

**TUESDAY, 21 JULY 2009**

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**ESTIMATES COMMITTEE E—JUSTICE AND ATTORNEY-GENERAL AND  
INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS**

**Estimates Committee E Members**

Mrs JF Miller (Chair)  
Mr GW Elmes  
Mr RG Hopper  
Ms AA Johnstone  
Ms M O'Neill  
Mr LJ Springborg  
Mrs CE Sullivan

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**In Attendance**

Hon. CR Dick, Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations  
Mr D Moss, Senior Policy Advisor  
**Department of Justice and Attorney-General**  
Ms R Hunter, Director-General  
Mr P Clarke, Deputy Director-General, Justice Administration  
Mr B Leahy, Deputy Director-General, Industrial Relations  
Ms A Gardiner, Director, Corporate Governance Branch  
**Electoral Commission of Queensland**  
Mr G Wiltshire, Director, Election Operations

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**Committee met at 9 am.**

**CHAIR:** I declare this meeting of Estimates Committee E now open. Can I start first by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which this hearing is taking place. I am Jo-Ann Miller, the member for Bundamba and chair of this committee. Joining me on the committee are: Glen Elmes, member for Noosa; Ray Hopper, member for Condamine; Amanda Johnstone, member for Townsville; Mary-Anne O'Neill, member for Kallangur; Lawrence Springborg, member for Southern Downs and deputy chair of the committee; and Carryn Sullivan, member for Pumicestone.

The committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Parliament Bill 2009 for the Legislative Assembly and in the Appropriation Bill 2009 for the portfolios of the Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations, the Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland and the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability. We will examine the estimates in that order today.

The proceedings today are lawful proceedings subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. As such, I remind all visitors that any person admitted to this hearing may be excluded in accordance with standing order 206. In relation to media coverage of the hearing, the committee has resolved to allow television film coverage and photography during my introduction and opening statements by the Attorney-General and the ministers. The committee has also agreed to the live broadcast of the hearing via the Parliamentary Services web site and to receivers throughout the parliamentary precinct. Before we begin, can I ask that all mobile phones be switched off now.

The committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2009 for the portfolio of Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations. Attorney, I welcome you and your advisers to the chamber today.

**Mr DICK:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** The committee will examine the portfolio until 12.15 pm with a 15-minute break at 11 am. The time limit for questions is one minute and three minutes for answers. A warning bell will chime 15 seconds before the time runs out. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. For the benefit of Hansard I ask advisers to, if you are called to give an answer, please state your name before speaking.

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Attorney, would you care to make an opening statement?

**Mr DICK:** I would like to very much, chair. The Bligh government is committed to ensuring that the Queensland justice and industrial relations systems continue to deliver the fundamental goals of safety and equity across the state. Through the 2009-10 budget we are navigating the difficult waters of economic uncertainty and global downturn. This year's \$883.9 million investment in the Department of Justice and Attorney General reaffirms the government's commitment to ensuring that Queenslanders are safe, both in their workplaces and in their communities, and that our systems of justice and industrial relations deliver fair and equitable outcomes for all Queenslanders.

The budget before the committee is focused on delivering upon the core commitments this government has made to the people of Queensland; first, through the continued investment in an ambitious \$18.2 billion infrastructure program that will generate employment, stimulate economic growth and provide the bricks and mortar foundation for ongoing reform and growth across the state. Having completed new courthouse projects in Mareeba and Pine Rivers last year, this year will see the completion of the Ipswich courts precinct and the finalising of refurbishments to the Toowoomba Courthouse by the end of 2010, while cranes used in the construction of the new \$600 million Supreme and District Court building begin to dominate the skyline at the other end of George Street. Second, the next 12 months will also see a number of significant reforms projects implemented, projects that mark some of the most broad-ranging and substantial evolutions in the Queensland justice and industrial relations systems this state has seen in generations.

I have already announced that the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal, which will commence operation on 1 December this year, is to be headed by Justice Peter Dutney of the Supreme Court as president and Judge Fleur Kingham of the District Court as deputy president. The Victims Financial Assistance and Services Scheme to replace the state's outdated Criminal Compensation Scheme will also commence later this year. Both of these initiatives will mean better access, more timely results and more consistent outcomes for victims and applicants statewide.

In addition to these reform initiatives, today I am also announcing the implementation from this year of the government's response to the Moynihan review into criminal and civil justice in Queensland. The honourable Martin Moynihan AO QC, former Senior Judge Administrator of the Supreme Court of Queensland, conducted a wide-ranging review of the Queensland justice system last year, delivering a report to government that contained 60 recommendations. The government has considered these recommendations and will now commence a staged rollout of reforms in support of the review. Most significantly, the first stage of reform will increase the civil jurisdiction limits for the District and Magistrates Court to \$750,000 and \$150,000 respectively and to the Small Claims Tribunal, soon to be part of QCAT, to \$25,000. In the criminal jurisdiction, reforms will be implemented to improve disclosure during proceedings and to allow for the summary disposition of more matters in the Magistrates Court where appropriate. These reforms aim to ensure the delivery of justice in our state and ensure that such justice is timely, equitable and reflects the Queensland of the 21st century.

In addition to broader systemic reform, the government has remained committed to ensuring that our prosecutorial service and our legal aid service remain appropriately funded to ensure that they can continue to serve the people of our great state. Additional funding to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions announced last year has meant an increase in prosecutors for the state as well as special funding for the prosecution of major cases. I commend the DPP and his prosecutors on their work, particularly in difficult and complex cases.

Finally, in enforcing penalties in our justice system we are also moving to crack down on recalcitrant debtors who refuse to pay their court ordered and infringement notice fines. Today I am pleased to announce that through a new trial program of wheel clamping, drivers licence suspension and seizure and sale of property, the Queensland government is tightening its grip on money owed to the state by those individuals who have broken the law. By bolstering our ability to recover these moneys we can provide funds that go to services directly assisting Queenslanders across the state.

The Office of Fair and Safe Work Queensland has also been busy and this year will continue to see the government working to make sure workplaces are safe and our industrial relations system is equitable. The government has worked with the Commonwealth to protect the interests of Queensland workers in the private sector through the national IR reform process, while closer to home we continue to work with industry to implement programs such as Zero Harm at Work and to maintain a stringent and proactive workplace health and safety program. There can be no doubt that the challenges to our community remain great in these uncertain economic times, but through it all this government is working harder than ever to ensure Queenslanders can feel safe and confident that they live in a state where justice is fair and the workplace is equitable.

**CHAIR:** I call the member for Southern Downs.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I refer to Service Delivery Statement page 1-170 in relation to Supreme Court appeals. Attorney, can you indicate to the committee if one of those appeals is going to be against the lenient sentence handed down to corrupt former Labor minister Gordon Nuttall and how much money have you allocated for that appeal?

**Mr DICK:** I am pleased to be able to report to the committee on the improvements in the process of managing appeals in our court system. As the honourable member will know, I provided him with an answer to a question on notice for this committee that set out how the courts have improved their disposition of appellate matters in the state. The commitment this government makes is to ensuring that we have an appropriately funded justice system and an appropriately funded court system.

Can I indicate to the committee that despite the increased workload, the Court of Appeal has achieved a clearance rate of 91 per cent for civil matters compared to a target of 105 per cent, and an exceptional clearance rate of 120 per cent in criminal matters compared to a target of 100 per cent. That is a combined clearance rate of 107 per cent. That means the court is disposing of more matters than it is receiving filings of each year.

The trial division of the Supreme Court is also progressing well in the clearance rate of its matters at first instance. In the Supreme Court there were no cases pending in the Court of Appeal after 24 months and only six per cent of civil cases and four per cent of criminal cases were older than 24 months in the trial division. We are managing the backlogs well. We report regularly against those in respect of the report on government services and on other reporting measures as required under the budgetary reporting requirements for the state.

I am very pleased with the achievements of the court. We should all be proud of how hard our judicial officers work at the Supreme, District and Magistrates Court levels. They deliver justice in a fair and equitable fashion for all Queenslanders. They work very diligently in the third arm of government, the arm of government that all of us in public life should respect and should ensure remains independent of the political process. Regrettably we have a poor history in Queensland of those in the executive seeking to influence law enforcement and the operation of the justice system more broadly. Thankfully, the architecture of Fitzgerald has ensured that we have appropriate measures in place to correct and to attack misconduct and criminal activity. That is an achievement of a Labor government that all Queenslanders should be very significantly proud of.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I thank the Attorney for working very wide on that question, not necessarily getting to the nub of it. Attorney, I also can read the SDS and understand the work of the Court of Appeal, but as you are aware, you are the guardian of the public interest and have to stand in the public interest when it comes to the lodgement of an appeal in cases where you believe there has been a lenient sentence. I ask you again: will one of those 340 appeals that have been proposed for this year be an appeal against the lenient sentence that has been handed out against corrupt former Labor minister Gordon Nuttall?

**Mr DICK:** I think it should be recognised that Mr Nuttall has been sentenced to seven years imprisonment. The earliest date for parole as ordered by the court is after he serves two and a half years. All members of the committee should be aware that the nature of our parole system is that he is not released at that date, he is released upon application to the Parole Board and that application being processed. It is a matter for the Parole Board to determine whether he is released. Let it not be forgotten by the committee that Mr Nuttall will be stripped of his public contributions to his parliamentary superannuation scheme. As I have said publicly, the state will be seeking to recover and confiscate the proceeds of his criminal activity—which rightly should be condemned by all Queenslanders. He is a man who took secret commissions while he held high office in this state. We will be recovering the \$360,000 that Mr Nuttall secretly obtained, plus interest. He is also a man who will serve time in jail.

I am very pleased with how the system of justice has worked in Queensland. We have caught someone who has acted corruptly and again I reaffirm to the committee that this is the Fitzgerald architecture working. This is the process that was set in place to ensure integrity in public service and public office in the state. We should all be very pleased that the system works and works well. Anyone who assumes high office in this state knows that they must act with the highest of standards and the highest of propriety. If they act criminally they will be caught and they will be prosecuted. So our system should be.

Mr Nuttall has suffered a sentence of imprisonment. He will be stripped of his entitlements. His home will be sold to satisfy the debt owing to the state, if necessary. This is something that we have secured by way of a caveat and a restraint order. We will be seeking to strip him of his superannuation as well. He is being pursued as he should. Those systems, those checks and balances, are working and working well.

All Queenslanders and members of the committee should acknowledge how the corrupt conduct by the National Party in government in the 1980s, which led to the Fitzgerald inquiry, has led to a new and better system in this state through the leadership of Tony Fitzgerald as commissioner and has resulted in substantial reform to the administration of public office in this state.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Madam Chair, I would be very happy to engage the Attorney in debate as to appropriate or inappropriate conduct of members of parliament, including two of his former colleagues who have been convicted on paedophilia charges.

**CHAIR:** Can you get to the question, please.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I take the attorney's answer as a 'no'. As 340 other matters are to be appealed and given the nature of the public interest in the lenient sentence handed down to Mr Nuttall, why doesn't the Attorney consider that the sentence is too lenient and should be appealed, thus restoring public confidence in the justice system? Specifically, can the Attorney indicate to me if Mr Nuttall is known to him personally? Has the Attorney ever worked for Mr Nuttall, has he ever worked with Mr Nuttall and does this compromise his capacity to be able to impartially decide whether an appeal is justified?

**CHAIR:** Can you explain to me where the relevance of this is in the SDS?

**Mr DICK:** I am happy to answer the question.

**CHAIR:** Member for Southern Downs, is this a continuation of your previous question?

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Yes, because it relates specifically to SDS 1-170 in relation to the 340 appeals that the Attorney is predicting this year and public confidence in the justice system, which is also mentioned throughout the SDS.

