or a carer's home where overcrowding exists. It will help families to stay connected. They will be available initially to young people in Townsville, Rockhampton, Toowoomba and Inala in the initial stages of the rollout and they will be expanded to other parts of the state as needed and available. As I said, we are trying to be creative and innovative. I really commend both the non-government organisations and our departmental officers, who are working well together to make the lives of homeless people a lot more secure.

CHAIR: Minister, I am very fortunate to represent a large number of social housing tenants. I refer to the Service Delivery Statement at page 3-7 and the allocations for maintaining and repairing social housing. I ask you to detail to the committee what funding and what work will be undertaken in my electorate to improve social housing.

Ms STRUTHERS: Again, member for Waterford, you are one of the pesky MPs who keeps ringing my office and contacting me about social housing issues in your area, and I know you are a strong advocate for social housing. One of our goals is to ensure our social housing assets are safe, secure and in good repair. The department maintains comprehensive property condition data that allows for planned, regular maintenance and upgrade works to be performed. This year it is expected that over \$312 million will be expended on maintenance and upgrades of social housing stock. In the electorate of Waterford the department owns 1,475 properties—and I bet you know where they all are; they would be the best ones in the street—with an average age of 25 years. You will agree that these properties are well maintained and a total of \$7.6 million is budgeted for expenditure in your electorate to ensure these properties remain in good repair and are properties that tenants can be very proud to live in.

These funds include \$1 million in general upgrades including kitchen, bathroom and laundry upgrades and \$1.5 million for the renewals program. The renewal program funds general upgrades of whole properties to transform areas into attractive neighbourhoods, offering a better quality of life for current and future residents, and it encourages tenants to take a more active role in their local street and community. There is also \$2.9 million for maintenance including painting, repairing leaks, fixing blocked sewers and ensuring properties are of an appropriate standard for new tenants. There is also \$2.2 million from the nation-building and jobs program that includes built-in wardrobes, electric hot-water system replacements, roof insulation, floor coverings and general upgrades such as driveways.

I recently took the federal housing minister, Tanya Plibersek, to a property. It was not in your electorate; it was in Redcliffe in the electorate of the member for Redcliffe. The federal minister was very impressed, too, with the nature of the work that had been done. Obviously the tenants were very happy with their new built-in cupboards, the paintwork, the driveway and other things. That is what people need. They want to feel safe. They had their security screens installed by the department as well and they felt very proud of their house. That is what we want—people in the wider community to be very proud of our social housing stock.

Ms van LITSENBURG: I refer to the Service Delivery Statement at page 3-16 and the RentConnect pilot in Caboolture and Central Queensland, and I ask: how is the trial helping people to enter the private rental market and are there any early indications that it should be rolled out into other areas?

Ms STRUTHERS: I thank the member for the question and want to acknowledge that the department is not just about the provision of social housing; we have a range of housing products including support for people in the private market. RentConnect is proving to be very successful. Members of this committee would be aware that the pilot RentConnect Advisory Service started late last year. Its purpose is to help people access the private rental market. As the private rental market makes up about 20 per cent of residential housing in Queensland, it makes sense for us to help people find housing in this market. Pilot services were started in Caboolture and Rockhampton with a target of helping 300 people in its first year.

I met the staff involved in RentConnect in Rockhampton a few months ago. I am pleased to announce that in just 10 months we have already helped more than 300 people meet the challenge of accessing the private rental market through one-on-one interview assistance, support in linking up with the real estate agents and other support. It is generally people who have been discriminated against in the private market—single parents with a number of kids, that kind of situation. It is about helping them negotiate the private rental market. Some of them do not have references from previous tenancies. We help negotiate with the real estate agents and get them a leg-up into accommodation. It is often a problem for large families. We certainly have been providing what assistance we can. There are simple and effective tips that we give people, and we certainly play a role in advocating with them.

People are also linked to community services while they might be waiting for housing. They may need low-cost loans to meet set-up costs such as rent in advance and moving costs and we certainly try to help them with that. Importantly, the message is that you are not left on your own. We can offer an innovative range of products through the department, and RentConnect is one of those innovative programs.

While 300 people have received one-on-one assistance, I am pleased that many people have also taken the opportunity to download RentConnect fact sheets from the Housing website, with more than 16,000 downloads recorded from July last year. There is a big demand for private rental housing; there is a lot of competition out there and it can be very difficult for people.

CHAIR: I call the member for Chatsworth.

Mr KILBURN: I refer to page 3-7 of the SDS in relation to social housing and ask the minister what initiatives are in place to help elderly people access social housing and give vulnerable Queenslanders the help that they need to make life at home easier.

Ms STRUTHERS: I thank the member for the question. Our government is committed to making life easier for our seniors and those in the community who are most vulnerable. Again I say that that is why we are building 4,500 new social housing dwellings, so that these people can be provided with homes. The department has 10,470 dwellings identified as seniors units, specifically for people who are 55 years and older. I mentioned earlier that 44 per cent of Queensland social housing homes are occupied by seniors as the primary occupant and 42 per cent are occupied by people who have a disability.

In addition to our massive building program delivering new homes, the Queensland government is also embarking on a massive repair and maintenance program with social housing. We will spend an extra \$80 million repairing and maintaining our social housing across the state, split between 2008-09 and 2009-10, including the upgrade and maintenance program, the Home and Community Care Modifications Program. These modifications will help frail aged or people with a disability to remain in their homes longer. That is certainly the goal we are trying to achieve.

Housing and Homelessness Services in my portfolio area administers and manages the home modification component of the broader program. In 2008-09 we completed 960 home modifications at a cost of approximately \$7.3 million. In the next 12 months we will complete home modifications to approximately 900 more homes. It does not simply modify homes; it provides essential support services for elderly Queenslanders. In January 2009 we began a remote occupational therapist assessment pilot. The pilot will see the therapist visiting elderly Queenslanders in their own homes to come up with ways to support and enhance their independent living. We are offering this service to frail aged people and people with moderate to severe disabilities and people who require support to modify their home. It will help these people stay in their homes longer rather than prematurely enter into a nursing home or hostel.

On another front, 31 home modifications were managed and completed in 2008-09 under the Spinal Cord Injuries Response Initiative. We have also delivered \$14.6 million in grants in 2008-09 to Home Assist Secure. Home Assist Secure provides a range of highly valued services that make a positive contribution to the health, safety and security of eligible seniors. Around 58,500 households have benefited under this innovative scheme. Our government knows it needs to help elderly people and vulnerable Queenslanders, particularly in these tough times, and we are investing in very practical programs like these that make their lives easier and give them a better quality of life.

CHAIR: I refer to the Service Delivery Statement of your department at page 3-7 and the housing stock in Indigenous communities, and I ask the minister to outline the government's plan to upgrade housing in Indigenous communities in Queensland.

Ms STRUTHERS: I thank the member for the question. Our record capital works program includes more than \$196 million to be spent on housing for Indigenous people in remote communities, and certainly this is part of a national partnership with the federal government. We are planning and delivering major improvements to housing in Indigenous communities and we are rolling out a large number of new dwellings. With these funds we will also be able to carry out repairs and maintenance to lift the standard of housing in many Indigenous communities.

I have travelled to a number of communities and at times been concerned about damage to housing. I do not want to be gimmicky here, but I just want to highlight a bit of a before-and-after scenario. This photo shows a house at Woorabinda prior to its upgrade. The other photo shows the kind of work and the quality of our work that is done on hundreds—in fact thousands—of properties around the state. Better housing for Indigenous families will go a long way to closing the gap on inequities in Indigenous health and their economic status. We will build more than 1,100 new dwellings and make repairs to and upgrade more than 1,200 homes.

As I said earlier, this is unprecedented investment in housing, unprecedented investment in Indigenous communities and all so important in closing the gap on those inequities. We are working side by side with Indigenous councils to roll out this massive capital works program, and it could not have

come at a better time for Indigenous Queenslanders. It is also a win for people in the building and supply industries. It is also helping to meet an election commitment to employ more apprentices and trainees on building sites in Queensland. Builders and developers of social housing projects have to demonstrate that Indigenous workers make up 20 per cent of the total workforce and that apprentices make up 10 per cent of the total workforce on the job. It is about delivering jobs, delivering housing and delivering a better deal for our Indigenous people in remote areas. The first cabs off the rank are in communities of greatest need: Doomadgee, Hope Vale, Aurukun and Mornington Island.

With these funds we will also be providing assistance for up to 70 households that have chosen to relocate to urban and regional areas to gain better access to housing, health, education and employment opportunities. It is about planning and delivering for the future. It is about tackling overcrowding and giving Indigenous Queenslanders better housing to meet their needs.

Ms van LITSENBURG: I refer to Service Delivery Statement page 3-3, the budget highlights, and the funds set aside to support the community services sector to continue to deliver vital services to our most needy, and I ask: will organisations like those that help homeless people in my electorate of Redcliffe receive funds?

Ms STRUTHERS: I thank the member for the question and her support of those people living in the showgrounds at Redcliffe. I commend you for working with my department and the community organisations to make sure these people were housed appropriately. They now have alternative safe accommodation. It was a combined effort from my department, the wonderful services of Micah, the local neighbourhood centre and Moreton Bay Regional Council. The state government embarked on a whole-of-government response to find alternative accommodation for them. Housing staff stepped in, visited the showgrounds daily, interviewed people, assessed their needs and helped them lodge applications for housing. Regular meetings were held with a range of government, council and community agencies.

I commend Micah and the Redcliffe Neighbourhood Centre for their efforts. They pitched in and worked with us in a true partnership and really followed those people through and will continue to do so. A reference group of all stakeholders was established, and they were certainly in daily contact with the people living in the showgrounds. My department has arranged funding for Micah to provide an ongoing support role. Referrals were also made to the Homeless Health Outreach Team for drug and alcohol issues and the neighbourhood centre also provided ongoing support.

Every cloud has a silver lining, and in this case safe and secure accommodation was found for all 12 residents. We will continue to fund vital organisations such as Micah because they provide very practical, very welcome, street-to-home programs that help homeless people get into more permanent housing arrangements. It was certainly a job well done by all of those agencies.

CHAIR: I call the member for Burdekin.

Mrs MENKENS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Will the minister state the number of complaints that have been received in the last year from neighbours of social housing tenants?

Ms STRUTHERS: I will just wait for some advice as to whether we have that calculation, but I might just make a comment in relation to complaints because as minister I do receive letters from members of both sides of the House in relation to neighbourhood complaints. One of the things I really want to impress on people here in the committee, and I do it every day in this job, is that tenants in our public housing system, in our social housing, are some of the best tenants you would ever want to have in your housing. I am not assuming this is part of your question, but I am going to respond to this issue because it bothers me greatly that there is this nonsense around the place that social housing tenants are somehow second-class citizens or problematic tenants.

I recently launched the WaterWise Garden Awards for our social housing tenants and met some of the proudest people you could ever meet—people who really take pride in their housing, have wonderful gardens and really want to promote the fact to the community that they value their property and welcome the opportunity government has provided by providing an affordable roof over their head.

As I have visited various parts of the state, particularly with this massive building program we are rolling out, I have met a number of people at various sites who have said, 'Are you putting public housing tenants in there? Are you putting Aboriginals in there?' It concerns me greatly that people have this stigma. It is unfair. On any given street around the state there will be private properties and there may be public housing or social housing. I would want to put money on the fact that it is probably the private rental tenants that are more problematic than our social housing tenants.

The other benefit we have in the public system is that government run housing and our community housing providers in the non-government sector have some of the best tenancy management practices you would ever find. We are onto people quickly. If they are problematic tenants we are onto them quickly. We have to balance neighbourhood harmony with the need to actually house people who have complex needs or low incomes or other issues. That is why they are in our social housing. So we have to balance that. But essentially I am very confident in the practices we have across the state in relation to managing any neighbourhood complaints.

Staff in our area offices liaise with neighbours on a daily basis to resolve issues where they can before they become, I guess, a more public complaint. We do not always reflect this in our numbers. I do not know that we actually have captured or I can provide you with any confidence the full number of complaints we received around the state.

Mrs MENKENS: Could we put that on notice?

Ms STRUTHERS: I will try to get you some figures before we finish the committee hearing today. We can give you numbers of evictions and that gives you some indication, but some of these neighbourhood complaints end up with an MP. They will not always end up with the department, so it will not capture everything. But certainly I can provide you with the number of evictions. The number of evictions in 2008-09 was 133 and the percentage of tenancies resulting in evictions was 0.25 per cent of our tenancies.

Mrs MENKENS: I am not drawing a parallel between private and department tenancies at all. There are a lot of tenants who can be described as antisocial. I am certainly aware that there are a high rate of complaints in both areas of department and private tenancies. However, what are the processes that your department uses to deal with complaints and with antisocial tenants? I accept that they are only a small percentage and that there are some marvellous tenants, but what are the processes in place and are these processes strong enough?

Ms STRUTHERS: The question is a reasonable one because we certainly want the public to be confident that we manage our tenancies well. I certainly look for this as I travel the state and meet with staff in regional housing offices. I ask them questions about their tenancy management and the sorts of complaints they may get about their tenants. I guess there is a very clear framework for us and that is the Residential Tenancies Act. We do not have another system. We operate, like the private rental market, under the Residential Tenancies Act. That has very clear provisions in relation to notices to tenants and guidelines around visiting tenants.

Mrs MENKENS: It gets a bit hard though sometimes, doesn't it?

Ms STRUTHERS: I am not naive about this. There are people who cause a lot of neighbourhood disputes. My point earlier was that they are in the private rental market and they are in our system. In our system we do have people with complex family needs, and at times with dysfunctional families there are situations going on within the walls of that house. There is no doubt about it.

I have just been advised of a particular case study in relation to management of a tenancy that will give you some idea of the approach that is taken. This is not her name but I will use the name 'Donna', who is a 39-year-old Indigenous woman separated from her husband and finding the separation difficult. She has three children who reside with her in a public housing tenancy. She was referred to the Sustainable Tenancies Opportunities Project, the STOP project—and I think non-government agencies fund that project. She was referred by a member of the Indigenous community as she was experiencing difficulty paying rent and managing her debts. She had difficulty working due to unstable mental health, high levels of anxiety and depression, and she was already well linked to mental health services in the area. She had considerable financial difficulties owing to prior loans that she was no longer able to service. At the time of the referral she had applied for Centrelink payments but was still waiting to receive a payment. She had further issues with home security, disruptive neighbours, a desire to move closer to her family and her children's school. So she had a number of issues going on. But the project worker was able to help her find a new house and this was at the referral of the department.

What I am saying is that, where we have people who are not paying their rent or when there are problems with neighbours complaining about them—I imagine she has kids that the neighbours have complained about, as that sort of thing happens commonly when there is a lot of stress going on in a household—assistance is provided. That service helped her link up with a mental health team. She was also assisted with rent payments and vouchers for food and petrol. A number of other services were provided to her so that she could sustain the tenancy. That case may not be the tenant from hell situation that you may be referring to, but she was certainly a woman with complex needs and kids who were probably getting into a bit of strife, but we have opportunities to support people.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, in your opening statement you referred to Mackay as a hot spot for homelessness. So what is the justification for the closure of the Mackay office and the services it provides to the local community, especially for the homeless and those at risk of homelessness?

Ms STRUTHERS: I am pleased that you have asked me the question because when there is a bit of mischief out in the community and in the media it is always important to clarify that. I am very keen to clarify for the benefit of the member and the committee that Mackay is not going to experience any service closure. Mackay is a major regional centre. We have moved from 10 regions to seven regions as part of the changes within the department. But Mackay will be strong and will have the regional executive staff and others that it currently has. So it has been a bit of mischief, I believe, in the Mackay media to say that Mackay is going to lose services. Again, I do not want to be too gimmicky, but why not?

Mrs MENKENS: But it is going to be controlled from Townsville.

Ms STRUTHERS: This is the new regional chart. I do not know if you can see that properly, but basically the dots represent our services. You can see the concentration around Mackay and Townsville. We have in fact got three major centres of service delivery across that northern region and that will remain. They will be strong. They will be serviced well. They will have senior executive staff in those areas.

I am not sure where some of this mischief is coming from. But I really want to assure you and assure the public in the Mackay and Mackay-Whitsunday area that we are not cutting back on any services and no-one will lose their job. Everyone will have a job at level but they will be new jobs. This is a new structure. We are wanting to provide better integrated and coordinated services to our clients across the state. People will have to think differently. They will have to break down those silos. I know you would appreciate that. We have all had experiences of where those silos have not worked to the benefit of people in our electorates, our constituents. This new structure will really focus on client service delivery and better integrate the agencies. I would be confident in saying that the Mackay region will experience better service delivery. There is certainly no cut in services. In fact, in the budget there are new initiatives for Mackay under our homelessness strategy and other strategies.

Ms CROFT: Minister, I refer to the Service Delivery Statement at page 3-8 and the Office for Women. Could you please outline what steps the state government is taking to encourage more women, and in particular Indigenous women, to take their rightful place on government boards?

Ms STRUTHERS: I thank the member for the question. As a member of parliament I have been actively involved in advocating for an increased representation of women in parliament. During the recent state election campaign, I supported an Indigenous woman campaigning to enter parliament. I was involved on a parliamentary committee. The *Hands on parliament* report was a report we produced a number of years ago with strategies to see more Indigenous people elected to the parliament.

The Bligh government is committed to actively pursuing an increase in the participation of Queensland women in all aspects of life, including on our government boards. I am happy to say that we have begun narrowing the gender disparity on boards. Last year, as I mentioned earlier, our Women on Boards Strategy saw 56.1 per cent of the 221 new appointments go to women. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, last month I welcomed 40 young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to parliament for the first ever Queensland Indigenous Youth Parliament. I think more than half of those were young women as well.

The Bligh government is dedicated to increasing the number of Indigenous people in leadership roles, and an increase in Indigenous leadership across the state in all walks of life will help to close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage. Nothing succeeds like leading by example. One way this government is working to increase Indigenous leadership is through community leadership seminars delivered through the Office for Women. Through these seminars Indigenous women and girls share stories of leadership. They encourage the next generation to develop their skills and increase confidence through networking and mentoring. Through this government's policy and program work, we promote and encourage the rights of all Queensland women from all backgrounds. More and more women are taking up leadership roles in their communities. In every community across Queensland there are countless women achieving progress for Queensland women and girls in their day-to-day lives—in their communities, in their workplaces and in their homes. In future I hope to see more women, and particularly Indigenous women, on boards and in this parliament.

Mr KILBURN: Minister, I refer to Service Delivery Statement book 3 page 67 and in particular the department's sale of social housing stock. Could the minister advise on the outcomes of any sale?

Ms STRUTHERS: I thank the member for the question. In 2008-09 we sold 111 dwellings. This revenue, which was more than \$35 million, went directly back into social housing. Sales to tenants accounted for 62 per cent of the sales last year, and that is a significant number of people who now can proudly say they are homeowners. Let me assure you that the Bligh government is committed to creating more opportunities for Queenslanders to access affordable housing.

The decision to sell properties is not taken lightly, and in fact my department has very good reasons for disposing of properties. We only sell properties when it is determined that it is in the best interests of our clients. For example, since 2004-05 we have helped 314 people purchase the social housing property they were renting through the Sales to Tenants program. A large number of people now own their own home. Without this support, they may not have had that opportunity.

We also sell properties that are many years old and have been part of our stock for a long time. These properties may be too expensive to upgrade because of their age or there may not be the need for social housing in that particular area. We have also committed to reducing the concentration of social housing in some areas and creating mixed communities that promote social and economic opportunities. I am sure all members of the committee would agree that that is such an important goal. We have seen the legacy of communities with high concentrations of social housing. The member for Waterford has a number in the Logan area and across through to the Ipswich corridor. In other parts of the state there have been suburbs in regional centres where there has been a higher concentration than we would like.

When young families and kids are all living in an area where many of them are not so resourceful and there are a lot of issues and complexities going on in their lives, they get limited life opportunities. It is so important that our social housing tenants are near services, near schools, near hospitals and have good life opportunities. Some of these past policies were certainly detrimental. In Inala there has certainly been a very clear program of reducing the density through appropriate disposal and redevelopment.

We have undertaken developments in many areas. We are also using land occupied by two or three adjoining detached houses. Where we can remove the dwellings and turn that block into medium-density accommodation enabling more families to be housed, we are certainly doing that as well. Rural and remote residents are also benefiting from redevelopments. We recycle dwellings wherever possible. For example, we moved a surplus department of health house from Cairns to Georgetown. These are all smart ways of operating. We are rolling out, as I said, 4,500 new homes across the state, creating thousands of jobs.

CHAIR: We will now move on to the consideration of the appropriations for community services and the Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian. While that changeover is taking place, Minister, did you want to table copies of the photographs or the diagrams used in answer to your questions?

Ms STRUTHERS: You would like them tabled?

CHAIR: Do you want to table them?

Ms STRUTHERS: No. I am just making a point. I think one picture is worth a thousand words.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms STRUTHERS: Can I take the opportunity to clarify a couple of points I made. I just want to correct the record. I referred to the Residential Tenancies Act. It is actually the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008 that came into effect on 1 July. This act replaced the Residential Tenancies Act.

The second point I want to clarify for the benefit of the member for Burdekin is that we have recorded 41 per cent of complaints received through the appeals and review process relating to neighbourhood concerns. That is another indicator that complaints through our appeals process have related to neighbourhood concerns. That was one of your earlier questions.

CHAIR: Thank you. I call the member for Burdekin.

Mrs MENKENS: With seniors comprising 40 per cent of constituents, can the minister explain why spending on seniors participation, as on page 3-24 of the SDS, comprises just three per cent of the portfolio spending?

Ms STRUTHERS: Earlier I mentioned that seniors are a very significant part of the work we do in the Communities portfolio. In housing alone, in 44 per cent of our tenancies the primary tenant is someone 55 years and older. If you tallied up the value of that in capital and support—and some of the support that is provided is invaluable and hard to quantify—it is a significant part of our activity across the portfolio.

In relation to specific programs that you have put a dollar value on, I might just run through some of those for you. In relation to achievements last year, there were 55 services funded to support seniors. They included specialised Seniors Legal and Support Services in Brisbane, Cairns, Hervey Bay, Townsville and Toowoomba, and they have been re-funded for this year as well. The Older People's Action Program assisted 20 organisations across the state. There is the 60 and Better Program, and many members would have direct experience of how effective that program is in their local areas. The seniors inquiry line is a very important part of our response system for seniors. There is the Elder Abuse Prevention Unit, including a state-wide telephone helpline.

One of the newer initiatives is based on community concern about the pressure grandparents are feeling in relation to caring for their grandchildren. We have certainly been working in that area and we have the Time for Grandparents Program. We also have older men's groups in Hervey Bay and Toowoomba particularly trying to address the mental health needs of older men.

There are a number of other initiatives there. I guess the picture I am painting is that, in specific areas of support, in trying to provide inclusion, activity and support for older people, there are a number of initiatives. In terms of their legal support, we have new seniors legal services. Overall I would not want you to overlook the fact that such a significant part of our investment in social housing is to the benefit of seniors.

Mrs MENKENS: I would still ask though, Minister, why you have failed to give it a higher profile, as in an Office for Seniors, and why the seniors section has 16 fewer staff than last year?

Ms STRUTHERS: I will need to check on the accuracy of the staffing levels because that is not what I understand the case to be. Let me say again that seniors are a very important part of the work of the portfolio that I am involved in and receive significant support. I have also had recent meetings with

members of the seniors round table. At the Gold Coast community cabinet just a couple of weeks ago, the Premier and I met with a number of seniors representatives, including Val French and others, who raised similar concerns to you. The Premier was able to put to rest some of their specific concerns and misunderstandings. I do not have the specific title of minister for seniors, and that was one of their concerns, but I have assured them that I will work with them over the coming months to develop a whole-of-government seniors strategy. They have certainly been calling for that and they are going to get that, and they were very happy with that. That is indicative of a group of people who represent a number of seniors groups around the state, and that view is one that they welcomed and want to actively participate in.

In relation to their issues around transport, health and safety for seniors—all of those areas of government—my department will take a lead role through the Office for Seniors in coordinating that response and developing some kind of an action plan. I have certainly said that I want action; I do not want another plan or whatever else that might sit on a shelf. I have given them assurances that we will be very action focused in how we identify areas where we can improve government responses to the needs of seniors across the whole government.

They were particularly interested, as I said, in transport issues, and I think we can be pretty innovative there too. We talked about some of the community transport options in regional centres around the state where it may not be economically viable to have a major transport system but where there are existing HACC funded buses or RSL courtesy buses; there are these other systems in place that have a lot of downtime. We have been working on a number of creative ways through community transport options, and there are some local projects that are doing very well. So we want to put the whole lot under the microscope and come up with an action plan across government.

I have just been advised specifically in relation to your claim that there was a decline of 15 full-time positions that that was due to the transfer of staff working for Smart Service Queensland, which is now part of the Department of Public Works following the machinery-of-government changes. They would have been workers involved in call centre activity, phone line activity, concessions. They are still doing that work focused on seniors but they are part of the group involved in Smart Service Queensland.

Mrs MENKENS: I refer to government question on notice No. 8. Minister, what is the cost of machinery-of-government changes? How much of this can possibly be recouped by a 40 per cent saving in a *White Pages* listing?

Ms STRUTHERS: You might have to repeat that question in relation to the *White Pages*.

Mrs MENKENS: It relates to government question on notice No. 8 and the machinery-of-government changes where you talk about your savings. How much can possibly be recouped by a 40 per cent saving in a *White Pages* listing? Why is it worth documenting?

Ms STRUTHERS: I am being advised that we have collapsed all of those details into one advertisement, so that has certainly been a significant change for us. We no longer list all of the separate departments with all of their separate staff, agency phone numbers and whatever. So that has certainly been a saving.

In relation to the machinery-of-government changes specifically, I am very confident that we are going to see, firstly, significant improvements in client service delivery through the new arrangements. Already people are working better together across the housing and homeless areas, the community services area, the child safety area. We have already achieved a \$10 million efficiency saving in relation to corporate services and other areas of our activities. I guess the message from us as a department is that the machinery-of-government changes are being made in a cost-neutral environment, but where we can find savings we are certainly trying to achieve that through integrating and better coordinating the work of our agencies, particularly in the corporate area of activities and our communications areas.

Mrs MENKENS: With reference to page 3-12 of the SDS, can you state how many redress applications are still outstanding and unresolved? Are you aware that applicants, while waiting for finalisation of this process, are dying, and are you aware of how many have died during this time?

Ms STRUTHERS: Again, this is a really, really important area of service delivery and concern for our department. You would have people living in your electorate who have been abused as children and young people in institutions run by the church or run by the state. I have certainly met with many of these people and I attended a ceremony at Lotus Place in South Brisbane recently, which is the support service based in Brisbane for many of these people who are seeking redress.

Let me say from the outset that Queensland is the national leader in the provision of redress responses to victims of institutional child abuse and neglect. The redress payments are being organised in two phases. In the first phase, people have received payments, and I will just come to some detail in relation to that. The second phase is still underway. As you can imagine, they are complex issues. People have to document the degree of their abuse, and that is emotionally very troubling. One woman said to me that she took six months off work to do that. She was so emotionally affected that she had to separate herself from other activities in her life and she could not continue working while she actually made the application.

We do not make these application processes difficult. We are trying to be very empathetic to people about this, but they need to provide documentation—which institution it was, what period it was, the names of particular people—so we can verify the accuracy of the situation and the gravity of some of the abuse. So it has been a very, very complex and difficult process.

Applicants have expressed concern about the time frame for level 2 payments, and you rightly acknowledged that. I do not have information on specific deaths and I do not know whether we have captured that. I have certainly heard from people who have concerns about the timing. One of the leaders of the support group has developed an innovative invention to clean sports facilities. He wants to get on with his business, and he needs some capital to get ahead with that. He would be very confident of getting a redress payment under level 2, but we cannot fast-track anything for any one individual. It is expected that level 2 letters of advice regarding their payments will be sent to applicants from August. So we will be moving on that as quickly as we can over the coming weeks.

I want to thank the members of the independent panel who have had the gruelling task of assessing these applications. I do not think any of those people are here today, but let me put my thanks on the public record. In my meeting with them recently, I was very moved by the stories they told me and very impressed by the way they were systematically and very empathetically going through these applications.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, with reference to page 2-23 of the SDS and the number of young people in detention, I refer to the recent report by the commissioner for children that found on average young people in detention had been there up to five times previously. After 11 years of your government's revolving-door juvenile justice system, why does your budget not report on successful enrolment and completion of rehabilitation programs in detention?

CHAIR: Just before you answer, Minister, can I ask the member for Burdekin to make sure her future questions contain no argumentative elements.

Ms STRUTHERS: I want to respond, firstly, by saying that the evidence nationally and internationally suggests that detention is not a very effective deterrent. It does not stop people from reoffending. Usually it is the most serious repeat offenders who end up receiving sentences of detention, so you are actually capturing probably some of the young people who may end up in the adult system as well through youth detention. It has not proven to be a very effective response. Of course the public needs to feel safe and anyone who is going to put anyone else at harm needs to be in secure detention. I have no doubt about that.

I just want to, I guess, in some ways challenge this notion that detention is the be-all and end-all. It is not. We need to have an innovative range of responses to youth crime, and that is certainly what our government is doing. We are certainly working on a range of early intervention prevention programs to try to stop young people from ending up in detention, from actually ending up committing crimes. That is the focus we have.

I want to refer to the quote from the report that you are talking about. That report states—

Research shows that the large majority of young people who appear in court are involved in non-violent property and public nuisance offences and cease their offending after one or two court appearances, without the use of harsh penalties.

So I guess what we have in our system is that the vast majority of young offenders are actually not reoffending, but those who become serial offenders—because of life situations, behaviour, whatever—are the ones who end up in detention and they are going to be the hardest kids to turn around. I am not sure if you have visited the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre in Townsville.

Mrs MENKENS: I have in the past, yes.

Ms STRUTHERS: It is not a pleasant place. I looked in some of those rooms; it is all concrete, steel, a few personal belongings, security, big walls around it. What is good in that place is the commitment of the staff to educational programs, numeracy and literacy programs, jobs programs, sport, fitness and health. A number of these young people, as you would imagine, have complex substance abuse problems, chomping, those kinds of things. That has led them to some of their behaviour. I did not actually talk to many of the young people, other than some who were in a workshop there, but the staff told me that one young fellow, whom I think was actually from your electorate, had a complex range of intellectual disability issues going on in his life as well as longstanding homelessness. That is what we are dealing with. Unless you tackle that problem, you are not going to tackle their reoffending.

Mrs MENKENS: So do you have figures on how many are enrolled in rehabilitation programs and how many young people actually successfully complete those rehabilitation programs, because that is the important part? The most important part of the detention is holding them in detention with a strong rehabilitation program.

Ms STRUTHERS: Are you referring specifically to rehabilitation in detention or our system of support and intervention—for instance, our youth justice centres, our youth conferencing? Are you referring specifically to rehabilitation while they are in detention?

Mrs MENKENS: Initially, yes.

Ms STRUTHERS: Because everyone is enrolled. That is part of the deal: when they are in there, they cannot just lie in bed. They have to be out and about, active, and that is what I saw when I was at Cleveland recently.

Mrs MENKENS: But while they are on remand they are not actually enrolled in rehabilitation programs.

Ms STRUTHERS: Actually that is a bit of a furphy and I am happy to clarify that. They may not have the comprehensive range of programs because it may be that they go to court the next week and they do not get to complete their certificate in woodworking, or whatever it might be. But they do have access to programs and there is a very committed range of teaching staff there—

Mrs MENKENS: But woodwork is not rehabilitation.

Ms STRUTHERS: I guess it is about job skills. The important thing is the exit support, the transitioning support when young people come out of detention. There is no offending generally while they are in there. The reports of abuse against staff, for instance, or against other residents in detention are declining significantly. I get those reports weekly. There are not many incidents of actual problematic behaviour in detention. It is when young people come out and they have to face the reality of trying to survive again. Imagine young kids from Mornington Island or somewhere who have been sent to Townsville. When they come out, some of them try to settle in Mount Isa or they go back to the community. It is very difficult, unless you actually have the rehabilitation and support as part of the transition out of care.

In response to your question, which I hope I have captured in what I have just said, the rehabilitation is important both within the system and particularly outside. Our focus really as a community and as a department has to be putting the support at the front end of the system with kids who at a young age are on a problematic path, and we need to tackle that early and prevent them from ongoing offending and prevent them from ending up in detention.