**Mr DICK:** I am happy to answer the question. It does not surprise me one jot that the opposition of this place, in a budget of \$883 million, seeks to pursue political issues and populist political lines through the estimates process. It does not surprise me at all. Can I just indicate that the question from the member for Southern Downs is reflective of his ongoing pattern of behaviour in that regard. This is the same member of parliament who called on me publicly—publicly—to ring the Commissioner of Police in respect of a police prosecution and a bail matter that occurred in a court in Queensland. He said, in a media statement, that I should ring the Commissioner of Police and ask him to take action in respect of that matter. I find it quite extraordinary—extraordinary indeed—that the member for Southern Downs, who has served in this parliament for 20 years and served in the parliament immediately after the election following the commission of inquiry conducted by Tony Fitzgerald, would call on me publicly to ring the Commissioner of Police to instruct him to take action in a matter before the courts. It indicates that he has learnt nothing about the past and, regrettably, seeks to occupy high office in this state as the deputy leader and presumably the alternative deputy premier of the state.

It should also not be forgotten that, in an extraordinary statement recently, the Leader of the Opposition said of the recent conviction of Mr Nuttall, rightly convicted and convicted by a jury of his peers, that that sort of conduct is worse than Fitzgerald. The Leader of the Opposition demonstrates no knowledge of political history in this state and no knowledge of the past. He has done either one of two things: he has deliberately misrepresented what is in the Fitzgerald report or he has no understanding or knowledge of what happened in the 1980s. On either count, it makes him unfit to be the Leader of the Opposition, in my view, and unfit to put himself forward as the alternative Premier of the state. It is very regrettable that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition continues to pursue this line of questioning.

I have not worked for Mr Nuttall. I will make that quite clear. I have never worked with him. I seek to answer that question. I have nothing to hide. I will put that on the record quite clearly. But I will continue to discharge my duties fairly, equitably and in accordance with law, as I have to as a member of this parliament and also as the Attorney-General.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Again, I note that the Attorney is not going to appeal the lenient sentence handed down against corrupt former Labor minister Gordon Nuttall. I now ask the Attorney to indicate to the committee, in relation to SDS 1-168, what has been the cost per day for the preparation for the matters of Watson, Nuttall and Patel to date and how much money could have been saved in preparation had your government proceeded with the additional charges against Nuttall during his recent corruption trial?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the member for his question. As the member rightly knows, the prosecuting authorities in this state are independent of the executive and the government. The Crime and Misconduct Commission, a body that was established following the Fitzgerald report into the, might I say, systemic and systematic corruption of the National Party administration of this state, was

established as one of the great legacies of the Fitzgerald inquiry. Of course, we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Fitzgerald report. It was handed down early in July 1989, so we are just a few short weeks after the 20th anniversary. I do not interfere or intervene in the prosecution process in this state. That is left, quite rightly, to independent officers both within the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and the CMC. I do not interfere with that, I do not give them direction and I do not seek to do so. Those decisions are made independent of government.

I would put on the record that the Director of Public Prosecutions Act was passed by this parliament in 1984 under a former National Party led coalition. That independent office was created 25 years ago this year and it is an independent office. I do not seek to interfere or intervene in that. Decisions to prosecute are not based, nor should they be based, on any financial issue. They are based on merit and according to law. They are the decisions that prosecutors make every day in the courts in Queensland. The Queensland community should be confident in the work—very confident in the work—that prosecutors do each and every day in this state. Each and every day prosecutors in this state put people behind bars for breaking the law.

It is only in circumstances where a sentence might be manifestly inadequate that I would exercise a power under section 669A of the Criminal Code to lodge an appeal. That section was inserted into the Criminal Code 70 years ago, as I understand it, and provides for an appeal by the Attorney-General against a sentence. It is a power that I exercise where the sentence is manifestly inadequate and I will do so. But as to prosecution, I stand separate, as should all politicians, as should all members of the executive and as should all members of the parliament. We stand separate from that process that is conducted independently in our state.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I take the Premier—sorry, the Attorney-General back to SDS—

**Mr DICK:** Thank you for the promotion.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I know you desire that promotion. The white-haired boy coming through, I understand, as everyone else is falling up the front. Good luck.

**CHAIR:** Member, could we get to the question please.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** It will be a meteoric rise, Madam Chair. Back to SDS 1-170 relating to the Attorney's reserve powers of appeal—of which there are going to be a suggested 340 this year—as indicated under section 669A of the Criminal Code. I am concerned about the lenient sentence handed down against corrupt former Labor minister Gordon Nuttall and the Attorney not standing in the public interest. Attorney, do you know Mr Nuttall personally?

**CHAIR:** That has already been asked by you, member for Southern Downs.

**Mr DICK:** I am happy to take the question.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** He answered other aspects of the question.

**CHAIR:** Okay.

**Mr DICK:** I am pleased to talk to this issue of appeals that the member for Southern Downs continues to pursue. As the members of the committee will note from page 1-170 of the SDS, that is an estimated number of criminal law appeals in this state. It is not 340 appeals by the Attorney-General of Queensland—

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** That is right.

**Mr DICK:**—as the member for Southern Downs seems to wish to force on the committee. It is a general number of criminal law appeals in the state. When one considers the thousands of matters—tens of thousands of matters, in fact—that go through the criminal justice system in the state each year, Queenslanders should be confident to know that the system is working. If the estimate of criminal law appeals is somewhere between 330 and 350, that shows that courts are working, courts are sentencing people according to law, courts are sentencing people in a way that means the number of criminal appeals proceeding in this state is very limited indeed. So all members of the committee, the constituents you represent and all Queenslanders should be confident about the criminal justice process in this state. But matters need to be appealed. Sometimes judges do get it wrong and on those occasions appeals are lodged and our appellate system, which is something that works robustly and well in our state, leads to a review of those decisions. But generally speaking, they are a small number of matters given the thousands of the matters that go through the courts in our state each year. So the system works well and is delivering positive outcomes.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Is Mr Nuttall going to be one of those 340?

**Mr DICK:** I do want to indicate that this government has continued to increase funding for the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. In 2008-09 that office was allocated a further \$3.4 million in funding to assist in major prosecutions. When the office requires funding, including pursuing Dr Jayant Patel for criminal conduct—that matter is now proceeding through the courts—the funding will be

provided and we will ensure that our fine prosecutors in this state have the tools they need to carry out their duties and to pursue people who carry out criminal wrongdoing. It is a hallmark of this government and previous Labor administrations that we provide the resources, when they are needed, to our prosecutors.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I turn to page 1-117 of the SDS under strategic planning. I note that a moment ago the Attorney-General was vowing and declaring the Fitzgerald report as his bible. The Fitzgerald report also said that members should not lie before the parliament. Attorney-General, under your strategic policy planning process for the year, will the anti-lying law, which was repealed by your government, be one of those laws that will be reintroduced, knowing what we know about Mr Nuttall now? Have you actually adhered to that section of the Fitzgerald report?

**Mr DICK:** I am interested in the member's question and thank him for it. The member for Southern Downs has been pursuing this matter for the best part of four years, is it? I cannot remember.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** A good three and a half.

**Mr DICK:** It has been so long. There have been two state elections since that time. I find it quite interesting that the member for Southern Downs thinks that our parliament should be separate and different to every other parliament in the common law world in the Westminster tradition. This parliament has the power to deal with people for contempt. The range of penalties that can be imposed on members of parliament for acting in contempt of the parliament are very significant indeed and can include very significant penalties. It is up to the parliament to be the master of its own house and to control the conduct of members of parliament. I would recognise that, notwithstanding the urgings of the member for Southern Downs, all members of this parliament are subject to those rulings and all members of this parliament, regardless of political affiliation and tradition, have been subject to contempt proceedings.

I recall well when then Attorney-General of Queensland, Denver Beanland, was held in contempt of the parliament for failing to act upon a vote of no confidence in him passed by the parliament. The member for Southern Downs was, of course, a member of the cabinet in which Mr Beanland served in this state. I do not recall—and I am happy to be corrected by the member for Southern Downs—that he sought any criminal sanction against Mr Beanland. It was one of the most extraordinary events in parliamentary history in this country, that a minister of the Crown would have a vote of no confidence carried against him and ignore the demonstrated will of the parliament and fail to act; fail to discharge and act in any way that a proper member of the executive should be following the will of the parliament.

As members of the executive, we are drawn from and responsible to the parliament and so we should be. That is at the apex of our parliamentary and democratic system. This matter has been considered by the parliament. It has been considered at length by the parliament. I also understand a former Treasurer of this state, Joan Sheldon, was held in contempt of the parliament and had to apologise for being in contempt. Again, the system does work. Regrettably, some members of parliament seek to snub their noses at that and act contrary to the express will of the parliament, but all parliaments in this country have the ability—

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** It is not suggested that anyone has been charged with perjuring themselves against the parliament—

**Mr DICK:** All members of this parliament are subject to the rules that apply in all other parliaments in the Westminster tradition, including the United Kingdom House of Commons, the Commonwealth parliament, the parliament of New South Wales, the parliament of Tasmania, the parliament of South Australia, the parliament of Western Australia and the assemblies of the ACT and the Northern Territory, which regulate the behaviour and conduct of members of parliament.

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

**Mrs SULLIVAN:** I refer the Attorney-General to page 1-162 of the Service Delivery Statement regarding the Moynihan review of criminal and civil court processes. Would the Attorney-General outline his response to the review and the benefits for the Queensland justice system?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable member for her question. As I outlined in my opening statement, the government has now had the opportunity to consider the Moynihan report. I am pleased to announce today that this major overhaul of court processes and procedures and associated jurisdictional matters will modernise and streamline Queensland's civil and criminal justice system. Trials in Queensland will be heard faster and more efficiently in the most sweeping reforms to the state's criminal justice system in decades. These reforms are about providing a justice system for the Queensland of the 21st century. It is timely, in Queensland's 150th year, to consider the way in which the state's justice system has evolved but also the need to address the aged processes and inefficiencies that have emerged as the years have passed.

While great reforms have taken place over the past 150 years, there are aspects of our justice system which now fail to meet the needs of modern-day Queensland. There is a real need for reforms to address such shortcomings in the system and respond to the increasingly complex demands we put on

our courts. Public confidence in the justice system is based on cases being dealt with quickly, fairly and with the most effective use of public resources. That is what these reforms are all about. Reforms to the committal process will reserve court involvement for situations needing a judicial officer and streamline hearings by requiring reasonable justification for calling and examining witnesses.

Disclosure provisions will be improved by making them simpler, clearer and more consistent, with courts given more power to deal with noncompliance. Changes to sentencing laws will encourage greater clarity regarding the benefit of an early guilty plea. Magistrates will be given the authority to deal with a wider range of criminal offences but will still be able to refer cases to a higher court in cases of serious and complex matters or where there are other exceptional circumstances. The criminal jurisdiction of the District Court will also be increased, from offences with a maximum penalty of 14 years imprisonment to those with a maximum of 20 years imprisonment.

The reforms will extend to civil matters, with significantly increased monetary limits for minor disputes heard in the Small Claims Tribunal, which will be amalgamated into the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal from December, and cases in the Magistrates Court and District Court. QCAT's monetary jurisdiction will be increased to \$85,000, the Magistrates Court to \$150,000 and the District Court to \$275,000. These changes will nearly treble the monetary value of matters that can be heard at each level.

Consistent with the Moynihan review, legislative reform will be implemented in two stages, with the focus on delivering key efficiencies. An interim bill will be introduced to the parliament later this year dealing with committals, disclosure, sentencing, criminal jurisdiction and civil monetary limits. The second stage of reforms will involve the development of a new criminal justice procedure act and uniform criminal procedure rules and reforms to consolidate, modernise and streamline criminal justice procedure in Queensland. I thank the honourable Martin Moynihan for providing government with thoughtful and considered recommendations. Today's announcement of the government's response to those recommendations heralds a new era in the delivery of criminal and civil justice in our state.