Mrs MENKENS: On rehabilitation, can you give me the figures on the rehabilitation back into their communities, back into their home life, back into their—

Ms STRUTHERS: I am not sure that it is a realistic ask. What I can give you is the number of young people in detention each year. What I can tell you is that all of them have gone through some form of rehabilitation or educational program. The reality about young people on remand is that they have not been found guilty of an offence. So we have to have a presumption of innocence around them, but that does not mean that they cannot participate in programs while they are in there.

There will be conditional bail support programs and other opportunities where they will be on supervision or community service orders. I am not trying to avoid your question. I am just not sure that it is a realistic ask because, by definition, rehabilitation is very broad and includes our jobskills programs, which is an important part of that. Both within detention and outside of detention there is a range of initiatives. We spend a lot of money on educational and job skills programs, and literacy and numeracy programs. As you may be aware, some of these young people have grade 6 or 7 levels of educational attainment. If they are going to survive as adults and not reoffend, they are going to have to lift that educational attainment. That is where a lot of our effort is going.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, with reference to page 3-78 of the SDS, can you explain why following relocation of the offices of the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian to its new premises this year the offices were open for business with no signage and no security in place, bearing in mind that this is an office that would genuinely require security?

Ms STRUTHERS: I am not aware of that. As it is an independent authority, I might ask Elizabeth Fraser to respond. Would you like the question repeated, Elizabeth?

Ms Fraser: Yes.

CHAIR: Member for Burdekin, do you mind repeating the question?

Mrs MENKENS: Following your relocation, there was no security or signage in place when you first moved into that office, bearing in mind that it is an office that I think does require security.

Ms Fraser: Following the relocation, the security that was established was on level 17, which is the joint reception area that we share with the Ombudsman, the Anti-Discrimination Commission and the Health Quality and Complaints Commission. There was contracted security there when we moved in. The signage did take a little bit of time to sort out because initially when it arrived it was not accurate, but we did what we could to try to make sure that our stakeholders knew that we had moved and so did the others. But the signage is now up so hopefully that is rectified.

Ms CROFT: Minister, I refer to page 3-5 of the SDS and the government's funding for youth justice. Could you please explain the Bligh government's approach to tackling youth crime?

Ms STRUTHERS: I have made some comments in relation to this, but I am happy to go through this in more detail. The vast majority of young people do the right thing. That has to be the bottom line in any discussion about youth crime. We need a realistic approach to this. Some of the fear mongering in

the community is irresponsible and it causes undue fear. The vast majority of young people do the right thing and are good, valued citizens in their local areas. Youth crime is down from nine offences per 100 young people to eight offences per 100 people from 2001—a significant drop considering that the population of young people rose by almost 50,000 in the same period. That indicates, I think, that we are on track with police, community services, our youth justice centres and others working well together.

We often hear about the need for—and even the opposition has at times called for—boot camps and a stronger use of detention as the main response. National and international evidence shows that detention should be a policy of last resort for young people as it has limited benefit in curbing reoffending behaviour, and boot camps had a limited benefit as well. Boot camps are not a new idea. They have been tried mainly in the US but also in Canada and in New Zealand. All of the careful and extensive research that has been conducted points in one direction. In New Zealand, for instance, boot camps were abandoned in 2002 because they resulted in a 92 per cent reoffending rate. We are simply producing fitter, faster young offenders through some of these sorts of initiatives, in the sense I am getting from this. The New Zealand evidence showed that the highest reoffending rate was in that boot camp cohort of people.

To protect the community we need early intervention policies that effectively address the causes of youth crime and prevent career criminals from emerging. We need to detain and be tough on serious offenders but tough as well on the causes of crime. That is why this government has a youth justice system that includes prevention, detention, supervision, rehabilitation, diversion, and police and court services to deal with young people who commit or who are alleged to have committed offences. These are tried, proven, effective approaches to supporting and rehabilitating troubled youth—like youth justice conferencing, which is an important mechanism where young offenders meet with victims, families and police and agree on ways to repair the harm their crime has caused. These consistently achieve a 98 per cent satisfaction rate from all participants, particularly the victims. These approaches have proven to be more effective in reducing reoffending. The Bligh government is determined to develop youth justice policies and strategies based on the evidence of what works, rather than some of these failed ideas.

Ms van LITSENBURG: Minister, I refer to page 3-5 of the Service Delivery Statements and the increasing demand for community services. I ask you to outline for us what initiatives the Bligh government has in place to help seniors and pensioners in these tough economic times?

Ms STRUTHERS: I am very pleased to respond to your question. We know that a lot of older Queenslanders are doing it tough, and we certainly want to help them as much as we can. To assist vulnerable seniors at risk of elder abuse and financial exploitation, the Seniors Legal and Support Service will receive \$1.8 million in this financial year. In 2008-09, concessions totalling \$130.143 million were provided to approximately 700,000 eligible pensioners, seniors and veterans throughout Queensland on a range of essential services such as the Pensioner Rate Subsidy Scheme, the South-East Queensland Pensioner Water Subsidy Scheme, the Electricity Rebate Scheme, the Electricity Life Support Concession Scheme and the Reticulated Natural Gas Rebate Scheme. Queensland's Solar Hot Water Program will offer fully installed greenhouse-efficient hot-water systems for \$100 for eligible Queensland pensioners and low-income earners.

The electricity rebates for seniors have increased. We have increased that in this budget by 15.67 per cent. This will certainly be a big boost for pensioners and seniors. The electricity rebate has risen from \$165 per annum to \$190.85, an increase of \$25.85. That is an important increase for many low-income people. The Electricity Life Support Concession Scheme has increased from \$336 per annum to \$388.65, an increase of \$52.65. The Reticulated Natural Gas Rebate Scheme has increased by a couple of dollars, but every dollar counts to many of these people on limited incomes.

The Rail Concessions Scheme, delivered through Queensland Rail, provides discounted travel for pensioners and seniors on Citytrain, suburban and interurban rail services, and Traveltrain's long-distance rail services. Expenditure under this scheme for 2008-09 is \$35.893 million. Currently some 607,000 Queensland seniors hold the Seniors Card and Seniors Business Discount Card which delivers discounts to Queenslanders aged 60 years and over. There are certainly significant benefits in having that card as well. There is an extensive package of initiatives and programs in place to assist and help seniors, and they are very important initiatives to help them in these tough economic times.

CHAIR: Minister, I refer you to the Service Delivery Statement at page 11 and the Logan-Beenleigh Young Persons Project in my electorate of Waterford. I know that recently you were able to meet with me, the member for Woodridge and the service providers. Can you advise the committee of the benefits to local residents from this innovative project?

Ms STRUTHERS: Well, haven't you got a lot of good things going on in your area! That was a great project. I am really pleased that I had the opportunity to attend a meeting of the participants of that program with you last month. The Logan-Beenleigh Young Persons Project is an innovative approach to helping young people with multiple and complex needs through early intervention and prevention. It is the kind of project I was describing earlier that we really need to focus on. Through these kinds of programs we are picking up young people who, if not supported, may end up in systems like our detention systems.

The project targets young people who are pregnant, teenagers, young people at risk of becoming parents too young and/or young people showing signs of mental illness. These young people receive coordinated intensive support for up to two years in order to improve their educational, economic, social and health outcomes. I think you would agree, member for Waterford, one of the things that was impressive about this program was that there is a two-year commitment to these young people. The member for Burdekin earlier talked about a revolving door. That is the legacy of our systems. Many services have worked in isolation. Young people have gone from service to service, from problem to problem, and there has been a revolving door. I certainly acknowledge that. This program seeks to overcome that. It seeks to better integrate service delivery for this group of young people.

The young people targeted through this project will have better life chances by being supported to remain in school and increase their employability, reduce their level of involvement in the criminal justice system, develop skills to obtain and maintain appropriate and sustainable accommodation, develop parenting skills, increase their ability to manage their own mental health needs and their medication, and improve the health, safety and wellbeing of themselves and any children they may have with them.

It is a five-year project. One year has been completed, and 40 young people have been assisted. The number of young people helped is expected to increase by 80 by the end of 2009, with 120 during the third year and 160 in both the fourth and fifth years of service. It is an intensive project. It is a very important project, and I am pleased that you are giving it your full support.

I met a number of young people involved in the project when I attended with you. One of the clients whom I did not meet but I heard her story is a young woman who had suffered trauma and torture in her country of origin. She can understand and speak English but cannot read English. She has a history of chronic depression. One of her children was conceived through a rape. So there are a lot of issues going on in her life. She is one of the young women who is getting ongoing support and a pathway through to a secure and hopefully very good quality life for her and her children. She has been assisted in that project through a number of elements including enrolling her in a young parents high school program.

CHAIR: I refer you to page 5 of the Service Delivery Statement and the provision that relates to the new approach to preventing domestic and family violence. Can you provide details of how this new approach will help the victims of domestic and family violence?

Ms STRUTHERS: Certainly times have changed in relation to responses to domestic violence. There have been significant improvements over the past 10 to 15 years in Queensland and nationally. We know that domestic violence inflicts a horrendous toll on all those who either witness it or are directly subjected to domestic violence. It is a big cost to our community. It is estimated to cost the Australian community \$13.6 billion a year. The cost to the Queensland community is estimated at \$2.7 billion to \$3.2 billion per annum. That is a lot of housing that the department could build.

The financial toll is but one aspect. The emotional toll, the physical abuse and the other aspects of domestic violence are very distressing. I was pleased to launch a new Domestic and Family Violence Strategy in Rockhampton last week: 'For our sons and daughters: a Queensland government strategy to reduce domestic and family violence 2009-2014'. The strategy has been informed and developed by the consultation process and feedback for a more coordinated response to domestic and family violence. We have committed to delivering a clear program of action each year over the five years of that strategy. The outputs encompass a broad spectrum of initiatives and a program of action each year, particularly for our most vulnerable women and children.

In the first year of the plan—and we already have this underway—we will establish a death review panel to oversee a review of current coronial processes and practices. There have been something like 60 deaths related to domestic homicide in the past five years in Queensland. This review panel will have a look at the systemic and other factors underlying those deaths and look for areas where we can improve our practices.

We will test a new integrated approach to prevent domestic and family violence in Rockhampton. I met with the magistrates, the police and the community service providers when I was in Rockhampton. They have a great integrated approach that they are working on there. This initiative will help enhance that.

We will establish safety upgrades on the Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast and Townsville so that victims of domestic violence can actually remain in their own homes. We will develop an Indigenous framework in the four Cape York welfare reform communities of Coen, Aurukun, Mossman Gorge and Hope Vale. As I mentioned earlier, we will be reviewing the Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act.

Work under this strategy will contribute to the Queensland government's Toward Q2 strategy to build a fairer and healthier Queensland. We certainly see that women and children affected by domestic violence—and in some cases men; I acknowledge them—certainly need our support. We certainly have to deal effectively with perpetrators of violence and make sure that we continue to promote the message that this is not to be tolerated.

Mr KILBURN: Minister, I refer to page 3-5 of the Service Delivery Statement in relation to specific initiatives that will assist in meeting the *Toward Q2: Tomorrow's Queensland* targets. I ask the minister to explain the importance of young volunteers and seniors in helping the government to meet this important goal?

Ms STRUTHERS: We are certainly committed as a government to boosting the proportion of volunteers in Queensland by 50 per cent by 2020. That is a pretty ambiguous target. As you know in your own communities, there are people working across sporting, cultural and arts groups as well as in community services and emergency services such as in the SES. There are a lot of people who actively contribute to the community. It is hard to put a price on their contributions, but they are very significant. Volunteers come from all walks of life. They certainly make a great contribution to community life. We have a comprehensive volunteering strategy to improve the lives of all Queenslanders. For seniors it often gives them the benefit of overcoming some of the social isolation they may experience.

Our policy, *Valuing Volunteers*, has three strategic goals. They are to support volunteers and volunteering; to build a stronger base for volunteering; and to strengthen rural and regional volunteering. The policy outlines a range of initiatives and strategies to ensure that we achieve our target. We have a resource kit—*Valuing Volunteers*. We are holding an annual symposium on International Volunteer Day in December. Each year we hold the Queensland Young Volunteer Awards. They recognise the efforts of some of our outstanding young people. As part of this annual event we will hold the Queensland Young Volunteer Awards speaking tour.

We are delivering a \$52 million package over five years to boost equipment and training for Emergency Service volunteers. We are also boosting our commitment to marine rescue volunteers through a new four-year \$10 million beach and marine safety program. We have developed an insurance agreement with WorkCover Queensland to cover volunteers across all divisions of the Department of Community Safety.

Our department will not necessarily be funding these initiatives, but we play a role in coordinating these activities across government. As part of our across-government volunteering strategy, we have developed and implemented a youth engagement strategy that includes a public awareness campaign.

One of the other initiatives that I had the pleasure of being involved with recently was the launch of Golden Gurus. Volunteering Queensland has been active in supporting this initiative. This is an initiative of a fellow from Brisbane. He put this initiative up through the 2020 strategy process. We picked it up in Queensland. It is a program which encourages Queenslanders over 50 with business skills to sign up as volunteers. They have skills and experience that many people could benefit from. It is certainly an important part of community life to encourage volunteering. We certainly will continue to do as much as we can to promote it.

Ms CROFT: Minister, I refer to the Service Delivery Statement at page 3-12 and the \$13.8 million provided to people who have suffered the effects of cyclones Charlotte and Ellie and the severe storms that swept across the south-east. What assistance packages are in place to help stricken Queenslanders in the event of more natural disasters in the summer of 2009-10?

Ms STRUTHERS: Thank you for raising this issue. I was just talking about volunteers. What a wonderful community effort we have seen in relation to the support that has been provided during and following these disasters. We have seen great spirit emerge in local communities. People have been getting some wonderful support.

Our government is committed to ensuring that individuals, families and communities have the information and support they need to recover from these sorts of disasters. Many people struggle in the aftermath of cyclones, floods and bushfires. They certainly need very direct help and support. Many of them lose everything. They often lose very valued personal possessions as well as assets like their houses. We help to provide them with the basics—food, accommodation, financial support—particularly in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. We also provide assistance to help replace essential household items and repair their dwellings to a safe and livable condition.

In the last financial year we have had to contend with five major disasters. They have included the monsoon flooding in the Mackay region, South-East Queensland's storms, the North and North-West Queensland storms, the Sunshine Coast flooding and the South-East Queensland storms. In response to these events, we have established 10 community recovery centres to operate as one-stop shops so disaster victims can access information, support services and financial assistance. The hotline we set up answered the calls of over 22,000 people in the wake of these events. In total, the government has provided \$17 million to assist Queenslanders affected by these terrible natural disasters. It is a crucial safety net.

The Emergent Assistance Grant helps individuals and families in immediate personal hardship with the cost of items such as food, clothing, temporary accommodation or medicines in the first few days after a disaster. The grant provides \$165 per individual to a maximum of \$765 per family for a family of five or more. The Essential Household Contents Grant is another opportunity for support. The

maximum grant is \$1,635 for singles and \$4,910 for couples. We also have the Structural Assistance Grant. In North Queensland \$6.7 million was provided to people who were affected by the floods under the state-Commonwealth Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements.

Three community recovery centres were established in Ingham, Townsville and Mount Isa. Some 454 employees from my department were deployed to assist in North Queensland as part of the government's response. I thank all of those people for their commitment and dedication. Local businesses and professionals did their bit as well. The community support was very positive.

Ms van LITSENBURG: Minister, I refer to the Service Delivery Statement at page 3-5 in relation to domestic family violence. As well as the new pilot being undertaken in Central Queensland, what other initiatives are in place or planned to help victims of domestic and family violence?

Ms STRUTHERS: I am happy to talk further about this issue. As I said earlier, our community and our government do not tolerate domestic and family violence at all. In 2007-08 there were 15,632 domestic violence orders and 12,374 temporary protection orders made in Queensland. In my opinion that is 28,000 too many. I am sure that is the opinion you would hold as well.

When I was in Rockhampton last week the magistrate said that there are probably on average each year about 800 orders made through that court alone. She was disturbed by the number of orders that are breached. That is putting people at risk when those orders are breached. We have invested \$2.7 million in Rockhampton as the test site of an integrated response model to be carried out over the next two years. This collaborative trial, alongside service providers, will develop an integrated specialised court program. I mentioned earlier that all parties will be involved in that. I met 10 or 12 police at the launch who are very interested in working with the court staff, the community members, the Indigenous elders and others. It was a very positive launch.