**Ms O'NEILL:** I refer the Attorney-General to the entry on page 1-172 of the Service Delivery Statement regarding the State Penalties Enforcement Registry. Can the Attorney-General explain what steps are being taken to ensure that offenders who incur a fine pay that fine?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable member for her question. The State Penalties Enforcement Registry is critical to preserving public confidence in the criminal justice system by maintaining the integrity of fines as a credible deterrent and sentencing option for our courts. Before this government established SPER in the year 2000, the total recovery of unpaid fines was around \$24 million a year. Last financial year SPER collected more than \$143.8 million in unpaid fines and infringement fees—a sixfold increase in just nine years. The message to people is clear: if you do the wrong thing, you will be fined and, if you do not pay up on time, your fine will not go away.

Much of the increase in collection has been achieved through the introduction of automated civil enforcement actions such as redirecting money from bank accounts or wages and registering interests over property. SPER has also invested heavily in staff training and call centre technology. The government will continue to build on that good work in pursuit of even the most recalcitrant fine dodgers. I am pleased to announce today that significant new compliance and enforcement strategies will be implemented over the next two years to crack down on people who refuse to pay their fines. From 1 January next year SPER will begin wheel-clamping motor vehicles as part of a 12-month trial in Brisbane targeting fine defaulters whose outstanding fines exceed \$5,000.

Legislation will also be introduced to strengthen SPER's existing powers to seize and sell goods. This will be trialled in the metropolitan Brisbane area using Brisbane Magistrates Court bailiffs. The ability to suspend debtors' driver's licences will also be extended to assist in the enforcement of all unpaid fines, not just those relating to motor vehicle offences. SMS technology will be used to send warning messages to debtors when enforcement action is about to be taken such as cancelling lapsed instalment plans or suspending driver's licences. SPER wheel-clamp stickers will act as a visual deterrent to other would-be fine dodgers in the community. This will send a strong message to people who thumb their nose at fines: pay up or risk losing your wheels.

The community expects that people who receive a fine for breaking the law will repay their debt in full. This action will send a clear warning to fine defaulters that if they turn their back on their fines they will not get away with it. By reinforcing the effectiveness of fines as a deterrent penalty the government is hopeful that these strategies will also help to reduce the incidence of actual offences.

**Ms JOHNSTONE:** I refer the Attorney-General to page 1-161 of the Service Delivery Statement relating to the construction of the new Supreme and District courts complex in Brisbane's CBD. Can the Attorney-General please advise the committee on progress of construction and how the project is helping to secure jobs?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the member for her question. The new Supreme and District courts project is the largest government civil construction project within the Brisbane CBD in living memory and has a total budget of \$600 million. The Bligh government is investing \$152 million in this project in 2009-10 as

part of the \$18.2 billion Capital Works Program across Queensland. An undertaking of this magnitude and complexity creates substantial employment across a wide range of trades and professions—up to 5,000 jobs over the life of the project. There are approximately 100 workers on site at present and by the end of the year that will double to 200. At its peak there will be up to 450 workers on the site. This project is helping the Bligh government to meet our key election commitment to creating and supporting jobs.

The floor area of the new building will be around 60,000 square metres, not counting the adjoining public square. To give some idea of scale, the new complex will be around twice the size of Brisbane's State Law Building. The design is also far more complex than a typical office block, with state-of-the-art security, air conditioning, electrical systems and environmental features. The project will also support hundreds of off-site jobs for fabricators, technicians and other tradespeople as well as architects, engineers and project management staff.

Despite extended wet weather since on-site work began in October last year, construction is proceeding well. Preliminary earthworks included the removal of more than 60,000 cubic metres of old fill to clear the basement areas, supported by 450 metres of retaining walls and pipes. Since then, three major construction cranes have been erected on site—one of which is believed to be the largest ever used in the Brisbane CBD. A full-size courtroom prototype has been established at Strathpine to ensure layouts and technical systems are the best possible before work starts on the first of 39 courtrooms to be built in the new complex.

The basement floor has been laid and concrete cores for the building's 17 lifts have been poured to ground level. By Christmas the structure of the building will be well above ground level and the full scale of this project will become increasingly evident over the next two years. Once complete, the Brisbane Supreme and District courts will be one of the most impressive courthouses in the country and will contribute to efficient, timely and fair access to justice for all Queenslanders. This major project highlights the Bligh government's commitment to jobs and our commitment to important infrastructure for the future of our state.

**CHAIR:** I refer the Attorney-General to pages 1-161 and 1-164 of the Service Delivery Statement regarding the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. How has the Bligh government's multimillion dollar funding boost for the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions strengthened Queensland's prosecution services?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable member for her very important question about the operation of our prosecutorial service in this state. The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions plays a fundamental role in our criminal justice system and is charged with being the voice of Queenslanders in that system. Each year the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions manages about 12,000 criminal matters ranging from committals in the Magistrates Court, trials in the District and Supreme courts, appeals in the Court of Appeal and representing the state in the High Court of Australia. The Bligh government is determined to ensure that our prosecution services have adequate funding to keep pace with the increasing number of cases coming before our courts.

The Bligh government has a very strong and very real commitment to delivering the fairest, the most equitable and the most efficient justice system in the country. This is reflected in the July 2008 announcement of a \$4 million increase in base funding for the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions in the 2008-09 financial year to address workload increases caused by the appointment of four additional judges and also specific funding for prosecutions conducted in Far North Queensland. This funding increases to \$4.3 million in 2009-10 and ongoing years, equating to \$17.2 million over the next four years.

I am pleased to advise that, as a result of our funding boost, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions has increased its number of staff throughout the state, particularly in regional centres. The office has engaged an additional seven prosecutors, seven legal officers and three legal support officers—a total of 17. Most of these increases have been in Cairns and Townsville, which has allowed prosecutors in these centres to focus on trial preparation and advocacy. The increase in staffing levels has resulted in a reduction in the average case load for prosecutors of about 26 per cent in regional areas and 16 per cent in Brisbane.

The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions is structured into 16 prosecution chambers—seven in Brisbane and the remaining nine in Southport, Beenleigh, Ipswich, Toowoomba, Maroochydore, Rockhampton, Mackay, Townsville and Cairns. In the past, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions' greatest challenge was its increasing workload, particularly in regional areas, and the complexity of the matters. With increasing funding, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions has been able to address the workload issues of each of its chambers and ensure that they are appropriately resourced. Each chamber is now organised into a number of standard work groups, each consisting of one prosecutor, one legal officer and one legal support officer. The number of work groups in each chamber depends on the number of incoming matters the chamber receives. A standard staffing model has been applied to achieve a standardised level of work across the practice.



**Mrs SULLIVAN:** My question refers to the new Victims Financial Assistance and Services Scheme, listed on page 1-161 of the Service Delivery Statement. Would the Attorney-General explain how this scheme will better assist Queensland's victims of crime?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable member for her question and her interest in these matters. Despite these tough economic times, the Bligh government is committed to ensuring victims of crime have timely access to the support they need to get their lives back on track. The Victims Financial Assistance and Services Scheme, otherwise known as VFASS, will replace existing provisions under the Criminal Offence Victims Act. The new Victims Financial Assistance and Services Scheme will ensure victims of crime have access to faster and more effective financial assistance and coordinated support services than ever before. The Bligh government is determined to do everything we can to help reduce the effects of crime on their lives and enable victims to get back on their feet. I know it is a matter that the honourable member has a significant interest in.

Funding to operate the new scheme will increase from \$21.2 million to \$25.3 million in 2009-10 and then to \$28.8 million by 2011-12. Primary victims, who have personally experienced acts of violence, will continue to be eligible for financial assistance up to \$75,000. Financial assistance for related victims, such as the dependants of those killed through criminal offence, will increase from a maximum of \$39,000 to \$100,000 per family.

The reforms will introduce a new category for secondary victims, such as badly traumatised witnesses and parents of injured children, with assistance of up to \$50,000. However, the new scheme will move away from the focus on lump sum compensation and will identify the actual assistance needed for treatment and support to help victims recover as quickly as possible. The changes will also establish interim assistance of up to \$6,000 for all categories of victims eligible for financial assistance. This is to cover urgent expenses such as funeral bills or relocation costs where the home is a crime scene.

In addition to providing faster, easier access to financial assistance, the new scheme will improve the delivery of services to victims of crime in Queensland. This will be achieved through the creation of a Victims Assistance Unit within the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. The new unit will provide a one-stop shop to help victims access financial assistance and a wide range of services from government and non-government agencies. It will also provide them with practical support through the criminal justice process. These reforms will cut red tape and streamline services so victims can access the funding and support they need as quickly as possible. It is anticipated that the Victims of Crime Assistance Bill will be introduced into parliament later this year.

**Ms O'NEILL:** I refer the Attorney-General to pages 1-161 and 1-162 of the Service Delivery Statements regarding the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal, and I ask: would the Attorney-General provide an update on the progress of implementing the new arrangements and explain how the community will benefit from establishing a single body?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable member for her question and for her interest in the justice system in the state. The Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal, also known as QCAT, is one of the most significant reforms to our justice system in half a century and the people of Queensland are about to reap the benefits. The government has committed a further \$3.3 million this financial year to the creation of QCAT. That takes our total investment in this front-line service initiative to \$6.5 million over two years.

QCAT will make it easier for Queenslanders to access justice in an independent, efficient and accessible tribunal. Last year the government gave a commitment to establish a new modern, efficient and accessible system of civil and criminal justice for Queenslanders, and the Bligh government has delivered on that commitment. QCAT will amalgamate the functions of 23 existing bodies and provide ready access to civil and administrative justice through a single gateway. Queenslanders will no longer have to negotiate the maze of administrative review bodies, tribunals and courts just to identify the appropriate avenue for redress.

QCAT will enhance the consistency and quality of decision making through increased standardisation of procedures, the requirement to provide reasons, greater sharing of knowledge and resources, and improved access to appeals. There will also be an enhanced focus on early resolution of disputes through more consistent use of alternative dispute resolution services.

QCAT will deal with a wide range of issues including disputes about minor debts, retail shop leases, residential tenancies and building disputes. It will also review decisions of government agencies and statutory bodies, make guardianship and administration orders, and conduct disciplinary hearings for a range of professions and occupations. The additional funding provided in last month's budget will help ensure a smooth transition to the new arrangements on 1 December this year. This has been a massive project, but we are well on track.

The QCAT Act was passed last month. Supporting rules and regulations are being drafted and new positions are being advertised. A common case management system, streamlined business processes and new website are also being developed along with staff programs. Existing facilities are

being modified so QCAT can operate effectively from one convenient location in Queen Street. Very importantly, a service plan is being prepared to ensure regional and rural Queenslanders also have ready access to the tribunal.

Finally, last week I was pleased to announce that Supreme Court justice Peter Dutney QC has accepted the position of president and District Court judge Fleur Kingham the position of deputy president. These are two outstanding members of the Queensland judiciary who are highly qualified to lead the transition to QCAT and to lead that body. The end result of these changes will be a less formal and legalistic avenue for redress that is more responsive to community needs.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I refer the Attorney to page 210 of the SDS. My question relates particularly to the role of the CMC in ensuring public confidence in our institutions, investigating crime and official misconduct. My question to the Attorney-General is: are other Labor members of parliament under investigation in relation to GBG Project Management, the water report which the now convicted, corrupt Labor minister Gordon Nuttall has been involved in?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable member for his question. How could I possibly know who is being investigated by independent prosecuting authorities in Queensland? For all I know, the member for Southern Downs could be being investigated by the Crime and Misconduct Commission.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Well I can indicate today that I have not been.

**Mr DICK:** Not that you are aware of, at least. I do not anticipate that the member is being investigated, might I add.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Well I don't even know the people involved in this.