There is a lot happening. I am particularly pleased that we have the death review panel underway. Marg O'Donnell, a former director-general, is going to chair that review. She is currently a member of the Legal Aid board. We will see some really good outcomes from that. That is an initiative that many service providers have been calling for. We are delivering on our commitments in the domestic violence area. We are going to see some really good outcomes.

CHAIR: The minister's time has expired. I call the member for Burdekin.

Ms STRUTHERS: Before we call on the member for Burdekin, can I clarify and provide some further information to the member.

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms STRUTHERS: The member asked me a question in relation to the redress scheme. She asked how many applicants have died whilst awaiting the processing of their applications. We have certainly been giving priority assessment to people over 70 and people who are of ill health. But sadly there have been applicants who have died during the assessment of their level 1 application. Of the 42 applicants who died, 37 of their families received funeral assistance. The remaining five families did not require funeral assistance.

With level 2 applicants who are currently being finalised, 27 people who received a level 1 payment died whilst awaiting the assessment of their level 2 application. If these deceased applicants are found to be eligible for a level 2 payment, it will be made to their estate.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, in response to a government question you said that boot camps had been abandoned in New Zealand. However, based on new evidence from New Zealand released this year and reported in the *New Zealand Herald*, a program has been operating in New Zealand for the past seven years. It is run by an ex-soldier and has seen a 58 per cent reduction in total offending from graduates and a 71 per cent drop in serious crimes. Given your evidence is clearly outdated and the New Zealand government this year has moved to introduce boot camps, how can you discount such a positive diversionary program when your own figures indicate that under your government child offenders are being pushed through detention over and over again and going on to become adult offenders? I will table that article.

Ms STRUTHERS: I thank the member for her interest in doing that work and providing more evidence. I guess my general message to the member is that I want to work with you cooperatively on these issues. The lives of young people are very important, as you know. We have to get the supports, the punishments and the deterrents in the youth justice system right. I am happy to take that evidence on board and have my staff in the youth justice area examine that.

There are initiatives operating in Queensland—boot camp like initiatives. I recently had a group member approach me with the member for Burnett. A program called Hard Yakka is run by a former SAS officer. Pardon the expression, but it is horses for courses. Some things work for some young people. What I was referring to was research that showed that the boot camps had not actually reduced the reoffending in that particular study. Some young people will respond to the discipline and the structure of that kind of activity.

The young people in the Hard Yakka program operating in the Hervey Bay and Maryborough area dressed up in uniforms. It was a residential for six weeks or so. The fellow who was running it seemed very committed and very responsible. At this stage, our department does not have funding for that kind of initiative. The jury is out for me in relation to the evidence that it works.

I suggested that he actually approach the federal Department of Defence. Some of those young people clearly have an interest in that sort of activity. They were not using real rifles but they had weapons. There was a lot of army-like activity. If that is going to work for young people and they want to end up in the Defence Force, let us see the federal defence department pay for it as a recruitment strategy. I had a very productive discussion with the member for Burnett and the colleague that he brought to meet with me.

I really want to see us cooperate on these issues. This might not be the right forum, but I would like to have a discussion with you about attending some of the youth justice conferences. The Townsville service where I met staff recently has some really good Indigenous staff as well as non-Indigenous staff. The elder in that group was saying to me that it is such a powerful force. When these young people have to feel the shame of fronting up to their victim and apologising and agreeing to some sort of recompense, they shake in their boots. That is what he was saying to me.

There are a lot of initiatives around the state that are proving to be a deterrent. It is my responsibility to work with my department to keep an evidence based approach to our efforts, to fund those initiatives that work and to expand those initiatives that work which let us hopefully intervene early so that young people get back on track and do not cause harm to themselves and others.

Mrs MENKENS: In the highlights for 2009-10 of the Service Delivery Statements, at page 3-3 there is a fund to counteract wage increases in the community sector, which has been announced and which you also spoke about in your opening statement. Can you state the maximum amount that a community sector organisation can expect to receive? What will this equate to per employee, bearing in mind that this is a very, very serious issue for those non-government organisations out there?

Ms STRUTHERS: Again, I am pleased to hear your support for this wage supplementation. As you would be aware, the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission came down with a very important landmark decision for the community services industry. It was a decision that recognised the need for pay equity.

Most of our non-government service providers have been experiencing very low rates of pay. It has therefore been hard to recruit and retain adequately skilled and educated staff in many of these services. We have come up, through the budget process, with a system which the Premier has agreed to. We have focused on the clients in order to provide some supplementation to these services—and keep in mind we are not the employer so we are not directly obliged to fund the wage increases—in terms of sustaining these services into the future with an impost on them that is going to be pretty difficult to deal with.

Mrs MENKENS: They will not be able to cover it.

Ms STRUTHERS: We acknowledged that we had to find some money to sustain these services and help them with the wage supplementation. So as a combined group of ministers—and this is where the integration of the portfolios is working well—we have put a proposition forward that focused on clients. We have put a case to the budget review committee that said, 'We need to make sure the services that are providing services to the most vulnerable clients—disability services, 24-hour care services, all of those—should get priority.' We knew we were in a tight fiscal environment. We knew we could not go cap in hand and ask for full funding of \$500 million plus for the wage supplementation. So as a combined group of ministers I thought we came up with a very good model that the department helped us develop.

I am not trying to go about this in a roundabout way; I just want you to understand the context. In a difficult environment, it was extremely hard to get any funding at all for this, but the \$414 million over the next few years is a significant milestone. It will be allocated through a process of moderation. Some groups, in what we are calling a category A grouping, will get a 100 per cent supplementation now and into the future. A category B group will get 100 per cent supplementation for the first 12 months, dropping down to 50 per cent supplementation after that. A category C group will not get any supplementation, and that group will include, in general terms, peak bodies and others that generally have a capacity to find some of their own source revenue and are not working directly with clients in need of 24-hour support or counselling or direct crisis work.

I can only respond in general terms, because this is work in progress, but it is certainly going to mean, too, that because we have found this significant bucket of money to support the sustainability of services we will also be working with them in terms of service improvements as well. We want to see some streamlining and better coordination of their own service delivery. We will be working with the non-government sector to reduce the imposts on them through streamlining our process but also working with them to improve service delivery within their sector.

Mrs MENKENS: I appreciate that you have found some funds there, but certainly on your own admission it is nowhere near enough to cover the added wages for the current services that are being delivered. You have mentioned A, B and C services. Can you enlarge a little bit more on that? What services are not going to be funded? What are the organisations and the services that are going to miss out? Let us face it: what we are going to see is the delivery of fewer services to those vulnerable people in need.

Ms STRUTHERS: Yes. Again, you are pursuing a very important area here. What I am presenting to you is that, in a difficult fiscal environment, that was a major achievement. The peak bodies have welcomed it. I went to a budget breakfast with my colleagues after the announcement and the room was full. There were probably 300 or 400 community service providers from around particularly the south-east—some had come down from the north as their peak body representatives. The overwhelming sense was that they welcomed this. They did not expect it, frankly. So let me say that first up—that it has been welcomed.

I guess the second point is that I was concerned to hear your own leader during the election indicate that if you got elected there would be a three per cent efficiency dividend. You were actually talking about cuts to services.

Mrs MENKENS: But there were not jobs that were going to be lost in that.

CHAIR: Member for Burdekin, this is not your opportunity to interject.

Ms STRUTHERS: As I said in my opening remarks, service cuts were not negotiable in our minds as community services ministers. When we fronted up to the Cabinet Budget Review Committee on two occasions—and I was shaking in my boots on both occasions—we were hard line in relation to not cutting services. Your position seemed to be one of cutting services. That would have meant \$150 million or so gone from the community services budget. It would have meant hundreds of jobs gone. It would have meant cuts to our social housing program.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, that is not the truth and you know that.

Ms STRUTHERS: That is the contrast. I am pleased that we have found a significant amount of money to both recognise the pay equity concerns and recognise the value of these people. Again, I pay tribute to their work. There are some 20,000 workers who are affected by this decision of the Industrial Relations Commission around the state who are working in your area, my area—and the state—providing very important service delivery. This gives them a much better position in the future to be sustainable and to continue their service delivery without cuts.

Mrs MENKENS: Can the minister provide the total amount budgeted for programs to prevent suicide in the 2009-10 year, including full details of where that money will be allocated?

Ms STRUTHERS: I am happy to do that. We do not have primary responsibility for the suicide response. The department of health—the Minister for Health—has the primary carriage of the state-wide Suicide Prevention Strategy but we do, through various programs, provide support that is either directly aimed at suicide prevention or supporting people in a more general way—for instance, some of the work I mentioned earlier with seniors in social isolation and the work that we are doing there.

We have had nine projects specifically funded under the Queensland government's Suicide Prevention Strategy. A total of \$0.42 million was carried over from 2007-08. We have certainly seen services for at-risk youth in Mackay. There were some particular incidents occurring in Mackay where a group of community leaders got together and wanted responses there. We have certainly provided support, with two full-time specialist workers to work with young people. We have provided money to vulnerable groups. I think we have provided \$100,000 for the lesbian and gay Open Doors—I think the organisation is called—to do suicide prevention work. They met with me recently seeking funding. They had evidence of work they have done in places like Goondiwindi. I thought it was very brave of them—the sort of work they had been doing in some of these more isolated regional centres—raising issues of concern for gay and lesbian young people. That would have been a difficult job, I think, in some of those communities where many of these issues are kept pretty much under the carpet and as a result young people suffer. So we have some innovative responses to suicide prevention but, as I said, the bulk of the effort is through the health department and its funding initiatives.

Mrs MENKENS: With reference to pages 31 and 32 of the Capital Statement, can you provide a reason for a 97 per cent underspend in capital on the Northern Outlook project, with just \$69,000 spent out of the promised \$2 million in 2008-09?

Ms STRUTHERS: You would be really interested in Northern Outlook, because it is one of those adventure based responses and activities for young people, trying to get them on track through adventure based activities. The Southern Outlook at Boonah has had a successful record for a long time. The Northern Outlook is operating, and I have met staff from there. They have a mobile Outlook where they take young people to various sites. My sense is that there is a bit of a NIMBY thing going on here—not in my backyard. Because it largely involves a lot of Aboriginal kids, my understanding is that there has been some concern about the location of the land for these adventure based activities. I do

not think we have finalised a site, hence the capital being carried over. That is my understanding. I will seek advice on that, but it is an important initiative. It is not a boot camp, but it certainly is adventure based activities. We need these sorts of initiatives. They have a proven record of success through the Southern Outlook and the Northern Outlook activities. However mobile they are, they need a permanent base, but sadly we have been coming across some community concern.

You will hear a lot more from me on this NIMBY stuff, because frankly I am very concerned about it. We need to provide support for young people. We need to provide social housing. We need to provide all of these things. The community wants it, but sadly some community members do not want it in their backyard. In terms of any help you can give me on the Northern Outlook, I will be happy to receive. But my understanding is that we are still negotiating in trying to find a site.

Mrs MENKENS: Can the minister state how many seniors have used the Seniors Legal and Support Service. If it has been a successful policy, why has the funding remained static? Why are there no plans to expand this service?

Ms STRUTHERS: I will just seek some of the detail on the actual numbers using the service, but I met with staff from the Seniors Legal and Support Service at a recent event in Brisbane—a two-day training opportunity that we had funded. Their response to me was very positive. They promoted the very important work that they are doing. There is certainly concern from them that this is non-recurrent funding currently and they have asked me to investigate opportunities for recurrent funding. I will certainly be doing that. I accept that it is a very important service.

Actually, I stayed for a presentation on elder abuse and they talked to me about that issue. I do not think many people know about it. I am thinking back 15 years when I was working at a service called the Domestic Violence Resource Centre and the issue of elderly abuse was raised with me and other colleagues by some HACC workers—some people working with seniors. We went online and found a whole lot of information about elder abuse in Canada and North America but not in Australia. At that time we got sent to us a number of packages on elder abuse, but essentially at that time we handed it over to the seniors services rather than running the issue as a domestic violence service. The staff at the Seniors Legal and Support Service said to me that they are doing a lot of work on elder abuse and they still feel that it is an issue that not many people understand or know about. So 15 years on, not a lot has really happened. A lot of people are experiencing financial abuse and neglect rather than direct physical abuse—and primarily at the hands of family members or carers. We have now included this issue in our legislation.

In relation to your direct question about the numbers, the service has assisted 670 clients with either advice or ongoing casework during the 2007-08 period. It also provided information and referral services in 1,323 instances and delivered 293 community education awareness sessions attended by over 8,000 people. Given what I said about how this is still an issue that people are pretty silent on or do not know a lot about, that work is critical.

Ms van LITSENBURG: I refer to page 3-11 of the Service Delivery Statements. What is the government doing to ensure young offenders are held accountable for their crimes?

Ms STRUTHERS: Again, I am happy to talk about youth justice. It is a big part of my portfolio. As I said earlier, and I will say it again, the vast majority of young people do the right thing and I do not want any of us to ever lose sight of that reality. Youth crime is down. Some of the credit for that can go, I think, to our youth conferencing programs. I really have seen how effective they have been around the state. These innovative programs are a powerful deterrent to young people. They bring together the police, the offenders and the victims to develop a legal agreement on which the young person must comply. If they breach that agreement, they have to suffer the consequences of that.

I am impressed that police actually refer a lot of young people to youth conferencing. Police would not do that if they thought it was a wussy thing or a soft option. In my understanding of these programs, the police have been active participants, sometimes as victims of the crimes themselves or certainly people who want to be part of the process of those conferences. It certainly works. Victim satisfaction has been measured at 98 per cent, and that is consistent with the evaluations that have been done. Referrals are up 15 per cent and, as I said, many of them are coming from the police, and the courts certainly are indicating a confidence in these programs as well. With such a successful program, we actually want to do all we can to strengthen it. In 2009-10 we will provide over \$10 million to hold conferences, including the funding for an additional eight staff. We are focused on prevention of crime and helping young people become productive members of society.

Again, I might use a case example without naming the person as an indication of what this process is about. A young man was charged with common assault as a result of a schoolyard dispute when a young person physically assaulted another school student. The conference involved the young person, the victim and his family and the police. A community agency also attended to outline the impacts of bullying and assault.

As a result of the conference, the young person undertook 20 hours of volunteer work. He completed the agreement and continued to participate with his father within a community association teaching disabled and disadvantaged children how to fish. The victim was pleased that the young

person had taken responsibility for his behaviour and was now involved in supporting young people in the community. I guess the message in that is you have to get processes where these young people can dig deep, get some insights into their behaviour, get some empathy happening there, understand what is happening for the people they are impacting on and be shamed as part of this process—really understand what they are doing, how wrong it is and how it impacts on other people. For this young fellow with the support of his father to actually contribute in some way through a community association was certainly a positive thing. Time is up?

CHAIR: It is.

Mr KILBURN: I refer to the Service Delivery Statement page 3-51. Following machinery-of-government changes, can the minister advise if the independence of the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian has been maintained?

Ms STRUTHERS: Thanks for the question. I am happy to talk about the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian. The independence of the commission is vital. The Bligh government takes this very seriously. The commission has an important role to play in promoting and protecting the rights, interests and wellbeing of Queenslanders under 18 years of age. I can confirm that the commission is not answerable to the department of communities or me as the minister. The commission is independent. Its decisions are not influenced by any government department or agency. You have met the commissioner, Elizabeth Fraser, here today. The commission does not have any reporting accountabilities to the department or the director-general. Following machinery-of-government changes there have been administrative changes which have not and cannot impact upon the independence of the commissioner. Let me go through these.

Firstly, the commissioner is appointed by the Governor in Council with powers and functions clearly stated in the CCYPCG Act. The commissioner's powers clearly state that the commissioner must act independently and is not under the control or direction of the minister. Secondly, the transfer of the commission does not and will not include any change to the mandated authority of the commission as a statutory body under the control of the commissioner. I fully support the mandate and independence of the commission. I am confident the establishment of the parliamentary Social Development Committee will ensure the commission's continued independence.

The committee has been given the power to review and monitor the work of the commission. The committee will report to the parliament on any changes required for the more effective operation of the commission or the act that establishes it. I am certain the commission will continue its important work in monitoring, reporting and advocating for children and young people. I look forward to any information or advice it provides to help the government assist those in our society who are the most vulnerable, and that is our children and young people.

Mr KILBURN: Minister, I was fortunate enough to attend the first Indigenous Youth Parliament that you held here, and I commend your department for that. It was a fantastic day and the speeches that were given were great. The young people and the communities they come from should be proud of the way they presented themselves. I ask the minister to outline the benefits for those young Indigenous men and women who took part in Queensland's first ever Indigenous Youth Parliament.

CHAIR: You have two minutes, Minister.

Ms STRUTHERS: I welcome the feedback you have provided. It was an historic event, an amazing event, a very emotional event. It was fantastic to see those people one day in their jeans and T-shirt having a lot of fun in their yarnning circle on the other side of the building and then to come here the next day in their suits, ties and dresses already looking like leaders. I spoke to the fellow who was going to be the Premier for the day. He was all puffed up and proud. I spoke to the young fellow who was in my role, the Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women, and I said, 'You feel good in this job, do you? Don't get too much of a taste for it, though.' They were performing absolutely outstandingly. I listened to some of their speeches.

These sorts of initiatives are what we want for the future. If we are going to have any impact on closing the gap on the inequities in health, education and economic status of Indigenous people around the state, we need these young people sticking up for their communities, sticking up for their people and leading the way.

We had discussions with them in the yarnning circle about drugs, alcohol, substance abuse, violence and all those tough issues as much as we had discussions with them about the positive stuff. I attended the NAIDOC ball, the national event, on Friday night. There are so many high-achieving Indigenous people in this nation and this state, but the media will not report much of that unless they are a sporting champ.

There is so much good stuff happening in communities on a day-to-day basis involving people who are quiet achievers, people who are achieving great heights. In Rockhampton on Friday I had the pleasure of attending the NAIDOC celebration there. There were 2,000 people in the showgrounds having a great time—alcohol free. I did not see a beer, did you, Director-General? It was a great day for

families. A young five-year-old girl got up. She was shaking in her boots. Five years old and she sang the national anthem. She was a shocker, but good on her. It was great to see. That is the sort of achievement and leadership that we want to be proud of.

I am pleased that my department sponsors these Indigenous Youth Parliaments because that is the next step. These are the first peoples of our nation and, sadly, none of them sit in this House with us. We had one member, Eric Deeral. I understand he was a lovely fellow and I met him briefly during the Hands on Parliament report that the member for Callide and I were involved in. To think that we have had many years of parliament in this state and only one Indigenous fellow for one term is a sad indictment on our community. We need these young people to come forward. I am not prepared to hand over my job just yet, but that young fellow was ready for it.

CHAIR: That concludes the committee's consideration of the appropriations for the Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women.

Ms STRUTHERS: I just have one revision as well. The member for Burdekin raised an issue about savings on the *White Pages*, which will be \$37,579. I want to table a revised answer to that question that the member asked.

CHAIR: You have to seek leave to table it.

Ms STRUTHERS: I seek leave to table a revised response to a question on notice—response No. 5.

Leave granted.

CHAIR: Minister, on behalf of the committee I thank you, your staff and the department for their attendance and participation in today's hearing. We very much appreciate it.

Ms STRUTHERS: I have one closing comment. I, too, want to thank you, Mr Chair, and the members of your committee. We have had a very constructive discussion this afternoon. I want to thank my director-general, her leadership team and departmental officers, who have worked very hard in preparing responses and detailing issues for me in preparation for these hearings. I thank my own staff—the 'barrel girl'—and the others who have worked very hard and the parliamentary staff who contribute to the success of these estimates committee processes.

CHAIR: The committee will resume at four o'clock.

Proceedings suspended from 3.48 pm to 4.00 pm

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE C—INFRASTRUCTURE AND PLANNING

In Attendance

Hon. SJ Hinchliffe, Minister for Infrastructure and Planning

Mr S Fyfe, Principal Advisor

Department of Infrastructure and Planning

Mr C Jensen, Coordinator-General and Director-General

Ms A Hall, Director, Executive and Communication Services, Strategy and Governance Group (Acting)

CHAIR: This hearing of Estimates Committee C is now resumed. The portfolio of the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning will be examined. The proceedings today are similar to parliament to the extent that members of the public cannot ask questions. In that regard I remind visitors that in accordance with standing order 206 any person admitted to a public hearing of a committee may be excluded by order of the committee or at my discretion as chair. In relation to media coverage of the hearing, the committee has resolved that television film coverage and photography be allowed during my introductory comments and the opening statement of the minister as well as for a short period during each changeover of ministerial advisers. The committee has also agreed to the live broadcast of the hearing via the Parliamentary Service's website and to receive this throughout the parliamentary precinct. I ask that all mobile phones and pagers be now switched off.

I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time limit for questions is one minute and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a double chime will sound at the end of these time limits. An extension of time may be given by 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. For the benefit of Hansard I ask departmental officers to identify themselves if the minister calls them to answer a question. Minister, your advisers and staff, welcome to today's hearing. I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning to be open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Yes, I would. Thank you for your welcome and thank you for your fellow committee members' commitment to this process. I welcome the opportunity to report on my portfolio's progress in delivering vital infrastructure and planning reforms amid the challenges of a global recession. As Minister for Infrastructure and Planning and faced with the greatest economic challenge in 75 years, I am determined to keep coordinating the largest infrastructure program in Queensland's history and delivering major reforms for Queensland's planning, building and development system.

Since its formation 2½ years ago, the Department of Infrastructure and Planning has demonstrated its capacity to address state population growth of nearly 100,000 new residents each and every year by coordinating whole-of-government delivery of vital infrastructure. Faced now with the greatest economic challenge in generations, I am determined to continue vital infrastructure delivery to address growth but also to create and support jobs and to prepare Queensland for the global recovery. I am also determined to continue reforming the state's planning, development and building system to foster greater planning consistency, improved housing standards and increased supply. The Queensland government is keeping promises, meeting commitments and delivering projects.

As minister, I promised to keep infrastructure at the centre of the government's priorities, and the state budget supports my position, allocating a record \$18.2 billion for capital works this year in the face of a global recession. Our infrastructure program is the nation's largest and it is investing \$1,000 this year for each and every Queensland—twice the average investment of other states. I am keeping my promise to support Queensland jobs and the state's building program is forecast to support 120,000 jobs this year.

Today I recommit the Queensland government to the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program 2009-26 with an estimated investment of \$124 billion, up from \$107 billion, ensuring the fast-growing south-east gets the infrastructure it needs. To that end I seek leave to table for the committee's information SEQIPP 2009.

CHAIR: Leave granted.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: The revised program includes 32 new infrastructure projects and it is forecast to generate 900,000 jobs in South-East Queensland to 2026. Consistent with that promise to support jobs, we promise to secure South-East Queensland's water supply. The South-East Queensland water grid is nearing completion in less than three years. The government promised to continue reforming Queensland's planning, development and building system and we have kept our promise, recently introducing the Sustainable Planning Bill 2009 to the parliament. The new planning bill is the largest reform to Queensland's planning system in more than a decade and reduces red tape and increases flexibility while focusing on sustainable development.

I promised to support the continuing introduction of regional plans across the length and breadth of the state, working in partnership with local stakeholders, and we are delivering. The South East Queensland Regional Plan 2009-31 is scheduled for release in a few weeks along with regional plans for the south-west, central-west and Maranoa-Balonne. We promised a regional plan to guide development in the north-west and a few weeks ago I kept that promise and released a draft regional plan for North-West Queensland. We promised to support development of a billion dollar liquified natural gas industry in Queensland and the state budget provided a corridor for an underground superhighway to transport gas from Surat and Bowen basins to the Port of Gladstone.

The Queensland government is meeting its commitments. We are meeting our commitment to work constructively with the Australian government and deliver shovel-ready school upgrades and social housing projects across the state in partnership with Canberra. The Bligh government is meeting its commitment to balance sensible development with environment and lifestyle protection. We have also introduced the statutory Far-North Queensland Regional Plan which won two awards from the Planning Institute of Australia for its strong focus on sustainability. We are meeting our commitment to reducing Queensland's carbon footprint with a range of new sustainable housing measures progressively coming into effect from 1 March this year to reduce carbon emissions from residential and commercial buildings.

As minister I am meeting my commitment to reduce transport congestion in South-East Queensland by coordinating the whole-of-government delivery of numerous road and public transport projects and planning which supports containment. The Queensland government supports coordinated whole-of-government infrastructure project delivery. With the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program, which I tabled today, we are seeing a whole lot of things delivered across the length and breadth of South-East Queensland. Four years into the program, some 87 projects are already complete and another 173 are underway. In partnership with industry we are seeing a whole lot of other projects being delivered and I am pleased to work with the Coordinator-General in that role to supply a whole lot of opportunities for industry across Queensland.

CHAIR: Member for Gympie?

Mr GIBSON: Thank you, Mr Chair, and welcome Minister. Let us begin with SEQIPP because obviously it is a document that I have been looking forward to. I would like to start by referring to SDS 2-122 regarding the department's responsibility to provide leadership on planning for growth and infrastructure provision in Queensland. I note in the budget papers and in an answer to the question on notice I asked regarding planning undertaken by your department that SEQIPP is not listed in either, yet this document is extensively referred to by the Department of Transport and Main Roads. Why isn't SEQIPP referred to in either the question on notice or the budget document papers and is this another example of the Department of Infrastructure and Planning failing in its planning and leadership role?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Through you, Chair, I would like to thank Mr Gibson for his question. SEQIPP and the role that it plays in supporting the South East Queensland Regional Plan is fundamental to the planning that we do across the state. I do not think that it would be right to say that planning has not been the core of what we have been doing as a state. I think you will find that with the 21-year investment that SEQIPP demonstrates, and today being re-emphasised with the 2009 version being released, the Bligh government has demonstrated that it is absolutely committed to the role planning and providing support for planning through the delivery of a program of infrastructure and a pipeline of infrastructure demonstrates.

It is updated each year and we need to understand that it needs to respond to the circumstances that are alive at each moment in time. It provides an overarching framework around delivering the systems that a whole range of line agencies will then deliver in terms of particular pieces of infrastructure that they are responsible for. It does assist in that planning and delivery of infrastructure across South-East Queensland, but it does not replace planning and infrastructure that is more broadly addressed by the SEQ Regional Plan plus agency planning that happens in each and every line agency. It supports and assists and helps deliver that South East Queensland Regional Plan but it does not replace all planning that happens across the whole of government.

Mr GIBSON: I do not doubt its importance. I am just curious that it was not listed on the non-government question on notice as part of the planning documents. Perhaps that was an oversight. If we continue on with SEQIPP, I note that you launched it at 12.30 today, a month later than was promised by

your colleague the Minister for Main Roads in answer to a question on notice that he provided to the parliament. I also note that in answer to a question on notice for the government you indicated that it would be released yesterday. Is the timing of the release of SEQIPP today neatly timed to avoid the full scrutiny of estimates but also to be lost in the storm surrounding Gordon Nuttall's conviction for corruption or is it due to concerns about the quality of the document and just another example of the arrogance of this Labor government?

CHAIR: I should say, Minister, that the matter referred to by the member for Gympie is still before the courts so be careful in your answer.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Thank you for your guidance, Mr Chair. I can assure Mr Gibson, through you Chair, that the timing of the launch of the plan was all to do with providing an opportunity to make sure that SEQIPP was provided in this context of the budget process and the estimates process. Indeed, my reason for tabling it here is to allow the committee to consider and use that document in its deliberations. When we had a budget that was focused on the Renewing Queensland Plan it was important and appropriate that the SEQIPP document, which has in the previous two years been released with the budget, be released at a separate time. At the end of this month, in the next few weeks, the final version of the renewed South East Queensland Regional Plan will be released. It was particularly appropriate that SEQIPP 2009 was informed by the content of the South East Queensland Regional Plan as it is close to finalisation.

Mr GIBSON: I struggle to believe that by tabling a document here before this committee we would then have time to be able to peruse it. Even accessing it online from the midday announcement it still does not leave the committee much time to peruse the document. My question to you now is: I note in your press release today that SEQIPP talks about 900,000 jobs under this plan. Could you advise the committee how this figure is calculated?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Through you, Chair, I want to thank Mr Gibson for his question and in the first place reiterate that I do think the committee has a process beyond this hearing and I encourage the committee to use SEQIPP in its deliberations and how that then reports to the parliament as a whole. I think Mr Gibson should appreciate the importance of the role of the whole of the committee process and not just a day in the sun like this afternoon might be.

I appreciate Mr Gibson's interest in the very important and significant figure of 900,000 jobs that are provided for as a result of the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program over its life. Those job figures are calculated using a non-dwelling construction index provided by the Office of Economic and Statistical Research extrapolated over the period of the plan. Job numbers are estimated on a year-by-year basis. That is a normal process when it comes to particularly these sorts of infrastructure and construction jobs. The program job target of 900,000 is a cumulative assessment of the job numbers based upon the total spend of the program from 2005 to 2026 which is the nature of the total of the program.

The 2010 data is based upon current projected budget estimates and program spend. That is when we are talking about the 45,000 jobs being delivered and supported by the program this year. I think it is important to reiterate the jobs element arising out of the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program. I think that this government places importance on its infrastructure program, its building program, to deliver and support jobs in our community at this very important and very challenging time in the context of a global economic downturn. I want to reiterate how important these job creation and support opportunities are as compared to alternative decisions that might have been made by a different government. I think it is very important that the pipeline of infrastructure, the pipeline of opportunities that arise for jobs in South-East Queensland out of the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program are reassuring to a whole range of people across our region and I would encourage all members to support the program in that context.

Mr GIBSON: If I can just get some clarification then. Cumulative over the life of the program to 2026; what year are you calculating? Basically the question is: are you using 2009 figures for wages when you look at those calculations up to 2026?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: If you use the principle of using an index that calculates these things you would be using 2009 figures in terms of, as we do throughout the plan, the costs of projects and therefore 2009 wage figures or whatever the figures are to do that calculation in that context. I presume that would be the correct way to go forward.

Mr GIBSON: Therefore, I guess, it is reasonable that with increasing wages we could see that estimated 900,000 jobs drop?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: If there was an increase in wages it would also be potentially reflected in the increase in the costs of the projects themselves. They are indeed indexed each year, as I mentioned. There is that index, that non-dwelling construction index, which takes into account those sorts of factors. They are the normal ways in which people in industry understand and provide for and plan for these sorts of projects over time. It is no great mystery to anyone in industry who deals with these factors and it is certainly no great mystery to this government that has been planning so well for the provision of infrastructure into a long period to come.

Mr GIBSON: I am just trying to sift the spin from the facts and I appreciate your assistance in that.

CHAIR: Member for Gympie, I would hope that you would keep to the content of the question.

Mr GIBSON: Minister, I refer to SDS 2-122 regarding the department's responsibility to provide leadership on planning for growth and infrastructure provision in Queensland. The recent damning Auditor-General's report has found this government has failed to provide a transport network that addresses urban congestion and therefore is negatively impacting on South-East Queenslanders' quality of life. In particular, it found the Department of Infrastructure and Planning's frameworks and systems for infrastructure delivery did not extend to the management of congestion. Is this another example of the failure of you and your department to provide true leadership on this matter or did you simply overlook the traffic jams outside your window?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I thank Mr Gibson for his question. I have spent some time already talking about the importance and role of the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program. Let me go back to laws and make another reference to the South East Queensland Regional Plan. The South East Queensland Regional Plan plays a significant role in providing an overarching planning context for the south-east on behalf of all state agencies, and indeed local authorities and a range of other interested parties including people in the private sector and other interested groups, to plan ahead for the future of Queensland, particularly in the face of, as we have seen, ongoing population growth—population growth which has been unprecedented and unrelenting.

The South East Queensland Regional Plan, both in its 2026 iteration and in its 2031 iteration that we will see shortly—the draft form that is out there at the moment—provides significant responses to the issues around traffic congestion. As I am sure members of the committee will appreciate, traffic congestion is not entirely solved by building roads. It is not entirely solved by massive injections into public transport infrastructure and services such as we have seen under this government. It is in part solved by better planning—not better planning around developing new infrastructure but better planning around where people are located, where they move to and how they travel within our region. So the containment of communities, better planning and creation of more employment opportunities in the communities where people live, so that people do not have to make the journey across town to go from their place of residence to their place of work, is part of the planning that we need to do. That is what the South East Queensland Regional Plan provides for in some respects.