**Mr DICK:** I will reiterate what I have said previously: I do not run the CMC. I do not manage the CMC. I do not direct the CMC. I am not the chairperson of the CMC. My job as Attorney is to ensure the CMC has the resources it needs to do its job according to law—according to the statute that creates the CMC and the powers invested in the CMC by statute. I am quite confident in the capacity of the chair of the CMC and all of the officers who work in that body who investigate official misconduct and who investigate serious crime that they act in the best interests of Queensland and in the best interests of all Queenslanders.

I make no inquiry. I let the independent investigatory and prosecutorial bodies in this state do their work. The last thing we need is to go back to a system where politicians involve themselves in criminal prosecutions in this state. I let them get on with the job. I let them do their job, and they do it well and they protect the public interest in this state.

The Crime and Misconduct Commission, as the SDS indicates, has three outputs—crime, misconduct and witness protection. Can I also add witness protection to what I said earlier? It is a very important program that the CMC carries out. What are the strategic goals of the CMC? They are to prevent and combat crime, promote high standards of integrity and reduce misconduct in the public sector, provide an effective witness protection service, and be an effective, respected and productive organisation serving all Queenslanders. They are admirable goals indeed.

All members of this committee will know that the government has acted to implement various amendments to the Crime and Misconduct Act, as recommended from CMC reports. We have acted recently to ensure the integrity of umbrella references and also to strengthen criminal powers in respect of official misconduct.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** The Attorney mentioned the role of the CMC before, particularly in relation to witness protection, which is also covered in the SDS. Certainly he would be aware of the whistleblower in the case of GBG Project Management. When this matter was raised in parliament, [*remainder of sentence expunged from record*]. Is this person under witness protection at the moment?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable member for the question. With respect, Madam Chair, one finds it very difficult to know where to start in a parliamentary examination of public expenditure about whether we should be discussing whether an individual is subject to a witness protection program. What an extraordinary suggestion by the member for Southern Downs. What an extraordinary initiative that he would come to this committee—a public committee which has the full powers of the parliament—and ask the Attorney-General or anyone in the executive whether someone is subject to a witness protection program.

The very nature of witness protection programs is to protect vulnerable witnesses involved in the criminal justice system. I do not know what motivates the member for Southern Downs sometimes. It is far beyond me to speculate on those matters, but I will not be commenting on any individual not known to me, I might say—again, a matter that I make no inquiry about. I let the CMC do its job. A very important, critical part of its criminal activities is to protect witnesses who may be critical witnesses in criminal justice proceedings. They are protected for a purpose. They are protected to ensure their safety and security as witnesses. Sometimes it is beyond when they give evidence. Sometimes people need to be protected for considerable periods because they have put themselves at risk by participating fully in the criminal justice system.

I indicate to the committee that the number of admissions to the Crime and Misconduct Committee's witness protection program is dependent upon requests made by law enforcement agencies, principally the Queensland Police Service, and the suitability of applicants for the program. Further, the witness protection program is voluntary, leaving a person offered admission to the program the freedom to accept or reject any offer made.

I can indicate that 51 persons were admitted to the CMC's witness protection program in the 2008-09 year compared to a target in the SDS of 78, but I would indicate that I have no intention of talking about any individual that may be subject to the witness protection program, and I would strongly recommend that no other member of this place engage in such discussion or speculation either.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** My next question without notice relates to responses from the Attorney in relation to the Electoral Commission of Queensland. I think they are questions on notice from non-government members Nos 8, 9 and 10. I refer the Attorney-General to pages 1-230 and 1-231 of the Service Delivery Statements. On page 230 it claims that the Electoral Commission is responsible for promoting the full participation and confidence in the electoral system. Attorney, I refer to the declaration voting user guide prepared for returning officers which outlines the duties of returning officers during the state election campaign. Can you assure this committee that, for every vote counted at the state election, the guidelines were followed?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable member for his question. At the outset I indicate that the Electoral Commission of Queensland is an independent agency—independent of the government, independent of the opposition and independent of all political parties. It is a very significant and important institution in our state.

Before coming to the specific question, I would like to indicate that the 2009 election was conducted very successfully with the following outcomes: the number of enrolled electors was 2,660,940. The voter turnout rate was 90.93 per cent and the informality rate was 1.94 per cent, so a very low informality rate.

In respect of those matters specifically asked, I indicate that the Electoral Commissioner is not present today. He is ill and unable to attend. Could I ask for the deputy electoral commissioner, Garry Wiltshire, to add any further to the answer?

**Mr Wiltshire:** I heard the question. I am not really sure what exactly was intended by it. As far as I am aware, our staff followed the instructional manuals, and all votes were counted, scrutinised and accounted in accordance with those manuals.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I refer to this document which is prepared for returning officers. It is version 5. I am happy for the Acting Electoral Commissioner to see a copy of it. It goes through the procedures which need to be followed by the ROs. It states—

10.1 Step1: Receive Completed Application.

The Elector will return the completed application form, usually by post.

**Note:** All PV/EV applications received are to be dated and signed by the RO before scanning.

Can you, Mr Attorney, or the Acting Electoral Commissioner assure the committee that at the recent state election all postal vote applications were dated and signed before being processed?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the member for the question. Mr Wiltshire has indicated that, to the best of his knowledge, the guidelines for the commission were complied with. He has no information or evidence otherwise that there has been noncompliance with that.

In my answer to the honourable member's question on notice No. 8 I indicated that of the applications issued by the commission I had been advised by the commission that the percentage of postal votes admitted to the count increased from 83.32 per cent at the 2006 state election to 87.39 per cent at the 2009 election. There are a very significant number of postal vote applications that are lodged in an election. The increase alone from 2006 to 2009 was 37,000 postal voters. There are a very significant number of people who postal vote.

I indicate that if the honourable member is aware of any noncompliance then I suggest he bring that to the attention of the Electoral Commissioner and the Electoral Commission of Queensland. Obviously it is a significant and important administrative process to receive applications, to process them, to turn the ballot papers around, to issue them, to then receive them again and put them in the count for the election. It is an important part of our democratic process. Could I indicate that if he has any concerns or a complaint in that regard he should provide that to the Electoral Commission. The Electoral Commission of course is very keen to review its performance after each election to improve the operation of the commission, to improve the system—very important as it is to all Queenslanders.

So I would ask him to provide that information. I am sure that the Electoral Commission, as the independent agency of the state responsible for the conduct of all sorts of elections and ballots, particularly state elections, will take those matters and investigate them as necessary and ensure that if any improvements need to be made they will occur.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I again refer the Attorney to this document which is a user guide for returning officers and I direct the question to the Attorney or the Electoral Commission: can they assure the committee that any or all of the PV/EV applications received have been dated and signed by the returning officer before scanning? What number were dated and signed before scanning as is required under this particular guide for ROs?

**CHAIR:** Minister, you have already answered this question. Would you like to answer it again?

**Mr DICK:** I do not wish to elaborate any further. I think the answer has been clear. To the best of the Electoral Commission's knowledge there has been compliance with the guidelines. But if the honourable member is aware of any matters where, to his knowledge or to the knowledge of anyone else, there has not been compliance with the guidelines I am sure the Electoral Commission would be pleased to receive that information.

The Electoral Commission plays a critically important role in the conduct of democratic ballots in this state, not just general elections but for a whole range of other bodies and institutions, including registered employer organisations and registered employees organisations such as trade unions. The percentage of votes admitted to the count has increased to 87.39 per cent in the 2009 election. That is the critical statistic. There has been an increase. The job of the government is to ensure the commission is appropriately resourced and funded. The government, as do all members of this parliament regardless of political affiliation, take that responsibility to ensure we have a properly resourced and independent electoral commission very seriously. So it should be in a democratic system.

We are very lucky not just in Queensland—and this year is our 150th anniversary of statehood—but in Australia that we have a long and proud system of democratic governance in this country. It is one that has been free of the violence and bloodshed that stains democracy in other nations around the world. It is something that we need to cherish and always seek to improve. If the member has any questions, queries or concerns I am sure the commission is happy to pursue them.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I again return to this particular document which says that all of the PV and EV applications received are to be dated and signed by the returning officer for scanning. I also refer to an email which I have at hand today from crown law—and I am happy to table it—in response to an inquiry on a matter that is currently before the courts. The crown law officer, a principal lawyer of administrative law, advises on this particular point that the commission does not have a record of when postal vote applications are received or when ballots are sent. It goes on to say that the applications are usually processed on the date of receipt. But we have no idea how many of those are actually received and sent out on the day. It would appear to be a clear breach of compliance with the guidelines. I am happy to table that. Minister, would you actually agree with this document which clearly says that they all have to be dated and receipted when they come in?

**CHAIR:** Before the minister answers that question, I would like him to read the tabled document.

**Mr DICK:** I thank the member for his question. I note the chain of emails includes an email from someone in a law firm named who is, I presume, acting on behalf of, if I am not mistaken, an applicant who currently has a matter before the Court of Disputed Returns.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I indicated that. That is true.

**Mr DICK:** You have made that clear at the outset. What I want to indicate is that I think we need to be careful not to put ourselves in contempt of important legal proceedings currently occurring in Queensland. It would appear that some of the matters raised by the member for Southern Downs may impact or relate to those proceedings and potential evidence that may go before the court.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I have received advice that that is not the case.

**Mr DICK:** The honourable member has tabled communications, it appears, between lawyers acting for relevant parties in the proceedings. That is a significant thing for the member to have done. We need to be careful not to put any extra judicial pressure on the court in respect of those proceedings. It would be an egregious thing indeed for this committee to be considering those sorts of matters.

All I can do is reiterate what I said earlier: if there are specific matters in respect of the conduct of the ballot that the member has concern about then he should put that to the commission outside of the court proceedings currently being pursued in this state.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Will you supply on notice details of how many of these PV and EV applications have actually been date stamped and recorded in accordance with this particular document? You should have that information.

**Mr DICK:** I thank the member for his question. The member ought be very careful of the information he is seeking. It would certainly appear, on the face of it, that the information he is seeking through a parliamentary committee—asking me as the Attorney-General and the minister responsible for the Electoral Commission—is information and factual matters that are directly relevant to court proceedings in this state. I have no intention of taking that question on notice. I have no intention of proceeding on those matters.

The member for Southern Downs has served in this parliament for 20 years and knows very well, having vigorously questioned me previously about the nature of parliamentary privilege, that he should be very careful in asking those sorts of questions. If he has concerns in respect of the conduct of the ballot and whether there has been compliance with the guidelines of the commission he should be putting those matters properly to the commission. I put on the record that I do not seek to interfere in any way in court proceedings that may affect the outcome of an election in an electoral district in this state as a result of the 2009 election.

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

**Ms JOHNSTONE:** My question relates to page 1-216 of the Service Delivery Statement. What programs does Legal Aid Queensland have in place to provide legal services and assistance to regional and rural communities?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable member for her question. She is obviously a very active member of this parliament representing the interests not only of the residents of Townsville but also the broader area. She is very interested in the delivery of services in regional Queensland.

Many members would be aware of the important role that Legal Aid Queensland plays in our community. By providing valuable support to the disadvantaged and marginalised it ensures legal services for those who might otherwise go without. The decentralisation of Queensland makes this task particularly challenging.

Legal Aid Queensland strives to develop and implement strategies which will ensure provision of accessible legal services to regional communities. As part of these efforts, Legal Aid Queensland has partnered with local community based legal services to establish the Regional Legal Assistance Forums. These forums comprise representatives from Legal Aid Queensland, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service, community legal centres, family relationship centres and family violence protection legal services units.

The Bligh government is committed to a fair and efficient justice system which is accessible to all Queenslanders. Regional Legal Assistance Forums are one way this is achieved. Regional Legal Assistance Forums are regularly conducted in regional areas, including Cairns, Bundaberg, Maroochydore and Toowoomba. They provide a collaborative response to addressing the emerging needs of regional communities and reducing service gaps.