It also provides for and emphasises opportunities around transit oriented development—development that supports and enhances the use of public transport and the ability for people in the community to shorten journeys and take the pressure off our congested roads and other transport infrastructure. I would encourage the committee in its consideration and deliberation of these issues to consider the fundamental nature of the South East Queensland Regional Plan to the planning work that the state does throughout South-East Queensland and also the way we are using these regional planning documents across the rest of the state.

Mr GIBSON: Minister, in light of the fact that we have only just received SEQIPP, I am happy if you want to take this question on notice, as we certainly have not had the time to go through it in detail. Can you advise the expenditure on infrastructure projects by type—roads, public transport, health, energy, water supply et cetera—for 2008-09 estimated actual, 2009-10 budget and forward estimates and provide a breakdown by local, state, federal, GOC and private sector contribution to or investment in those projects?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: There are some elements of that which I can address now, but if you want a holistic answer I am happy to get that together and bring it back to you.

Mr GIBSON: I am happy if you wish to take part of it on notice and if you wish to address some of it now.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I am sure I will be able to get back to you and deal with some of that before the end of today.

Mr GIBSON: Thank you. Minister, in your earlier answer to a question you talked about population growth. I think the word you used was 'unrelenting'. It is a fact that since 1982 the average annual population growth in Queensland has been 2.2 per cent and that in the past decade the average annual population growth has been an identical 2.2 per cent. Will the minister admit that the current congestion and infrastructure crisis is more due to poor planning and lack of management by this Labor government and not a sudden spurt in our population growth?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I thank Mr Gibson for his question. I think you will find that the nature of the statistics that Mr Gibson quotes to the committee hearing are accurate in the way he has quoted them. Equally, it is important to analyse statistics such as that. You need to understand that there are some very different dynamics that have been going on in recent times in terms of the distribution of population, as has been the case in previous periods. The distribution of population growth has been more focused and more centred on some key areas of the state. That is where the pressures have arisen and that is where the pressures lie.

I understand the point that Mr Gibson is making. But I suggest to the committee that we need to be—and indeed we do this through the processes of the South East Queensland Regional Plan, the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program, the Far North Queensland Regional Plan and the Far North Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program—far more fine grained in the analysis of the nature of growth and the pinch points that that creates in the infrastructure that we have to serve that growth.

Mr GIBSON: Minister, as recently as Tuesday this week the Premier referred to the pressure that we have on our infrastructure as 'growing pains', yet clearly it has been fairly consistent from a percentage perspective. I take your point with regard to distribution, but it begs the question: if the population growth has been known and we have not been planning for its distribution, again is this an example of this Labor government failing to properly plan?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I thank Mr Gibson for his question. I think I have demonstrated in answer to a number of questions that through comprehensive planning documents and comprehensive planning action, such as the South East Queensland Regional Plan and the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program, this government is planning for this region in a way that is entirely unprecedented. In fact, you will find that the Australian government is pointing other governments across Australia in the direction of the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program and in the direction of the Queensland government's planning processes as an example of how to do it well.

I would counsel members of the committee against getting the idea that there is a lack of strategic planning happening in relation to the needs of our state and particularly the needs of South-East Queensland. I need only to refer to and point to the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program and its parent document, the South East Queensland Regional Plan, which provides a comprehensive set of arrangements to plan for the growth of our state. If we look at the rollout of regional planning documents in various forms across the rest of the state, we also provide for planning in a range of areas in a range of circumstances, be they high growth or low growth.

Mr KILBURN: Minister, I refer you to page 118 of Service Delivery Statement Book 2. Creating jobs in Queensland is important for securing the future for many of the working families in my electorate. Will the minister provide details on the planning program currently being undertaken by the state government to stimulate and fast-track projects that support job creation?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I thank Mr Kilburn for his question. As part of the ongoing program for planning for Queensland, the Department of Infrastructure and Planning is helping to stimulate projects that create jobs through statutory planning, reform agendas, land use plans and economic development opportunities studies and by securing land and funding for essential infrastructure projects for Queensland. They play a multifactoral role in intervening in the economy to support job creation. By way of example I refer to the Sustainable Planning Bill, which I mentioned earlier, that is currently before the House. It seeks to reduce red tape for the development industry and focuses on achieving outcomes faster. I refer to those land use plans that I have mentioned already—the Far North Queensland Regional Plan 2009-2031, which was released on 13 February 2009, and the South East Queensland Regional Plan 2031, which is due for release shortly—which identify economic development hubs and opportunities for strategic growth of industries over the next 22 years.

My department also continues to plan, facilitate and lead major private sector and government projects that support job creation. They include undertaking site investigations for special industries in Southern Queensland; ensuring land is available and that infrastructure development and planning occur in strategic locations to support industrial development; facilitating the liquefied natural gas industry—a real sunrise industry for the state; coordinating the Northern Economic Triangle Infrastructure Plan; and implementing the coal infrastructure plan of action and coordination of the environmental impact statements process for significant projects.

The department coordinates and delivers key infrastructure across the state which I have mentioned at great length in terms of what is contained within the South East Queensland Regional Plan and also a whole range of projects across the rest of the state. But the department also plans, secures and manages land support for development including declaring and managing state development areas and undertaking a state-wide inventory of land for public recreation. Through the Property Services Group, which uses the state's construction fund, it provides funding for property related and industry development functions that encourage the location and expansion of businesses and industry, thereby supporting job creation in Queensland. It is particularly important in relation to regional Queensland.

The department has an ongoing role in coordinating submissions for projects seeking funding under the Building Australia Fund. I can identify four Queensland projects. The Ipswich Motorway, the Gold Coast Rapid Transit project, the Bruce Highway Cooroy-Curra upgrade and Brisbane inner-city rail have secured funding under those arrangements. That was part of the drive that our department supported.

Ms van LITSENBURG: Minister, I refer to your Service Delivery Statement, which mentions facilitating the liquefied natural gas industry. LNG is an exciting new industry for Queensland. Can you advise on the potential job creation associated with this up-and-coming industry?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: The government committed during the election, as you rightly know, to creating 100,000 new jobs. I am, as the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, working each and every day to support and create jobs. One of the fundamental planks of that strategy is the creation of jobs through the development of new industries. As the Premier said on Tuesday, a liquefied natural gas or LNG industry in Queensland could create more than 18,000 jobs as well as offer billions of dollars of investment for the state. During the recent election campaign the government committed to creating a gas superhighway to facilitate a multibillion dollar LNG industry for Queensland.

It is important for all committee members to note that of the eight current LNG proposals seven are based in the Gladstone area and one is examining the potential of a medium-sized plant at Abbot Point near Bowen. This industry could deliver for the Mackay, Fitzroy and central west regions more than 14,000 jobs. This equates to economic benefits for that regional economy of estimated 8.3 per cent growth. Further, LNG could deliver more than 4,300 jobs to the Downs and south-west regions. This equates to economic benefits for those regions of estimated 4.4 per cent growth.

As the Premier said, growth of this nature in these regions is very exciting, especially considering that the state's current annual growth projection is at half a per cent and that Australia as a whole is not showing any growth at all. So, additionally, the flow-on effect of this growth across the regions is going to be a great contribution to the development of jobs potential particularly. But, equally, rapid development of the Surat and Bowen basins in the past few years means that we can potentially have an LNG export industry of up to 40 million tonnes a year, as well as supply domestic power stations until at least 2050. I ask the committee to note that modelling shows that the LNG industry in 10 years could add more than \$3 billion per annum to gross state product. That is from an industry producing 28 million tonnes per year.

CHAIR: Minister, I want to follow up on one of my questions on notice, which is government question No. 1. In your response to my question on notice, you said that you were notified by the Coordinator-General on Monday, 19 June of the proposed modification to the Airport Link project. Some media reports have suggested that the government was aware of the modification prior to the election. Can you advise the committee whether there was any earlier advice to you prior to 19 June?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I should clarify that 19 June was a Friday.

CHAIR: I apologise.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: That is all right. The Airport Link project, as committee members would appreciate because you have heard me say this on a number of occasions, is one of the largest projects of its kind in Australia. When the project is finished, it will deliver major time savings for people travelling across Brisbane, whether by car or by using the Northern Busway. In addition, more than 1,800 people have been employed and are now working on the Airport Link, the Northern Busway and the airport roundabout upgrade projects across seven major work sites. The project delivers on the government's commitment to create jobs and plan for a better integrated transport and road network to combat traffic congestion.

I appreciate that you have raised this question today because it gives me a good opportunity to dispel some rumours, comments and suggestions out there that the government was aware of the proposed modification prior to or during the election earlier this year. I can confirm that the government was not aware or informed of the proposed modification requests to the Airport Link project prior to the election in March. In fact, the problem was not identified by the contractor until after the election.

As I have stated in my answer to your question on notice, I was formally briefed on the requests for a project change on Friday, 19 June, after it was submitted to the Coordinator-General. I announced the proposal for the Wooloowin work site at a press conference on the following Monday, 22 June. During an extensive tour of the Airport Link, the Northern Busway from Windsor to Kedron, and the airport roundabout sites in late April after my appointment as Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, I was made aware of concerns about the quality of the ground conditions in the Kedron area. At that time, a number of possible options—including a work site at Rose Street, Wooloowin—were under consideration by BrisConnections and its construction contractor, Thiess John Holland, but I was advised that detailed technical work had not yet been undertaken on any possible alternative engineering solutions. Officers of my department have been working with City North Infrastructure, BrisConnections and Thiess John Holland since late April 2009 to define the proposal and ensure the engineering solutions proposed were adequately and thoroughly investigated prior to seeking public input into the process.

The Coordinator-General has received a request for the change and has initiated a process to seek submissions from the community, government agencies and other organisations. It should be understood that community consultation is an important part of the decision-making process. That

period of consultation closes tomorrow, 17 June, and has been opened since 24 June. The Coordinator-General will assess those submissions and other information that is relevant and make a determination about whether the project change is accepted and if there are any conditions.

CHAIR: Minister, you mentioned that it was open until 17 June?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I meant July. My apologies; thank you.

Ms van LITSENBURG: Page 2-119 refers to the minister's Pool Safety Committee. Will you provide an update on work being done in this important area?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Thank you for the question. In December last year, the Premier announced the biggest shake-up of pool safety laws in nearly 20 years. Queensland already has some of the toughest pool safety laws in Australia, and our pool fencing legislation has been effective in reducing drownings by up to 60 per cent since it was introduced in 1991. However, if we can save even one young life with this review, it will have been invaluable. Sadly, in the past three years, 18 Queensland children under five have drowned in private swimming pools. The right pool safety laws are part of meeting our Q2 fair ambitions of supporting a safe and caring community.

To that end, an independent panel of experts, including Kidsafe, the LGAQ and Queensland Master Builders, was established and has produced a report with recommendations, and this was released for public consultation earlier this year. The consultation period ended in June and the government is currently considering the feedback received before making decisions on the matter. The committee's report sets out a range of improvement ideas, such as, firstly, having one pool safety standard to apply uniformly to all pools instead of the 11 that there are currently, with the only variation being for pools before 1991 where child resistant doors can still form part of a safety barrier; secondly, mandatory inspections for new pools as well as at the point of sale and lease of properties; and, thirdly, a register of all pools and tougher rules for portable swimming pools.

As part of the consultation process, nine roadshows were held across Queensland in regions such as Mackay, Townsville, Cairns, the Sunshine Coast, Mount Isa, Rockhampton, the Gold Coast and Brisbane. I attended two of those roadshows and found the feedback at those opportunities and the consultation I had with the community and the interested people there—such as building certifiers—invaluable. But, in the end, it is important to remember in all of these measures that the best pool safety measure is supervision: the supervision of children is key to pool safety. I encourage members to make sure that message goes out to all of their constituents as the first thing, because parental vigilance will be the thing that saves more kids than anything else. It is important that we continue to ensure that our pool safety laws are as rigorous as they can be and are as simple to apply as they should be. That is where I think some of the measures that are proposed by the committee will be of great assistance to pool owners across Queensland.

Ms CROFT: Minister, I am very pleased to have the opportunity today to ask you a number of questions pertaining to the Gold Coast. I refer you to page 2-128 of the Service Delivery Statement which refers to the Gold Coast desalination plant. I note some issues have been raised by landholders, in particular from the Tugun rugby league club. Can you advise what steps have been taken to address these issues in relation to the club?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I want to thank Ms Croft for her question. I appreciate her ongoing interest in all issues that relate to the Gold Coast. It is true to say that the Gold Coast Desalination Alliance has worked closely with the community and residents, particularly along the pipeline sections, since construction began in 2007. Now that the construction of the pipeline has finished, there is a chance to conclude the detailed assessment of a number of outstanding claims that have been made by landholders. The alliance has made all reasonable attempts to avoid damaging property during the construction phase of course, but these are things that need to be checked and tested.

Pre- and post-condition surveys are pretty important to that and they were undertaken along the pipeline, and all property owners were contacted and invited to be involved in that process. With the exception of three new claims that are currently under review, the alliance has investigated all the damage claims and property owners have been contacted regarding outcomes in that regard. There were also a number of issues that the Gold Coast City Council has identified about damaged roads, and it has been contacted and we are working with it on restoration works as well.

I note your particular question around the Tugun rugby league club. I understand Minister Robertson mentioned earlier that the Premier has requested he and I meet with the president of the club as soon as possible. I can advise the committee that my office has made tentative arrangements for that meeting to occur, pending the confirmation of the relevant stakeholders who will be involved.

I understand that the alliance has previously investigated the claims of the Gold Coast City Council and the Tugun rugby league club that truck traffic, construction activities and blasting from the construction of the desalination plant's tunnels had caused or accelerated existing damage to the club's amenity building. My advice from the alliance is that the most likely explanation for the damage to the building was the poor standard of construction on an unstable site. It is an old style, uncontrolled landfill, and under current legislation construction on landfill like that would not be permitted. The

desalination site is more than 200 metres from the rugby league clubhouse and the alliance's view is that the construction activities from the building works had no effect on the clubhouse or adjacent buildings.

Equally, I am keen to work with the rugby league club and indeed the Gold Coast City Council around the future of the club. I think more of its concerns are about the long-term future of the club and where its facilities will be located into the future, which I understand the Gold Coast City Council has a view about as well.

Ms CROFT: Minister, I was pleased recently to facilitate a meeting between the Minister for Transport and Gold Coast marine industry representatives to discuss a range of issues pertaining in particular to my electorate of the Broadwater. I know they would be very keen to hear your response to this next question I have for you. I refer to page 2-118 of the Service Delivery Statements. Can you outline the progress of the Southport-Broadwater to Southern Moreton Bay Marine Infrastructure Master Plan?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I thank Ms Croft for her question and do note her active interest in these issues. The Southern Moreton Bay Marine Infrastructure Master Plan study is in response to a coordinated response to the rapidly developing marine industries in the Gold Coast and southern Brisbane region. There has also been increased demand for new and improved infrastructure to cater for the increased numbers of recreational and commercial vessels plying the waters off South-East Queensland.

The master plan will comprise whole-of-government endorsed outcomes to facilitate marine industry and maritime infrastructure development over the next 20 years. Development under the master plan will be confined to areas which provide optimal potential from an environmental and community perspective and align with the 10-year dredging program of the Department of Transport and Main Roads, which is obviously a pretty key element of it. This is to ensure that industry has certainty and that appropriate water access will be available in line with development proposals.

The methodology adopted in the master plan has been endorsed by a steering committee comprising whole-of-government representation and has taken a specific approach to environmental assessment. This methodology will ultimately be adopted state-wide by the Department of Environment and Resource Management when it assesses future maritime opportunities under the State Coastal Management Plan.

A feature of the master plan preparation has been the consultation that has taken place with key stakeholders. Stakeholders have included marine industry representatives, developers, environmental groups, the recreation industry and relevant local governments. Peak bodies, such as the Institute of Business Leaders, have also provided advice on matters such as commercial viability and funding models to ensure that master planning outcomes can be sustained on a commercial level.

The draft master plan is expected to be completed by August this year, following which it will be placed on public display. A central part of the successful implementation of the master plan is the management of the staged development approach, which is critical to ensure that the necessary dredging requirements are fulfilled in conjunction with development. I encourage you to keep in close contact with that process and have your say and encourage your community to have a say after August 2009.