Each regional forum is developing a priority list of services required for its area and forum members will then work together to develop strategies to improve service delivery. By cultivating relationships with community groups, these forums reduce service duplication and provide clear communication channels between service providers, the community and Legal Aid Queensland. To further improve rural services the Bligh government has invested \$214,000 to expand Legal Aid Queensland's farm and rural legal service to provide assistance to rural landholders and occupiers affected by mining activities. Based in Toowoomba, this service provides assistance in resolving disputes with mining companies and developers.

It provides free legal advice and assistance with mining issues, including exploration, fossicking, pipeline development and similar activities. The service has forged strong relationships with the community and industry groups and serves as a valuable member of the government's Land Access Working Group. In 2008-09 the mining service provided advice and extended assistance to 98 rural landholders in dispute with mining companies and developers. The service also provided casework assistance to 17 rural landholders around the state. By funding Legal Aid Queensland's Farm and Rural Legal Service in the area of mining, this government has ensured Queensland's farmers and rural landholders have access to quality legal services that address some of the specific legal issues for people in this sector of the economy and the Queensland community.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I refer the Attorney-General to page 1-162 of the Service Delivery Statement and the additional funding provided in this year's budget for homelessness court initiatives. Can the Attorney-General please outline how this injection of funding for this program is helping to address the reasons homeless people become involved in the justice system?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable member for her question. I know she has an ongoing interest in the problem of homelessness in our community, as all members of the government do, in terms of alleviating this significant social issue. In December 2008 the government invested \$3.723 million over three years to help address the underlying causes of homelessness and to reduce numbers of homeless people involved with the criminal justice system. There is increasing concern among criminal justice agencies about the overrepresentation in our justice system of people who have complex needs such as mental illness, intellectual disability, cognitive impairment and those who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. The provision of diversionary courts, including the special circumstances court, is part of the Bligh government's commitment to a fair and effective justice system accessible to all Queenslanders. Traditional penalties such as fines, community service orders or incarceration do little to address these needs and invariably do not alter offending behaviour.

The special circumstances program was established on 1 April 2009 and provides support and treatment to reduce offending behaviour and subsequently improve community safety. The program is a bail and sentence based diversionary program for defendants who are homeless and who also appear to suffer from impaired decision-making capacity as a result of mental health problems, intellectual disability or brain or neurological disorders. The program operates in the Brisbane Magistrates Court for defendants charged with minor offences. Its main objective is to defer defendants from the purely punitive aspects of the criminal justice system through referral to services to address accommodation, health and other needs which may be contributing to their offending behaviour. The program builds on the work of the pilot Homeless Persons Court Diversion Program, which began in May 2006 as part of the Queensland government's Responding to Homelessness strategy.

The special circumstances court now sits up to three days each week, an increase from one day per week in the original program. I am pleased to announce that there are now additional service delivery positions in the court, resulting in a dedicated team consisting of two court case coordinators, a psychologist, a corporate support and data officer, a State Penalties Enforcement Registry officer, a probation and parole officer, two police prosecutors and two Legal Aid lawyers. Two dedicated magistrates will collectively spend six days each fortnight running the program. As of 14 July 2009, the homeless persons and special circumstances programs have received 908 defendant referrals. Of these, 755 people have been assessed for eligibility, with 507 deemed eligible for the program. The special circumstances program forms a vital part of a whole-of-government initiative to address homelessness in Queensland.

**CHAIR:** Thank you for your comprehensive answer. I now call the member for Pumicestone.

**Mrs SULLIVAN:** I refer the Attorney-General to page 1-161 of the Service Delivery Statement in relation to the new Supreme and District courts complex in Brisbane. Can the Attorney-General outline how the new complex will improve support for victims of crime and vulnerable witnesses and assist them to access justice?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable member for her question. The Bligh government is committed to supporting and accommodating the needs of vulnerable witnesses who come in contact with the criminal justice system. Coming face to face with an accused is daunting and intimidating, and for many it has already taken great courage to come forward. Through the establishment of the Victims Financial Assistance and Services Scheme, victims will soon have access to enhanced support through a recovery oriented victim support scheme. It is also important that we consider this recovery when vulnerable witnesses appear in court to provide evidence. The needs of vulnerable witnesses have been key features in new courthouses across Queensland and a major consideration in the design of the new Supreme and District courts building in Brisbane.

The new Supreme and District courts will deliver a new era of justice in Queensland, with greatly enhanced facilities for victims of crime, witnesses, jurors and members of the public at Queensland's flagship courts precinct. This major project is a great example of the Bligh government's commitment to delivering a modern, responsive and inclusive justice system for the people of Queensland. The new courthouse will specifically cater for the needs of victims, providing the highest possible levels of support for vulnerable witnesses. This includes providing more than 200 square metres of private suites specifically for vulnerable witnesses. The suites have been designed so that witnesses can avoid any contact with their accused. A private lift to the suites operated from a separate ground-floor entrance will ensure victims' security, while four video evidence rooms will mean, where necessary, witnesses need never enter a courtroom to give evidence. The technical infrastructure for the building will allow 13 criminal courtrooms to take external video evidence from either the vulnerable witness suite or off-site. The suites will also include three waiting lounges for people accompanying the witnesses, a kitchenette and toilet as well as office facilities for support staff.

If necessary, witnesses and those accompanying them will be able to enter and leave the building in privacy to minimise the difficulty of giving evidence. While we understand that giving evidence will always be hard, it is important that we provide the adequate support to ensure it is as comfortable as possible. This is another example of the Bligh government delivering on its commitments to the people of Queensland.

**Ms O'NEILL:** My question refers to the new Victims Financial Assistance and Services Scheme, VFASS, mentioned on page 1-161 of the Service Delivery Statement. Would the Attorney-General explain how this scheme will improve access for victims of crime to the services they need to support their recovery?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable member for her question and the interest of government members in this important change to the law in Queensland which will provide better and more effective services to the victims of crime in our state. Currently a wide range of organisations work tirelessly to deliver vital services to victims of crime. These organisations perform a valuable role in supporting and aiding victims through what can often be a painful recovery process.

The government's new Victims Financial Assistance and Services Scheme is anticipated to commence on 1 December 2009. The scheme will be administered by the Victim Assistance Unit, as I said earlier, and has two key goals. These are to provide financial assistance to victims of crime and to assist victims by improving the coordination, access and delivery of these services. Importantly, it will assist the victims of crime to locate and take advantage of the services that they need.

The new scheme is designed to help victims of crime to recover and get their lives back on track. This new scheme represents the Bligh government's commitment to ensuring victims of crime have access to the support and assistance they need. There is no doubt that being a victim of crime is one of the most horrible experiences a person can go through and it can impact on every aspect of a person's life. This government is determined to do everything it can to help reduce these effects and enable victims to get back on their feet. By creating a single access point for these services, victims will receive timely and effective support. Improved coordination means that victims can focus on their recovery while receiving the help they need to move on with their lives.

I am pleased to inform the committee that a central feature of the Victim Assistance Unit will be the introduction of Victims LinkUp. This centralised telephone service and website will see information officers employed to link victims with specialised government and non-government support services such as counselling services, court assistance and financial assistance. This service will provide victims of crime with easy access to information that is relevant, timely and best suited to their needs and recovery.

I can also announce the new state-wide Victims Court Support Program, another initiative that will be delivered by the Victim Assistance Unit. This service will be provided in partnership with the non-government sector through a tender process. The program will provide victims with practical assistance through the court and recovery process in and outside the courtroom and is due to commence in early 2010.

The Victims Financial Assistance and Services Scheme will be vital in improving service delivery. Its initiatives will streamline the provision of services to victims, allowing them to quickly and easily access the most appropriate support and assistance. Most importantly, the scheme places victims first, focusing on the support services they need to recover.

**Ms JOHNSTONE:** I refer to page 1-164 of the Service Delivery Statement outlining the Bligh government's commitment to review of neighbourly relations issues including the topics of trees and dividing fences that give rise to neighbourhood disputes and the available remedies to address those disputes. Can the Attorney outline what the new legislation is likely to include?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable member for her question. I am very proud of this initiative, as all members of the government should be. This is a significant program to help deal with neighbourhood disputes in Queensland. The Bligh government announced just last weekend that outdated neighbour laws would be repealed and replaced with a plan to quell disputes over dividing fences and nuisance trees. The Dividing Fences Act 1953 has been the statutory authority on boundary issues for over half a century in Queensland. Times have of course changed, and the Queensland of today is a very different place indeed. The Bligh government has agreed to change these laws to make it easier to resolve disputes between neighbours.

The Premier announced that the law would also be changed to deal directly with the issue of nuisance trees. Right now there is no specific statutory law in Queensland which addresses nuisance trees in the neighbourhood. Last year the department of justice conducted state-wide consultations which showed that this is one of the major issues of contention between neighbours throughout Queensland. The fact is that the population of Queensland is growing at more than 2,000 a week. We need modern laws to reflect the fact that we are living closer together in larger population centres than we have in the past. This is about planning for the future and ensuring our laws covering neighbourly relations will be able to cater for Queensland's booming population.

The new laws are currently being drafted but are likely to identify exactly what constitutes a nuisance tree and outline clear remedies when trees cause a private nuisance to landowners. On the issue of dividing fences, the legislation is likely to clarify the law over the ownership of fencing between landowners. The proposals resulted from an extensive state-wide review of some of the main causes of neighbourhood disputes. The review of neighbourly relations focused on dividing fences, trees and the remedies currently available to deal with disputes. The review involved broad public consultation, including inviting written submissions, an online survey and public meetings around the state. I want to thank all Queenslanders who provided feedback based on their own experiences, as that input was very valuable to the overall review process.

Community members needed a clear path and practical remedies to help avoid, reduce and resolve disputes with their neighbours around the common issues of dividing fences and nuisance trees. We want to keep people out of the courts by ensuring they have a clear understanding of their rights and accessible mechanisms to resolve disputes amicably as good neighbours. The government's dispute resolution centres offer free mediation services to help parties solve their differences without having to

go to court. Our centres opened 529 files on neighbourhood disputes in 2008-09. Of those files, 239 of them went to mediation and about 73 per cent of those reached an agreement. We offer a neighbourhood mediation kit to members of the community also.

**CHAIR:** I refer the Attorney-General to page 1-162 of the Service Delivery Statements regarding the Moynihan review of criminal and civil court processes. Would the Attorney please inform the committee of the proposed reforms to the committal process and why they are needed?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable member for her question. Queensland's criminal and civil justice systems will be modernised and streamlined as part of major legal reforms I am announcing today. The proposed reforms to the committal process recommended in the Moynihan review will help deliver an efficient and fair justice system accessible for all Queenslanders as part of the Bligh government's Toward Q2 goal. Over the past 15 years there has been a steady trend towards reform of the committal process in all common law jurisdictions, both interstate and overseas. Queensland and the Northern Territory are now the only Australian jurisdictions in which the accused retains an unrestricted right to cross-examine prosecution witnesses.

A professional police service, a professional magistracy, an independent prosecuting authority and other developments mean that the historical reasons for committals are no longer relevant. The introduction of paper committals has also changed the nature and role of the committal process. A particular concern identified in the Moynihan review was the large number of matters in which there is an agreement to a full hand-up or paper committal at the last minute. The costs of this are borne by many people, including the general community.

Anecdotal reports and submissions to the review also point to a systemic problem of inadequate preparation by legal representatives. Even so, the review recognised that committal hearings are sometimes justified. When used appropriately with well-briefed advisers, they can help the parties to clarify issues, refine the charges before an indictment is presented and identify weak cases that should be discontinued.

There are also cases where the pretrial cross-examination of witnesses is necessary to enable the accused to know the case that he or she must answer or to establish whether there is sufficient evidence to proceed to trial. However, unfettered access to the courts in all cases can no longer be sustained, because it is both inefficient and ineffective. The proposed reforms will give the magistracy overall responsibilities for supervising committals. They will also restrict cross-examination unless the prosecution consents or the magistrate is satisfied that there are substantial reasons for calling the witness in the interests of justice.