Mr GIBSON: Minister, let us move to the water grid. Page 2-121 of the SDS is the area I am looking at to start with. I would like to also touch base with your answer to non-government question on notice No. 10 and in particular the \$21 million already spent on pipe procurement that you refer to there for the Northern Pipeline Interconnector stage 2. Minister, in light of some problems we have seen with pipes—in particular what is now being referred to as a giant soaker hose between the Gold Coast desalination plant and the water grid—can you give us some guarantee that the pipes that will be used for the Northern Pipeline Interconnector stage 2 will not have the same connection problems?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I would like to thank Mr Gibson for his question. I appreciate his concern for ensuring that the Northern Pipeline Interconnector is a quality piece of infrastructure that will serve the people of South-East Queensland for many years to come. I am absolutely committed to ensuring that we see that project deliver the best possible outcomes.

As I think Mr Gibson will appreciate, I have already made very clear what I want to see delivered with other projects that he has made reference to. Before the government accepts those projects and makes any final payments, we need to see the specifications met, the design requirements met and the projects being what we want them to be in terms of those assets having durability and the water grid being up to the design requirements.

I can absolutely assure you that the design requirements for the Northern Pipeline Interconnector are of high quality and that the government will be requiring the alliance delivering the NPI to ensure that it delivers a quality piece of infrastructure that, as I say, will serve the people of Queensland for many years to come. Not only will it serve the people of Queensland for many years to come; it is serving the people of Queensland tremendously at the moment, with that work supporting some 890 jobs. There are 490 jobs for stage 1 and 400 jobs for stage 2. Those jobs that are delivering the pipeline infrastructure

that forms part of the water grid, securing the water security for South-East Queensland for many years to come, are jobs not only for the short term but jobs that will be supported through industry's access to water security for many years to come.

Mr GIBSON: Minister, taking on board what you have just said and the importance of making sure the specifications are right, there was recently an auction, on 17 to 19 June, of pipe formwork—plate and steel options—of leftover material from the Western Corridor Recycled Water Project. If you were to go through the auction guide, you would see that there were over five kilometres of leftover pipes that were being put up for auction. Minister, what assurances can this committee have that the \$21 million listed for pipe procurement for the Northern Pipeline Interconnector stage 2 will not end up at another auction?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I thank Mr Gibson for his question. The Western Corridor Recycled Water Project that you made reference to has involved the construction of some 200 kilometres of large-diameter pipeline. As you can appreciate, 200 kilometres is a lot of pipe. That means that the exact specifications and the exact alignment of it will not always be exactly right, right down to the exact number of pipes. The bulk pipe procurement happened in that project before design was finalised due to the fast-tracking. We were in the depths of a severe drought in South-East Queensland and these projects were being fast-tracked. There is no question about that. I do not think anyone has denied that. That is why we saw that bulk pipe procurement before the design was finalised.

We did not leave the pipe out there in the pipeline to sit there on the surface and rust. We made sure that we got hold of them and they were realised as an asset for the project. So we can apply any of those further funds to the delivery of the Northern Pipeline Interconnector and to the other important projects in South-East Queensland to deliver South-East Queensland's water security for the future.

Mr GIBSON: Minister, I am sure you do not have the answer to this, but I am happy to put it on notice.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: You might be surprised.

Mr GIBSON: I may well be. Do you know what was received from that auction? What was the value of those pipes?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: You got me there, Mr Gibson. That is something that I will seek some advice on and return to you during today if I can.

Mr GIBSON: I did not think you would quite have that one.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I have not been surfing eBay like you, obviously.

Mr GIBSON: Minister, in response to a question on notice asked by the member for Waterford, you provided reasons for progressing NPI stage 2 ahead of any approval for the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam as it is a stand-alone project to connect the Noosa Water Treatment Plant with NPI stage 1. Can you advise the committee of the expected megalitre transfer either to or from the Noosa Water Treatment Plant?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: To answer Mr Gibson's question, currently the NPI can supply up to 65 megalitres of water a day into the Brisbane supply system as part of the water grid. The long-term planning for the NPI is to operate at a maximum design capacity of 206 megalitres per day in the southerly direction. Those issues in terms of how it could be provided in both directions in part depend on decisions that will be made by the water grid manager, who actually determines those issues based upon need. If there is something further I can clarify for you, I can seek to do that.

Mr GIBSON: Minister, if you could give us some clarification. The 206 megalitres that you are referring to I am assuming is calculated on Traveston Crossing Dam being online. In answer to a question on notice you indicated that it is a stand-alone project connecting the Noosa Water Treatment Plant to NPI stage 1. I accept that. I am just asking what the numbers are, megalitre wise, that you are looking at drawing either from the Noosa Water Treatment Plant or connecting to the Noosa Water Treatment Plant.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Unfortunately for Mr Gibson, I think he has missed his opportunity to ask that question because the Queensland Water Commission would determine those issues in terms of the specifications and the requirement of the operations of the pipeline. What the Northern Pipeline Interconnector is seeking to do, and will achieve, is to have a pipeline that provides for a connection to the Noosa Water Treatment Plant and see the capability of moving water in either direction. In terms of the quantum of that water, that is a matter which the Queensland Water Commission, which was available to the committee earlier today, would have been in a better position to answer.

Mr GIBSON: Minister, I accept that and thank you for that. In light of the fact that the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam is not approved—and I will follow up later to find out exactly what the figure is that is possible to either draw from or take to the Noosa Water Treatment Plant—we are looking at a cost of \$450 million for NPI stage 2. Would you concede that, without the Traveston Crossing Dam online, that is a very expensive connection just to a water treatment plant?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: To answer Mr Gibson's question, stages 1 and 2 of the Northern Pipeline Interconnector represent a significant element of the South-East Queensland water grid. They provide an ability to move water around the region. They provide an ability to move water to the northern end of the Sunshine Coast from the rest of the region. Indeed, they provide a significant opportunity to deliver water from the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam to the South-East Queensland water grid. I appreciate the point that Mr Gibson is making. None of us on the committee or no-one here before the hearing has any illusions about Mr Gibson's opinion of the Traveston Crossing Dam. There are no surprises there. I can reassure him that it is an important element of the South-East Queensland water grid—

Mr GIBSON: NPI stage 2 without the dam being approved.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: The dam is an important part of the South-East Queensland water grid—

Mr GIBSON: I understand that.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: And it will provide an important contribution towards obtaining water security for South-East Queensland's population for many years to come.

Mr GIBSON: Minister, I am going to ask it again, because you did not answer the question. I appreciate what you have just said: 'it is a very important part of the water grid.' I understand the government's position as well as the government understands mine. But if the dam is not approved, do you concede that the Northern Pipeline Interconnector stage 2, at \$450 million to connect the Northern Pipeline Interconnector stage 1 to the Noosa Water Treatment Plant, is a very expensive piece of infrastructure?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Mr Gibson has identified that something that is worth \$450 million is expensive. That is no great surprise to anyone. It is an expensive piece of infrastructure but it is delivering an important element of the South-East Queensland water grid—

Mr GIBSON: To a water treatment plant.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: To the water grid, which is about providing flexibility and security in accordance with the requirements that were set out for the delivery of the infrastructure by the Queensland Water Commission. The Queensland Water Commission made the decisions that determine the nature of the infrastructure that my department is working with the alliance to deliver. This set of questions should have been raised by Mr Gibson earlier today, I would venture.

Mr GIBSON: Minister, we can move on to page 2-121 of the SDS. Given that SmartWater is contracted to operate and maintain the Gold Coast desalination plant for the next 10 years, can the minister advise how much was spent by WaterSecure to employ so-called independent auditors to identify issues that John Holland and Veolia Water were already aware of?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I thank Mr Gibson for his question. I think what he is getting at is the independent report—

Mr GIBSON: The cost of it.

Mr HINCHLIFFE:—which was an important requirement that the Coordinator-General requested of the project to ensure that we got to the bottom of the issues around the delivery of this significant piece of infrastructure. That, as I have alluded to with another piece of infrastructure, is an important part of the South-East Queensland water grid. To have an independent analysis of this in the context of a shutdown of the plant—an ability for a range of experts from a range of fields to go into every nook and cranny of the plant, literally crawl through pipes and find out the details—was very important.

In relation to the costs of the delivery of that very important independent report, I am happy to take that on notice and get some detail. There have been others at different times in relation to this issue who have made analogies with motor vehicles. I know that when you buy a vehicle it is sometimes good to get the inspection done by the RACQ, which is an independent body. This is what we are doing through this process. That costs, but I am happy to provide that information to the committee.

Mr GIBSON: I will move on to industry support at page 2-125 of the SDS. I note that the number of jobs generated from proposed projects has jumped from 18,000 to over 57,000. It also identifies an increase in proposed projects from 33 to 39. Minister, if the increase in the estimated number of jobs created from proposed projects is connected to six additional projects, will you identify those six projects that will bring an estimated 38,875 jobs?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I thank Mr Gibson for his question. It absolutely highlights that, even given the significant set of challenges that we are experiencing at the moment in the face of a global economic downturn—a global recession as it has become known—we still have before the Coordinator-General in the order of \$100 billion worth of projects for assessment. That shows the significant vote of confidence that the private sector has in Queensland as a place where sound and smart investments will yield outcomes. Even in the face of a global economic crisis we have this level of projects being contemplated by the private sector. They are seeking declaration of their projects as projects of state significance.

We will double-check the projects that are identified. I would suspect that a number of them would be LNG projects. As I have outlined in other answers and in my statement at the beginning of this session, the LNG industry is a huge sunrise industry for the state of Queensland. There are some eight proponents out there around a range of different projects. Four of those have been declared of state significance at the moment. But we would expect further projects to be declared. In recent days a number of projects have been declared and some have moved to be assessed by the Coordinator-General.

Mr GIBSON: Just to confirm, will you take that on notice?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Absolutely.

Mr GIBSON: With regard to SEQIPP's 900,000 jobs and what we have seen here with the proposed projects—that is, 57,000 jobs—can you provide the committee with the definition of a job?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I thank Mr Gibson for his question. As the Premier said on Tuesday, if you were paying attention, Mr Gibson, with regard to the broader capital program and the range of other things that we talk about in terms of the jobs target, there are people who are employed, in construction projects in particular, and who continue to be employed because we continue to invest in projects rather than scrap them. For consistency, what we do is use the industry standard, which is job years. When we talk about a job we talk about job years. One year on the job equals one job. In essence, the reference to jobs in the SEQ Infrastructure Plan and Program is a reference to 900,000 job years.

Ms CROFT: Minister, I refer to page 2-121 of the SDS and appropriate planning for future growth in the Gold Coast area, where housing affordability is really an issue. Minister, can you detail some of the achievements and challenges in delivering greenfield sites for the Gold Coast that were identified in the Greenfield Land Supply Action Plan?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I thank Ms Croft for her question. Greenfield lands are areas of undeveloped area in the urban footprint suitable for urban development. I should clarify that: 'greenfield land' is a planners term that does not mean what a lot of people think it means. It does not mean bushland; it means undeveloped land in the urban footprint.

Greenfield lands are generally located on fringes of existing urban areas and often require a significant extension or provision of new infrastructure and transport services to facilitate development. One of the challenges for the Gold Coast is that there is limited broad hectare land supplied on the Gold Coast. This necessitates that all remaining parcels be efficiently developed.

There is also a role for infill development. That is vital for the medium- and long-term accommodation needs of the Gold Coast's projected population growth, as Ms Croft would be aware. It is recognised that it may be necessary to engage in more detailed planning to address the site constraints and regulatory provisions while also ensuring planning outcomes meet the density and centre objectives of the SEQ Regional Plan and the Affordable Housing Strategy.

As part of the action plan for greenfields, two sites were identified on the Gold Coast—Coomera and Helensvale West. At the time both sites had the benefit of the advanced stages of planning processes completed, that being a reasonable infrastructure supply available and a short-term development time frame of up to five years. Since then the department's greenfield team has been working with council to ensure that outstanding issues for these sites are progressed as a priority. For the Coomera site the work remains ongoing, although the Coomera Town Centre Structure Plan was endorsed by the government in December last year. Its site is in its final stages of planning scheme preparations.

There are some sensitive environmental issues for the landowners across the site. Mitigation and offset solutions are being finalised concurrently with the finalisation of the planning process. Development continues outside the town centre. Assessment for more than 1,480 lots is currently underway. The Gold Coast City Council and the Department of Infrastructure and Planning are working together to finalise the planning scheme. We will be doing that soon. The department is playing a coordinating role between council and developers to remove any of the unnecessary regulatory hurdles.

For the Helensvale site, all outstanding planning amendments and regulatory hurdles have been finalised and completed, in January this year. The land is available, ready for market, and development in the area continues. Major developments for the Helensvale site are the Stockland Riverstone Crossing, which the member might be aware of, and the Pacific Pines estates. This has been a great achievement as affordable housing has been delivered quickly, allowing for the accommodation of an additional 10,700 residents in less than three years.

Mr KILBURN: Minister, I refer to page 2-122 of the Service Delivery Statement. Can you advise the committee how the Airport Link project aims to improve traffic conditions for Queenslanders?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I thank Mr Kilburn for his interest in this project. This is genuinely one of the great congestion-busting projects for Queensland. As we discussed earlier today, with population growth putting enormous pressure on our infrastructure, keeping pace with the building program is a key issue. Addressing congestion is an important part of that.

The Airport Link project is a key initiative with the long-term strategy to combat congestion on five fronts: building capacity for growth with new roads and infrastructure; efficiency through working smarter to improve the existing network and how it operates; land use and planning outcomes, making sure that available land is used better to make our journeys shorter and easier; improving the wide range of travel options, which means better public transport, cycling and pedestrian services; and addressing travel demand, which means making sure there are smarter ways to move commuters.

The Airport Link project will deliver major time savings for people travelling across the city, whether by car or on Brisbane's busway system. Modelling shows that the Airport Link and the Northern Busway could reduce traffic on Lutwyche Road by up to 45 per cent when it opens in 2012. The Northern Busway will be a great public transport outcome for South-East Queensland.

I will notice in my local area how much Airport Link will take traffic of northside arterial roads and suburban streets. It will provide significant time savings for people using those surface roads. The busway will also provide an attractive public transport alternative. As we know, each full bus takes up to 40 cars off the road. That makes a huge difference. The Northern Busway will be able to cater for 47,000 bus passenger trips per day by 2016, five times higher than on the existing road network that is being used.

There are a whole lot of other spin-off benefits that the project is delivering for the community. More than 3½ hectares of new parkland will be provided for local residents upon completion of the projects, including a hilltop park at Bowen Hills which I know the member for Brisbane Central is quite excited about.

I genuinely know how much inconvenience there has been during the construction phase of this major project, but I hope that some of the benefits that will result, particularly in my area along Kedron Brook, will provide significant other enhancements and benefits for the community, not just the congestion-busting and the public transport benefits.

Finally, I will mention again that 1,800 people are working on the project as we speak. The indirect jobs created out of the Airport Link, the Northern Busway and airport roundabout upgrade project are in the order of 10,000 jobs.

Ms van LITSENBURG: Minister, I refer to page 2-119 of the SDS. As the member for Redcliffe I am committed to ensuring Moreton, Hays Inlet and all our environmental ecosystems remain as pristine as possible while developing a robust tourist trade. Can you provide details on how regional planning for South-East Queensland will deliver these objectives to the community of Redcliffe?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I thank Ms van Litsenburg for her question. I really appreciate how committed she is to the important green frame around the peninsula. I was speaking earlier in answer to other questions about the importance of the South East Queensland Regional Plan as a major planning document in terms of dealing with the growth in population and providing employment opportunities.

It is fundamental to remember that the South East Queensland Regional Plan protects more than 80 per cent of the region from inappropriate urban development. It does it by establishing an urban footprint that contains urban development by establishing policies and programs that must be followed by all agencies in the planning for the region—that is, by councils and state agencies.

The draft South East Queensland Regional Plan 2009-2031 was released for public consultation in December 2008. It includes amending regulations that allow small- to medium-scale development to be assessed by relevant local government rather than requiring assessment by the state government. In particular, regulation for tourist activities has been amended to promote opportunities for appropriate tourism development throughout the region.

Redcliffe is designated as a major activity centre in the regional plan as it provides employment opportunities and business and retail functions already. Recognition of Redcliffe as an activity centre promotes further development of business and retail activities which will in turn support tourism by providing a vibrant and attractive centre for residents and visitors.