When there is no application to call or examine witnesses, there can be an administrative committal in the registry. These reforms will lead to the early resolution of indictable matters, reserve court involvement to situations requiring a judicial officer and ensure that committals are more productive when they do occur. The necessary legislative changes will be introduced into parliament later this year.

**CHAIR:** The remaining time left for the examination will be shared equally between the non-government and government members. I call the member for Southern Downs.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** My question is to the Steven Bradbury of the Labor Party, the Attorney-General.

**CHAIR:** Will you please refer to the Attorney-General by his proper—

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** The Attorney-General. I go back to a question I was asking before the government question, and I refer in particular the pages 1-230 and 1-231 regarding the Electoral Commission and how its role is to ensure informed participation and confidence in the electoral system and also to the document that I raised regarding procedures for returning officers and the processing of postal votes and electoral visitor votes and how there has been significant noncompliance because of underresourcing of the Electoral Commission. Minister, will you provide a breakdown across Queensland by electorate of the number of postal votes and electoral visitor vote applications that have been signed off in accordance with this document? If you are concerned about Chatsworth, I am very happy for you to provide 88 breakdowns, not 89 breakdowns, because it is not a sub judice matter; the matter is not before a jury.

**Mr DICK:** I thank the member for his question. It may not be sub judice under the standing orders of the parliament but to seek to influence a matter that is before the courts in Queensland could constitute a contempt of the courts. This is a very serious and significant committee of the parliament. If the member for Southern Downs wants to put evidence before the court, he should do so, but he should not be seeking to put extra judicial pressure on the courts by litigating matters in this committee that should properly be litigated in a court of law.

Having said that, it appears that the heart of the honourable member's question is this allegation by him that there has been significant noncompliance by the Electoral Commission due to underresourcing. This is the first occasion that anyone has raised this issue with me. I would observe



that the state election was conducted on 21 March—some four months ago to this day—and one has to question the basis and the purpose of this allegation. If it was a significant issue, it should have been promptly and quickly raised by anyone with that information with the Electoral Commission.

I observe that, of course, the LNP is litigating a matter in the Supreme Court about the outcome of a particular election result for an electoral district arising out of the 2009 election. It appears, on the face of the question, that this matter is being pursued not at the earliest opportunity with the Electoral Commission but at a time when the matter is being determined in the court—and can I say after it has also been on one occasion considered by the Court of Appeal, as I understand it.

Can I suggest that the honourable member should consider again my answer to his question on notice No. 8, including the detailed table attached to that answer setting out the number of postal vote applications received by the Electoral Commission for each of the 89 electoral districts in Queensland and the number of postal votes admitted to count. Could I also indicate that a brief and cursory analysis of that table reveals that the number of postal votes received and admitted to count—the percentage of those admitted to count—in Chatsworth is one, of course, of the highest in Queensland, at 90 per cent. A review of that table indicates—

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** That is not the issue; we are talking about compliance with the guidelines.

**Mr DICK:** The honourable member has had his opportunity to ask a question and I will answer it.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** And I am awaiting the answer.

**Mr DICK:** And I will give you one.

**CHAIR:** The time has expired. Can I ask the member for Southern Downs to continue with any questions he may have.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Attorney, can you provide detailed statistics to this committee of the number of postal vote applications that were actually processed after 6 pm on Thursday, 19 March and the number that was actually posted out after 6 pm on 19 March.

**CHAIR:** Member for Southern Downs, can you remind me where this is in the Service Delivery Statements, please?

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Certainly. It is in relation to the commission and the compliance with its obligations and also ensuring informed participation and confidence in the electoral system, as on pages 1-230 and 1- 231 of the Service Delivery Statements.

**Mr DICK:** I remember Thursday, 19 March, well. On that occasion I am not sure where I was standing, but after 6 pm I was standing on a street corner somewhere in the state electorate of Greenslopes urging, in the way one does on a street corner, the community to support me. I am very grateful—very grateful—to the people of Greenslopes that two days later I was elected as the state member for Greenslopes, and received a small swing against the party and was fortunate enough to defeat—

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Congratulations. We will give you an award later, but that is not the question.

**Mr DICK:**—to defeat the Liberal National Party and return Greenslopes to the Labor Party's column in this parliament. The critical issue, as I could indicate to the member, is as set out in my answer to his question on notice. That answer clearly sets out the increase in the number of postal votes admitted to the count, which was an increase from 83.32 per cent to 87.39 per cent. So what matters is the conversion rate between applications received and the postal votes admitted to count.

As my answer indicates, the Electoral Commission has advised that 100 per cent of the applications received were processed and issued within the time frame specified under the Electoral Act. That is the advice I have received from the Electoral Commission and that is the answer that I have provided in writing to question on notice No. 8.

It does seem unusual, Chair, as you have indicated, that in this \$883 million budget the opposition does not seek to do what it is entitled to do under the standing and sessional orders, that is, to examine me on proposed public expenditure, but rather to relitigate the outcome of an election which was decisively determined by the people of Queensland on 21 March.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** That relates to the effectiveness of public expenditure. It is a basic question.

**Mr DICK:** As difficult and as frustrating as that may be for members of the opposition, the Queensland community has made its decision. I have full confidence indeed in how elections are conducted in an open and transparent way in Queensland.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** The only way we know is if you can provide us the details of how—

**CHAIR:** Member for Southern Downs, the minister still has one minute in which to answer the question.

**Mr DICK:** Thank you, Chair. Could I also indicate that the government provided an appropriation of \$14 million to the Electoral Commission to conduct the 2009 state election—a significant sum indeed.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I take that as a no, that we will not be receiving that information, which is unfortunate, because it would allow us to clearly see the adequacy of the expenditure and the capacity of the Electoral Commission to do what it is charged with doing. My next question also relates to informed participation and confidence in the electoral system, as outlined on pages 1-230 and 1-231 of the Service Delivery Statements. It relates to the provision of a postal vote to an elector who has applied for it. It indicates the steps the commission takes to ensure that that person gets to vote. Can you outline for the committee how the commission ensures that a person receives their postal vote if it is posted on the Friday, that is, after 6 pm on Thursday, before the election?

**Mr DICK:** How it is received?

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Are they sure that it gets there on Friday so that it can be signed off in accordance with the rules.

**Mr DICK:** I have great confidence in Australia Post if it is issued by the Electoral Commission and the way postal ballot papers are received are by a postman putting them in a letterbox to the appropriate address. So that is the answer to the honourable member's question

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** So if it is posted on Friday it is received on Friday?

**Mr DICK:** Can I indicate that 168,878 postal vote applications were received by the Electoral Commission.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Very good.

**Mr DICK:** And the question could probably be asked—the Electoral Commission cannot perform miracles—if an application is received on Friday, all it can do is process the application—

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** No, I said before—

**Mr DICK:** According to its processes, turn the application around and issue the ballot paper to the elector.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** They cannot process them if they receive them on Friday.

**CHAIR:** Member for Southern Downs, can we just let the minister answer?

**Mr DICK:** I was not at 6 pm on Thursday, 19 March thumbing through the postal vote applications, as I have indicated. I do not know what the member for Southern Downs is trying to get at, but if he has concerns about this—genuine concerns, not motivated by other issues or things that may be occurring in Queensland—then he should properly have raised that, as he was at the time the Leader of the Opposition, the alternative Premier, someone presumably who would have had an interest in that at that time. He should have properly raised that and not be seeking to use this committee to bolster or bootstrap a case that may be being considered in the courts in Queensland. He has had his opportunity. The answer is clear. This government provides significant resources to the Electoral Commission. The number of postal votes admitted to count has increased significantly. There were another 37,000 processed in this election over 2006. But I say again that if he has evidence of any matters that are of concern in relation to the conduct of the ballot—

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Evidence of noncompliance with that.

**Mr DICK:** It is a guideline document that he has been able to download. If he has any substantial evidence, then that matter should properly be put to the Electoral Commission and I am confident it will be pursued.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** My final question also relates to the same sections of the Service Delivery Statements, which is about ensuring informed participation and confidence in the Electoral Commission and the adequacy of the funding to the Queensland Electoral Commission to be able to comply with its guidelines to be able to deliver its postal ballots on time and to be able to process them in accordance with that as well. In particular, given the Attorney is saying that there is enough money for them to do their job properly internally, will the Attorney give us a breakdown of the number of postal ballot applications that were processed externally in the 2009 election by contractors and what privacy arrangements and security arrangements were put in place? Were any used at all?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable member for his question. I would reiterate that a very significant number of postal vote applications were lodged and processed by the Electoral Commission. Again, some 168,000 applications were processed. As the honourable member might be aware, I am not the Electoral Commissioner, nor am I someone who processes those ballots. This is the first that I—I presume anyone in the government—have heard of these claims and if he has any concerns about that let him come forward with the evidence.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I am asking you the question.

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

**Mrs SULLIVAN:** I refer the Attorney-General to page 1-162 of the Service Delivery Statements regarding the Moynihan review of Queensland court processes. Would the Attorney-General outline proposed reforms to civil monetary limits and the benefits they will deliver?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable very much for the question. The Moynihan review will modernise and streamline criminal and civil court procedures with the implementation of sweeping reforms by the Bligh government. The new limits are expedited to help reduce the cost of civil litigation for all parties involved. It is a simple fact that it is more expensive to commence proceedings and conduct litigation in the Supreme Court than it is in the District or Magistrates courts, let alone the Small Claims Tribunal. These changes will make the justice system simply more accessible.

The monetary limits for civil matters provide the primary point of delineation between Queensland courts. At present there is a ceiling of \$7,500 for the Small Claims Tribunal, \$50,000 for the Magistrates Court and \$250,000 for the District Court. The Supreme Court, of course, has unlimited jurisdiction. Those monetary limits have been in place for more than 10 years and are now below the comparable settings in most other Australian jurisdictions. There is also unanimous agreement among stakeholders that the current thresholds should be increased.

The review noted that any dollar figure is somewhat arbitrary and there is no single definitive criterion. Taking a wide range of factors into account, it recommended a new limit of \$25,000 for the Small Claims Tribunal, \$150,000 for the Magistrates Court and \$750,000 for the District Court. From December, of course, the Small Claims Tribunal will form part of the new Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal, another major reform in its own right. The cost scales in the Uniform Civil Procedure Rules 1999 will also be reviewed in line with the increased complexity and responsibility reflected in the increased monetary limits.

Public confidence in the modern justice system is based on cases being dealt with in a fair and efficient manner. The reforms we are announcing aim to ensure that the delivery of justice in our state is timely, equitable and reflects the Queensland of the 21st century. In line with Mr Moynihan's recommendations, it is the government's intention to review the civil monetary limits at least every five years and adjust them in the future to reflect the changing value of money and other relevant considerations.

These reforms will increase access to justice, given the number of Magistrates courts across Queensland. They will also increase efficiency because Magistrates Court processes require fewer public resources. As noted in the review, it also costs litigants less to make or defend a claim in the Magistrates and District courts than in the Supreme Court. The new limit of \$25,000 for QCAT will increase access to efficient, effective and affordable justice in a less intimidating setting. At the other end of the scale, the reforms are likely to free resources in the Supreme Court to deal with major cases. These changes will be included in an interim bill that will be introduced into the parliament later this year.

**Ms O'NEILL:** My question refers to the Victims Financial Assistance and Services Scheme, VFASS, mentioned on page 1-161 of the Service Delivery Statement. Can the Attorney-General please outline the arrangements in place for the transition of services and systems from the current Criminal Offence Victims Act system to the new VFASS system?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable member for her question. This government is currently in the process of moving from the Criminal Offence Victims Act to the new Victims Financial Assistance and Services Scheme, as the honourable member has noted. The Victims Financial Assistance and Services Scheme is the result of an extensive review process into assistance and support for victims.