The draft South-East Queensland plan identifies areas with significant biodiversity values—Hays Inlet and the northern end of Bramble Bay. These areas are identified as regional landscape and rural production areas in the regional plan to protect them from that large scale urban development.

Equally, the draft regional plan contains policies that ensure that any allowable development in these areas does not impact upon biodiversity values. Policies also identify the need to protect biodiversity corridors through management and rehabilitation. The water section of the draft regional plan includes policies to ensure that development within the region is planned and designed to meet water quality objectives and to protect and manage riparian areas to maintain and enhance water quality and biodiversity.

The statutory regional plan for SEQ is supported by strategic regional plans including the South East Queensland Natural Resource Management Plan and the South East Queensland Healthy Waterways Strategy. These plans identify targets and actions to guide natural resource management, waterway management and nature conservation in the region. Implementation of these plans, together with the South East Queensland Regional Plan, will ensure protection of our valuable ecosystems.

Mr KILBURN: For much of South-East Queensland the drought emergency is behind us, but I understand that Toowoomba remains in an emergency state. With reference to page 91 of Budget Paper No. 3, could the minister provide advice on the progress of the Toowoomba pipeline?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I want to thank Mr Kilburn for his question and his commitment to making sure that we do not leave behind the people of Toowoomba in the face of the better condition we are in after our significant May rains in South-East Queensland. Toowoomba did not get those rains like that and that is why we are making sure that we are delivering on the Toowoomba pipeline that will help join Toowoomba to the South-East Queensland water grid.

It is also a really good outcome in terms of the jobs that are being created. About 261 jobs have been created with the alliance employing at least one-third of its workforce locally. It is great to see those jobs for people in the valley and in Toowoomba and jobs for Queenslanders generally. We are not only delivering on our commitments to jobs but also delivering on that vital infrastructure that we need. In fact, just four months after the first pipe was laid, we are almost two-thirds complete of this phase of the construction. That is more than 23 kilometres of the 38-kilometre pipeline that has been laid.

Currently, the storage in the region's three dams, the Cooby, the Perseverance and the Cressbrook, has fallen to 10.9 per cent. The area is currently on level 5 water restrictions, which is equivalent to Brisbane's level 6, and prevents all outdoor domestic use. The delivery of this pipeline on time—which it will be—will provide the opportunity for great relief to that area. Toowoomba was in danger of running out of water. We cannot let that happen to one of our great cities—in fact, the garden city, as it has become known.

There are a number of issues in relation to the ultimate pipe ownership that needs to be resolved. I understand that the Queensland Water Commission and the Toowoomba Regional Council are continuing their negotiations around that. I in fact met with the Mayor of Toowoomba, Peter Taylor, to discuss some of those issues recently when I was inspecting the pipeline delivery. I am sure those issues will be resolved satisfactorily.

Ms van LITSENBURG: With reference to page 91 of Budget Paper No. 3, can you outline how many jobs have been created with the commenced construction of the Wyaralong Dam? What economic benefits are expected for the local community?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I want to thank Ms van Litsenburg for her question. The South-East Queensland water grid, as I have mentioned during the hearing this afternoon, is an election commitment of this government to secure water supplies for South-East Queensland, which was made in the midst of one of the worst droughts in the history of the state. The Wyaralong Dam is the first new South-East Queensland dam project in 20 years, at a cost of some \$348 million, and it is on track to be completed by mid-2011—a good six months earlier than the regulated date. The construction of the Wyaralong Dam provides not only an example of this government's delivery on its election commitments but it is a project delivering on, in 2006, the water grid but also delivering on the election commitments for 2009 around securing jobs for Queenslanders.

Construction of the Wyaralong Dam near Beaudesert is already paying dividends for locals in particular. To date, over 200 individuals have gained work on the first stage of construction, including the new 5.5 kilometre access road to the dam site. It is expected that 420 jobs will be created during the project, which is being delivered in three packages. There is preconstruction work, the Beaudesert-Boonah Road realignment and the construction of the dam itself. Major earthworks have now started on the Beaudesert-Boonah Road realignment and surfacing is underway on the dam access road.

Indirectly, over 70 local businesses have gained work from the project, ranging from accommodation providers, cleaners, caterers, plant suppliers, fencers, plumbers, earthmovers, crane hire, security, waste removal, construction material providers, boilermakers and electricians. When I visited the site a little bit earlier this year I was given a tour in a Moxy truck by Daniel MacNellie, one of the many locals who has gained work. Daniel had previously had to travel to Mackay for work and he spent a long time away from his family. So the Wyaralong Dam project has given him a chance to work closer to home with his wife and his two young children.

Once complete, the Wyaralong Dam will provide a significant attraction for visitors and tourism expenditure. A draft recreation master plan shows that the creation of some 40 kilometre of bushwalking, horse riding and mountain biking are focused around two trail heads complementing existing facilities in the region in terms of tourism. Other benefits, such as the upgrade of the Beaudesert-Boonah Road, should see improved road safety and shorter travel times in the local community as well.

CHAIR: As the member for Waterford, I represent people who live in those outer urban areas you referred to earlier. One of the things close to my heart is ensuring that affordable housing is a reality for my constituents. Can you provide details of what the government has managed to deliver since the launch of the 2007 Housing Affordability Strategy?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Thank you, Mr Chairman, and I appreciate your keen interest in this issue. The Housing Affordability Strategy that you refer to seeks to provide better access to appropriate housing that will assist individuals, families and communities and contribute to the overarching social and economic wellbeing of the state. If we cannot afford to have somewhere to live, that is one of the fundamentals that is going to damage the rest of the viability of activity in our economy and in our community.

For example, in South-East Queensland, in terms of the strategy that we are implementing, the area has accounted for a lot of growth. Recent ABS statistics show that a record 2,000 people are arriving in Queensland each and every week. So under the strategy, the Queensland government in less than two years has delivered, one, the creation of the Urban Land Development Authority; two, improved efficient planning and development systems; three, improved land supply for development; four, enhanced monitoring, particularly in the monitoring of supply of land and housing; and finally, five, simplified standard and transparent infrastructure charging is available through measures that were brought in under the strategy. Additionally, in the past 12 months we have also seen the government reduce stamp duty contributions for first home buyers. So that is a significant housing affordability measure as well.

This strategy is focused on getting land and housing on the market more quickly and at a lower cost, achieving a more competitive and responsive land and housing market by reducing time lines and associated holding costs which are a big impost on industry. Within two years of the establishment of the ULDA—the Urban Land Development Authority—there has been declared three urban development areas, Bowen Hills and Northshore Hamilton in March 2008, and Fitzgibbon in July 2008. On these, the UDLA will deliver a range of housing choices through a mix of densities, types, designs, tenures and affordability to promote community diversity and sustainability within those particular areas.

The Bowen Hills site is ideally positioned to capitalise on the overflow of the CBD office market and the areas's existing media and health related precincts. Northshore Hamilton is a 304-hectare site that is strategically located eight kilometres from the CBD on the Brisbane River, close to Brisbane's airport, the Gateway Motorway and the Australia TradeCoast. The UDLA at Fitzgibbon is approximately 295 hectares and is located 12 kilometres north of Brisbane. So in each those areas we will see the delivery of that mix of housing type and mix of housing outcomes. By way of illustration, on that Fitzgibbon site we will see the delivery of two-thirds of the housing product delivered at a cost that is the lower than the median house price in Brisbane.

CHAIR: I call the member for Gympie.

Mr GIBSON: Minister, so little time and so many questions about Traveston. Where will I begin? I have just received an answer to a question on notice that we asked you in which you indicated that the expenditure for the project to the end of April 2009 is \$481.8 million. Page 90 of Budget Paper No. 3 refers to \$490 million, and I am quite comfortable with the slight difference between the figures. When I conducted a search of Queensland land titles, it reveals that Queensland Water Infrastructure—the special purpose vehicle—has purchased over \$523 million worth of property in the ponded area. Can you advise why over \$41 million of expenditure on the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam is not contained in the budget papers and is not being revealed to the people of Queensland?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I thank Mr Gibson for his question. While reiterating the importance—

Mr GIBSON: We understand.

Mr HINCHLIFFE:—of the Traveston Crossing Dam to the South-East Queensland water grid, I can certainly take that one on notice and get you a reply during the rest of this session.

Mr GIBSON: I am happy to have it taken on notice. It gives me another chance to ask you a question. The \$75 million shown in Budget Paper No. 3 at page 93 for the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam is linked to environmental remediation work. Can you give us an undertaking that this means that no preliminary site works are funded under this state budget as detailed under supplementary EIS 2.1.1 page 2-5 and are planned to be undertaken in the financial year 2009-10 should approval be obtained for the dam?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I want to thank Mr Gibson for the question. As you rightly pointed out during the phrasing of your question, the approval of the dam is a matter that is still the subject of the Coordinator-General's independent environmental assessment and we need to make sure that we reiterate those issues in that context. It is important to appreciate that the early works in the area that were outlined in the supplementary EIS did not consider the delay in approval. They were outlined on the basis that it was as scheduled. So I do not think it is—

Mr GIBSON: I am looking at the funding that has been allocated and just confirming that this is for the environmental rehabilitation work and not for preliminary site work.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Absolutely. Those things were not taken into account. This is around those preliminary environmental issues that have been identified as a consequence of the supplementary EIS process.

Mr GIBSON: One last question on Traveston and then I will have to move on to something less interesting.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: We can keep going.

Mr GIBSON: I note the answers to questions on notice both asked by me and the member for Chatsworth where we sought examples of the type of mitigation measures that are expected to be funded from that \$75 million detailed on page 90 of Budget Paper No. 3. I note that in both of those answers to those questions on notice you failed to provide one example. Can you give us just one example of the planned habitat and vegetation restoration that would be funded from that \$75 million, or one example of a relevant catchment management activity that will be funded from that \$75 million?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I want to thank Mr Gibson for his question and draw to his attention that there are a range of proactive strategies for rehabilitation activities that will enhance the catchment's existing degraded riparian and aquatic areas.

Mr GIBSON: You obviously do not like cattle. I read about your—

CHAIR: Member for Gympie, I will explain how this works. You ask the questions; the minister answers them.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Those mitigation matters are measures that are being considered by QWI and will be submitted to the Coordinator-General for consideration, but if you want to have some examples I can draw your attention to examples, which include the establishment of the Freshwater Species Conservation Centre—

Mr GIBSON: I am aware of that.

Mr HINCHLIFFE:—which I am sure you are aware of, a range of habitat and vegetation registration projects that can be delivered and a range of relevant catchment management initiatives.

Mr GIBSON: I will ask again: one example, Minister. Surely in coming to a figure of \$75 million there would have been some discussion about, 'Let's do this. That will cost us a couple of million. We'll throw that into the pile. Let's draw on this idea. Perhaps that will cost us \$10 million. Put that in the pile.' I am just seeking one, Minister, just one example.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: To answer Mr Gibson's question, these are matters that are subject to consideration by QWI and will be submitted to the Coordinator-General for his consideration.

Mr GIBSON: You have no idea, do you? You have not got a clue.

CHAIR: Member for Gympie!

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I am happy to flag that these are matters that QWI are considering, and I am happy to confirm any specific examples that might illustrate the broader examples that I have already outlined. But if you are looking for something more specific than examples such as the Freshwater Species Conservation Centre—I think we know what we are talking about there—I am happy to get that information from QWI and provide it.

Mr GIBSON: That was the intention of the questions on notice by me and the member for Chatsworth, but I am happy to have it on notice again, and if we can get one example I would be really chuffed.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I think one example was clearly provided in relation to the Freshwater Species Conservation Centre.

Mr GIBSON: Minister, I am asking the questions; you answer them, thank you. With regard to the Urban Land Development Authority—

Mr HINCHLIFFE: You asked another question then. So I am even happy to give you an answer to that. I would appreciate three minutes if I need it to answer that.

CHAIR: We will take a step down. I call the member for Gympie.

Mr GIBSON: With regard to the Urban Land Development Authority, under the administrative items section of the SDS, you may have noticed that the UDIA last week released a report showing that Queensland needs 1,000 homes a week every week for the next year to meet its growing population but is currently building only 500 homes a week every week. You recently answered a question on notice that showed that only 280 blocks of land will be released through the ULDA in the next 12 months. This represents a shortfall of over 25,000 homes. How is this a good outcome for Queensland?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Mr Gibson, I can assure you that, while the Urban Land Development Authority is a fantastic initiative of this government that will provide excellent leadership across industry and particularly to local authorities around the delivery of developable land in a way that responds to the challenges of a growing state and the need to include sustainability outcomes and high-quality urban design outcomes, it is not the only way in which urban land is being delivered in our state.

I understand the issues that have been raised by the UDIA, but it is the leadership that the ULDA will show, through some of those projects I have mentioned already in answer to questions, and the assistance of measures contained within the Sustainable Planning Bill that is before the House—and I will not go into great detail about it because that would cause a problem with our standing orders—that will provide a better framework for the delivery of land infrastructure.

While I am at it, I have an answer to a question that was raised, if the committee would like to receive that. It was a question from Mr Gibson about the expenditure on the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program projects by type—that is, roads, public transport, health, water et cetera—for 2008-09 and also the 2009-10 budget and forward estimates and a breakdown of funding measures. In terms of infrastructure class, if we can put it that way—this is the figures for estimated investment over the life of the plan—for transport it is \$94 billion. Sorry, I have the wrong figure here.

Mr SEENEY: I suggest the minister table the answer and put us all out of our misery.

CHAIR: The minister has to offer to table it.

Mr SEENEY: I present the minister with the opportunity to table it.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I thank Mr Seeney for his kindness, but I can, after a bit of a struggle, get this out. The infrastructure class, transport—these figures are in millions of dollars.

Mr GIBSON: Sorry, millions?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Millions of dollars. It is 94,624. Industry development, 136; water, 4,559; energy—and I should note this is up to the 2012-13 year—3,312; health, 5,804; education and training, 2,901; community services, 3,570; regional sport and recreation, 184—

Mr GIBSON: Sorry to interrupt. The original question was by project. If that information is not there, I am still happy to take it on notice.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Sorry, that is not what was provided to us. It does not say 'by projects by type'.

Mr GIBSON: 'Infrastructure projects by type.'

Mr HINCHLIFFE: It does not say 'by projects by type', Mr Gibson.

Mr GIBSON: I am not sure what you have been presented with, but certainly what I presented to the committee states 'advise expenditure of South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program infrastructure projects by type, listing down for 2008-09 estimated actual, 2009-10 budget and forward estimates and provide a breakdown on local, federal, state, GOC and private sector contribution investments'. I am happy to take that on notice and have the detail provided.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Let me give you more of the information in terms of a breakdown of the government sector and different sectors that have contributed, and we can make sure that we provide the information that you are seeking on notice.

CHAIR: You are entitled to answer the question. I assume you have the same question that I have. We all have the same question? Excellent.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: But it does not say 'by project by type'; it says 'projects by type'.

CHAIR: It is alright to answer the question. It is also your opportunity to take it on notice—whatever you prefer, Minister.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I am happy to take it on notice and make sure we provide the answer to the question as it has been provided to me.

CHAIR: That concludes the consideration of the estimates for the portfolio of the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning. Minister, on behalf of the deputy chair and the committee, I thank you, your staff and the department for their participation in today's proceedings.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Can I thank you, Mr Chair, your committee, the committee staff, Hansard and other parliamentary officers who have supported the estimates process. I also take this opportunity to express my appreciation to my departmental officers and ministerial staff, who have provided significant support in the preparation for this hearing. In conclusion, I also wish my son a happy 12th birthday.

CHAIR: I think we all do.

Mr GIBSON: From our side of politics, I express our thanks to the minister and his staff and also to our committee staff for the great work they have done over a very long day and at times an enjoyable one. Thank you.

CHAIR: Before we conclude, I would also like to thank other committee members; the deputy chair, the member for Callide; the committee secretariat, Renee Easten and Jenny North; Hansard of course, who have put up with us all day; and the parliamentary attendants for their assistance today.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: With my very great apologies to Hansard at this late stage, I do have a minor correction I wish to make. I gave an answer earlier in relation to outstanding claims associated with the Tugun desalination plant and made a reference to 'with the exception of three new claims'. It should have actually been 'four new claims'.

CHAIR: That concludes the committee's consideration of the matters referred to it by the parliament on 3 June 2009. I declare the hearing closed.

Committee adjourned at 5.44 pm.