While the Criminal Offence Victims Act scheme has performed an important role for victims, the review highlighted the need for a scheme that focused on supporting victims and providing the services and assistance they need to recover. The scheme is moving away from a focus on a lump sum compensation figure. It will instead focus on identifying the actual financial assistance required for support or treatment, such as medical treatment or counselling, to help victims and their families recover as quickly as possible. These reforms will ensure financial assistance is directed towards helping victims to get back on their feet and maximising their chances of recovery through early intervention and tailored assistance.

By its nature, under the Criminal Offence Victims Act victims needed to fulfil certain criteria before being eligible for compensation. In many cases the detailed legal assessment in order to validate a person's eligibility under the Criminal Offence Victims Act made it a time-consuming process. In the transition to the new scheme, our No. 1 priority is to fast-track the 850 active claims currently on the books under the Criminal Offence Victims Act. To meet this challenge the government has increased the number of staff in the Criminal Injury Compensation Unit from 13.5 in December 2008 to 22.5 until the new scheme commences in December 2009.

Significant progress has been made in finalising existing claims, with the number of applications awaiting finalisation reduced by 40 per cent over the last three years. Current clearance rates of up to 250 per cent per month are now being achieved. Once the new scheme commences, a team of five officers will continue to deal with outstanding claims until they are finalised. Queenslanders can be

assured that the government remains committed to ensuring there is no reduction of service during and beyond the transition phase. The implementation team will soon hold information sessions for service providers and legal firms to ensure they are aware of the transitional arrangements and are prepared for inquiries about the repeal of the old act. Sessions will be held later this month and in early August in Brisbane, Toowoomba, Gold Coast, Rockhampton, Cairns and Townsville. We also expect an increase in applications under the old scheme in response to a public education campaign when the Victims of Crime Assistance Bill is introduced to parliament. This education campaign will help ensure victims of crime are aware of their rights under the old and new schemes.

The Victims Financial Assistance and Services Scheme focuses on recovery by providing victims and families with the appropriate support to recover from the physical and psychological effects of crime. Queenslanders will see the benefits of a system devoted to the recovery process.

**Ms JOHNSTONE:** I refer the Attorney-General to page 1-161 of the Service Delivery Statement which details expenditure of \$20.8 million over the next five years to digitise the historical records held by the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. Can the Attorney-General please outline how investment in this project will help to combat identity fraud and improve delivery of services?

**Mr DICK:** This is a very important initiative and I thank the honourable member for her question. The Department of Justice and Attorney-General, through the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, is responsible for recording, preserving and protecting life-event records for all Queenslanders. Currently a considerable proportion of these records in Queensland exists only in physical form such as original paper registers. I am pleased to announce that the Bligh government has allocated \$20.8 million over the next five years to digitise registration records still in paper form. This will be funded by the department through the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages' existing operational revenue.

The electronic storage of life records will result in major improvements in the time required to produce certificates for all Queenslanders. The full digitisation of the registry's life records will improve time frames for life-event registration and certificate services, improve access for genealogists, researchers and statistical agencies, expand the level and range of services the department offers the community, such as online ordering and payment, and preserve Queensland's historical life-event records for years to come. When people are accessing these certificates it is often in times of great upheaval or emotional strain in their lives, with the birth of a child, a marriage or the death of a loved one. I am pleased that the digitisation of this service will provide more timely and easier access to certificates for Queenslanders.

It is significant that this work will begin in our Q150 year, because it will improve access to historic records for people tracing their histories in years to come. The full digitisation of records will also assist agencies such as Queensland Transport and the Australian Passport Office to electronically verify proof-of-identity documents. Digitisation of records will also provide a stronger basis for protecting identity security into the future. Identity security is central to Queensland's security, law enforcement and economic interests and is vital in protecting Queenslanders from identity theft.

To further improve security, the registry also introduced new security paper for Queensland certificates in July this year. The new paper contains advanced security features that make documents more difficult to counterfeit and meet the new national identity security strategy standards that are being implemented by all states and territories this year. The production of the new certificate paper has also been limited to the BDM registry in Brisbane to further protect the private details of Queenslanders. In 2008-09 the department invested approximately \$220,000 to provide 20 regional Magistrates courts with direct electronic access to the BDM registration system. A further \$100,000 will provide 20 more Magistrates courts with this capability in 2009-10. This move allows regional officers to process local certificate orders quickly and efficiently and has reduced production times to an average of five days.

**CHAIR:** I refer the Attorney-General to page 1-161 of the Service Delivery Statement in relation to the new Supreme and District courts complex in Brisbane. Can the Attorney-General please inform the committee what measures and features have been incorporated into the design of the complex to support the government's Toward Q2 ambition for a greener Queensland of tomorrow?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable member for her question. The design of Brisbane's new Supreme and District courts is an outstanding example of the Bligh government's commitment to reducing our state's carbon footprint by moving to environmentally sustainable infrastructure. This state-of-the-art facility boasts an impressive five-star energy rating thanks to a host of green features. By incorporating a number of inventive and creative new technologies, designers have created what we believe will be the world's first court facility to achieve a five-star energy rating.

The Bligh government is committed to cutting Queensland's carbon footprint by one-third and providing tangible results as we move towards achieving the Toward Q2 vision. The building includes a number of modern features that will minimise the carbon emissions created by lighting and air conditioning of the facility. To reduce the external heat load on the building, a computerised external blind system will shade the building according to the position of the sun. This will complement an

underfloor displacement air-conditioning unit zoned to operate only when needed. The air conditioner's load will be further reduced by the careful placement of a 1.2 million litre underground rainwater tank. This tank will serve multiple purposes, with collected water maintaining gardens and flushing toilets.

The courthouse's design maximises the use of natural light, with extended lighting shafts even providing natural light to basement areas. Roof mounted panels will collect solar energy for selected lighting and water heating. Coupled with motion controlled, low-energy lighting, designers have moved to minimise electricity usage. The building's energy usage will be constantly monitored by a state-of-the-art building control system.

Staff will also have an opportunity to play their role, with shower and change room facilities in addition to secure bicycle parking available for those wanting to leave the car at home. The car park will also provide stations for charging electric cars. The building will have a glass facade that will provide an outlook and privacy for those inside the building and an external appearance of transparency. All of the courtrooms will have at least one external glass wall, and the internal walls will have glass panels to allow lighting in from the public areas.

The design also features an impressive public square as part of the state government's commitment to making the central business district more people friendly. The civic square will include large trees and a community green where city workers and visitors will be able to relax on the grass, eat their lunch or read a book. It will also form a central link in the public pathway being established between the Roma Street Parkland and the Gallery of Modern Art, along with the Kurilpa pedestrian and bicycle bridge being built across the Brisbane River.

Like other major court buildings in Queensland, the new Brisbane Supreme and District courts building will use 100 per cent green power. As Queenslanders we must all be part of the solution and reduce our carbon emissions to protect the natural beauty of our great state. The courts facility is just one of the ways this government is using new technology to reduce our impact on the environment.

**CHAIR:** The time for government questions has expired. The committee will now take a short break and resume at 11.15 am.

**Proceedings suspended from 11.00 am to 11.17 am**

**CHAIR:** We will resume from the break. Member for Southern Downs, are you ready?

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Yes, thank you Madam Chair. I refer to page 1-165 of the SDS, and in particular workplace health and safety inspectors, the number of workplaces that have been inspected in the past 12-month period and the number of non-compliance notices that have been handed out. I understand that has resulted in fines of \$2.2 million. Can the minister inform the committee of the number of inspections and non-compliance orders that have been provided in public sector workplaces in the past 12 months?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable member for his question. Each year very sadly nearly 100 Queenslanders die as a result of a workplace accident and nearly 30,000 workers are seriously injured requiring more than five days off work. This costs the Queensland economy \$5.2 billion each year. The Bligh government is committed to reducing workplace injuries by 40 per cent and fatalities by 20 per cent by 2012. This is reflected in the wide range of enforcement options available to Workplace Health and Safety Queensland and the Electrical Safety Office, ranging from the provision of advice, education and information to issuing directives and improvement and prohibition notices, removal of licences and prosecution. Most importantly, though, by improving health and safety in our workplaces we help ensure Queensland workers return home safe and sound to their families each day.

I can advise the committee that workplace visits are an integral part of Workplace Health and Safety Services with 24,303 workplace visits having been conducted in the 2008-09 financial year to undertake proactive compliance assessments and to investigate complaints and incident notifications. Enforcement notices are issued where noncompliance is detected and, along with data on investigations, can provide a picture of the challenges faced by the health and safety regulators. A total of 10,574 enforcement notices were issued during workplace visits during 2008-09 and 1,288 investigations were conducted. Of the investigations conducted, 1,180 were into incidents that caused death, grievous bodily harm or bodily harm. The majority of those incidents involved slips, trips and falls, body stressing and being hit by moving objects.

The use of prosecutions as an effective compliance and deterrent measure continued with 146 prosecutions finalised, resulting in fines totalling over \$3.3 million for 2008-09. Summaries of the results of successful prosecutions are now published on the department's website to assist in deterring others from adopting similar behaviours that may result in an obligation holder committing workplace health and safety offences. It is not the offence; the offence is very important, but it is ensuring that workplaces have the appropriate measures, arrangements, practices and procedures in place to stop incidents occurring at work. That is one of the very critical parts of what the Office of Workplace Health and Safety seeks to do to ensure that people have the mechanisms in place to ensure accidents and injuries do not happen. There is a balance there between education and being proactive, and at the same time

ensuring that people who breach the law should be prosecuted. Could I add that enforceable undertakings have become a strong feature of sanctions applied at the enforcement end of the department's business, with 20 enforceable undertakings accepted in the 2008-09 financial year.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Minister, further to that I note the statistic that you have provided. My specific question related to inspections by workplace health and safety officers of the public sector, that is, government workplaces. How many have there been and how many safety notices have been issued? I understand that government does not necessarily prosecute itself, but I would imagine that some compliance issues have been identified, particularly in light of the Mabuig Island nurse debacle a year ago.

**Mr DICK:** I thank the member for his question. On 1 January 2009 legislative changes providing for the prosecution of government departments for breaches of the Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995 and the Electrical Safety Act 2002 commenced. This clarifies that the Crown can be prosecuted for breaches under these acts. The value of prosecution in providing a deterrent to noncompliance with safety related legislation has been receiving greater recognition in recent years, as have the calls for government entities to be held to the standards applied to the general community. With the exception of the Commonwealth, the Crown can be prosecuted for breaches of occupational health and safety laws in all other states and territories in Australia. This change signals the importance of government departments maintaining acceptable occupational health and safety standards.

To enable initiation of proceedings, the state nominates an agency or department that must respond to the prosecution and have carriage of its defence. If a prosecution action is commenced against a government department, the department will be able to apply for enforceable undertaking under the same legislative provisions that apply to the private sector. The removal of the immunity for government departments from prosecution also removes the immunity from receiving infringement notices. Verbal directions, improvement notices and prohibition notices had previously been the primary enforcement tools used for government departments.

In the period 1 July 2002 to 30 June 2009, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland investigated 27,924 workplace incidents or complaints. Of those, 1,007 related to Queensland government departments, excluding government owned corporations. As a result of those investigations, a total of 585 notices or verbal directions were issued to the relevant departments to remedy noncompliance and improve workplace health and safety. I am advised that since the legislative changes two infringement notices have been issued to the Department of Public Works for contravention of construction work regulations.

I would also indicate that as a result of the sexual assault of a nurse in the accommodation attached to the Mabuig Island primary healthcare clinic on 5 February 2008, Queensland Health has been subject to a number of compliance and enforcement actions by Workplace Health and Safety Queensland. Queensland Health has entered into an undertaking that has a very significant number of elements. I indicate that Queensland Health is required to regularly report to Workplace Health and Safety Queensland on its progress implementing the provisions of the undertaking. Five compliance audits will be conducted during the lifetime of the undertaking, with the final audit scheduled for December 2011. At this time the undertaking is complete only if Queensland Health demonstrates that the requirements of the undertaking have been met. I indicate to the committee that Workplace Health and Safety Queensland inspectors conducted a compliance audit on Mabuig Island during May of this year. The audit confirmed that Queensland Health is complying with the undertaking. Workplace Health and Safety Queensland will continue to monitor Queensland Health's full compliance with the terms of the undertaking.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** My next question relates to page 1-168, the output summary for industrial relations. I would appreciate it if the minister would inform the committee of the amount that has been paid by his department for an employee industrial entity, that is, an employee union, in the past financial year. How are those payments acquitted and what cost-benefit analysis is applied to those payments?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable member for his question. In 2008-09 that part of my portfolio dealing with industrial relations made payments to unions and related parties—registered industrial organisations, as I understand it. Of the total payments made, \$418,950 were to trade unions and related parties. The remaining payments of \$671,230 were to employer unions. For the committee's information, over \$670,000 was paid to employer unions and over \$418,000 was paid to trade unions. A significant sum of almost \$250,000 more was paid to employer entities than to trade unions.

A significant number of payments were made. Of payments made to trade unions and related parties, the Queensland Council of Unions was paid \$55,950, Safe Work Queensland received \$357,500. I can indicate that AgForce Queensland received a total payment of \$40,000, the Association of Self Insured Employers received \$5,500, the Australian Industry Group received \$11,000, the Queensland Cane Growers Organisation received \$6,250, Commerce Queensland received \$81,975, the Queensland Master Builders Association received \$17,093, Farmsafe Queensland received \$450,103.36 and the Family Day Care Association received \$59,309. That compares to a payment to other trade unions, as I have indicated: \$55,950 to the Queensland Council of Unions, \$357,500 to Safe

Work Queensland, which is a very important body involved in the delivery of coordinated programs and industry safety sector standing committees. A significant amount of payments were made to employer organisations over employee organisations, and that is the way the department has always worked. It is quite appropriate. Those employer entities were happy to fund, obviously. They run significant programs in the community also, as do trade unions.

**CHAIR:** Thank you for your detailed response.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Further to that same question, Minister, I know that you have provided some overview details of the particular program that is funded. Do you have some more detail to provide to the committee? Is there a process of tender that those particular industrial organisations are expected to comply with when they put up their hand for taxpayers' money?

**CHAIR:** Are you referring to employer and employee groups?

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I am happy for the answer to be in relation to both.

**Mr DICK:** I thank the member for his question. I have obviously provided a very detailed response to the breakdown of those funds. I indicate that any entity engaging with government would need to comply with standard government policies and processes. If there are any tendering guidelines required, they will of course be complied with, particularly in relation to the provision of goods, and for many years all governments have had standard guidelines, protocols and procedures in respect of the payment of funds.

We have an ongoing relationship, as you can imagine, with a number of employer and employee organisations, particularly with the peak representative bodies. It is a very productive and cooperative relationship. A lot of people in the community on occasion see issues in contest between employer and employee organisations. But just as in many ways there are great contests in this parliament and in many other ways there is great cooperation—an example being the significant amount of legislation that is passed through the House on a cooperative, bipartisan basis—an analogy can be made with employer and employee organisations, which in the broader economy work together for productive outcomes for the Queensland community.

One of the things I have been very pleased to see since becoming minister is just how cooperatively employer and employee organisations work together in respect of workplace health and safety matters. There is a genuine commitment from employers and almost everyone I come in contact with to ensuring a reduction in death and injury in the workplace in Queensland. There is a united front there in many senses between employer organisations and employee organisations. With respect to the Zero Harm program, which I mentioned earlier, I was very pleased to attend a leadership breakfast where there were 50 CEOs and leaders from some of the largest corporations and trade unions in Queensland all sitting around together to discuss ways they can show leadership in workplace health and safety matters.

I am advised that, in respect of funding, some entities bid, some are provided with direct funding and some are provided funding through one-off agreements. We do that in accordance with established departmental guidelines. Overall, I am very pleased with the funding arrangements, particularly to employer organisations so that they can take the message out to their members, particularly the organisations responsible for small to medium sized enterprises. It is very important at a time of economic downturn that people do not cut corners on workplace health and safety and that they continue to meet their obligations.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** My next question relates to SDS page 1-160 and in particular the government's policy commitment to move towards a so-called national industrial relations system for the private sector. It is probably the most controversial and politically sensitive area for the government—the private sector coming under the Queensland system. Minister, can you indicate to this committee the benefits which have been outlined to you by your department that would come from the transfer of the residual matters to the federal industrial relations framework and how that may undermine cooperative competitive federalism? Also, Mr Attorney, can you indicate any other issues with regard to the national standard award framework which is being developed for residual IR matters?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable member for his question. I indicate at the outset the cooperative relationship between the state and territory governments and the Commonwealth government. That is an example of how all levels of government can work cooperatively in the national interest. You could not get a more stark difference between the way the federal and state and territory governments work at the moment and the top-down directive approach driven by the Howard government, particularly with respect to Work Choices—a very egregious and poor piece of legislation that attacked the rights of workers without discussion, consideration, cooperation or consultation. Thankfully that sort of arrangement has now changed in Australia.

I indicate that the Queensland government welcomes the Australian government's Fair Work Act 2009, most of which commenced on 1 July this year. The act represents a crucial first step towards the creation of a fair and balanced national industrial relations system for the private sector. The act is a significant improvement over the unfair Work Choices laws, as I indicated, introduced by the Howard government in 2005.

An important reason for this significant improvement is the unprecedented level of consultation with stakeholders that has been underway since early last year. Employers both large and small, unions and governments have all been involved in the consultations. The Queensland government has been working collaboratively with all state and territory governments and the Australian government on the development of a national industrial relations system for the private sector.

As honourable members will know, Queensland has indicated its in-principle support for joining a national workplace relations system for the private sector subject to a number of issues being resolved, including the protection of state award and agreement entitlements for employees transferring to the national system; continued state regulation of training arrangements for apprentices and trainees, as well as the regulation of conditions of employment for apprentices and trainees unless modern awards are more beneficial; a higher degree of state government control and input within the national system regarding changes to law and policy; and acceptable service delivery standards.

I indicate that the Australian Industrial Relations Commission is conducting an award modernisation process to create a comprehensive set of modern awards which will apply in the new federal industrial relations system from 1 January 2010. The government provided a written submission to the first stage of the award modernisation process which, among other things, said that it would not seek to make submissions on specific awards because the terms of awards are a matter for the industrial parties. The government has, however, made submissions to the award modernisation process in general terms. We have urged the commission to make sure that the process is fair for Queensland employers and employees. So we will continue to work cooperatively with the Commonwealth government. We see that there are benefits in the private sector being regulated under one national system. That is the outcome of the Work Choices decision of the High Court and one that the nation will work toward with fairness for all Australians.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** What is the time line for the transfer of these residual matters?

**Mr DICK:** In relation to the residual matters for private sector employees, we are working through that. We are not going to rush it. Those matters, as I have indicated to the committee, are matters of significant importance to Queensland. I and the rest of the government are working cooperatively with the federal government to negotiate those matters. We want to get the right outcome. We want to get the balance right to protect Queenslanders, who are well protected under the current system. But at the end of the day the target date for commencement is 1 January 2010. That is when Fair Work Australia comes into full effect. So we will have the arrangements in place by then.

**CHAIR:** It is now time for government questions. I call the member for Townsville.

**Ms JOHNSTONE:** In relation to the government's decision to sell a number of state government assets, could the minister please explain how affected employees will be protected and supported during this process?

**Mr DICK:** We are working cooperatively with industrial organisations to ensure the rights of individuals are protected as part of the process. Queensland, like other Australian states and territories, is working cooperatively. As has occurred previously in respect of the sale of assets, we have established a working party.

As honourable members will be aware, the Premier announced the Queensland government's Renewing Queensland Plan, which will restructure the Queensland government's asset portfolio to assist the state's economic balance and recovery. That process will prioritise job creation through meeting the government's election commitment for maintaining the \$18.2 billion Capital Works Program. The government has resolved to undertake a package of strategic asset sales designed to secure the future of a number of commercial assets without the ongoing need for public investment. Strategic asset sales will assist the state's economic balance and recovery and ensure the focus on jobs can continue unimpeded. This also frees up those costs from the government's balance sheet to better support the development of public infrastructure like schools, hospitals, public transport and roads.

It should also be remembered that the sale of government owned corporations has occurred previously—most recently involving Cairns and Mackay airports. The fact is that the government has a history of managing these events in a manner which protects the interests of the state, the corporations and their employees. The Queensland government will ensure that for affected employees the terms and conditions of their current enterprise agreements will continue to operate for the life of those agreements. As well, employment guarantees will be in place for two years beyond the date of sale. Employees transferring to the new businesses will experience no interruption to their continuity of service or accrued entitlements. This is a priority for the government.

In fact, the government has established an industrial relations working party, as I have indicated, to discuss the details of transitional arrangements with unions and the corporations involved to ensure as smooth a process as possible. The Bligh government will continue to work with unions, corporations and stakeholders to protect employees, their jobs and their entitlements and ensure workers get a fair day's pay for a fair day's work.



**CHAIR:** Minister, I refer you to page 1-165 of the Service Delivery Statement with regard to the government's participation in the intergovernmental agreement to achieve regulatory reform in occupational health and safety laws across Australia. What is the significance of this reform and how is Queensland influencing the national agenda?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable member very much for her question. The level of consultation on behalf of the Commonwealth has been greatly appreciated by the states and territories, as I have indicated earlier, especially after the abysmal lack of cooperation we received on these matters under the Howard government. There was an historic meeting of state and territory leaders on 3 April 2008 which agreed to commence developing a national model act for occupational health and safety. This agreement reflects the substantial consistency to be found in occupational health and safety laws around Australia.

The Bligh government remains strongly committed to this collaborative process and to continuing to work cooperatively with all governments to develop the model occupational health and safety act. Following the April 2008 meeting, a national review of occupational health and safety laws was announced by the Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard. The review was conducted by a panel of occupational health and safety experts, chaired by Robin Stewart-Crompton. The panel was asked to report to the Workplace Relations Ministers Council on the optimal structure and content of a model occupational health and safety act capable of being adopted in all jurisdictions.

The review panel consulted extensively with stakeholders across Australia in both formulating its recommendations and presenting its findings. Adoption of national modern laws will result in improved and more consistent occupational health and safety outcomes across the country. The harmonisation of occupational health and safety will produce uniform, equitable and effective safety standards and protections for all Australian workers. Harmonisation will also lower business costs by reducing the compliance and regulatory burdens for employers operating in more than one jurisdiction.

The recommendations for the model act include several features from the Queensland occupational health and safety legislation. For instance, the report recommends the general duty to prevent or minimise work related harm be placed on persons conducting a business or undertaking. The Workplace Relations Ministers Council considered the reports of the review panel in April and May 2009 and adopted the majority of the report recommendations, with minor modifications on the advice of senior officials. Work is now progressing on the drafting of an exposure draft of the national model occupational health and safety bill and the supporting economic impact assessment, which are scheduled for release for public comment in September 2009.

By working together in such a way, the states and territories and the Commonwealth are making real progress in making Australian workplaces safer and more productive. The Bligh government is committed to ensuring Queensland workers enjoy safe and productive workplaces.

**Mrs SULLIVAN:** I refer the minister to page 1-164 of the Service Delivery Statement and the government's commitment to working with other jurisdictions to develop a national industrial relations system for the private sector. The Attorney has outlined some of the benefits in a previous answer. But how has this process differed from the approach of previous governments in regard to national industrial relations reform? How will Queensland's involvement in the national system help you to meet the Bligh government's commitment to providing a fair and equitable industrial relations framework for Queenslanders?

**Mr DICK:** Thank you very much for that important question. The Bligh government has been working closely with all state and territory governments and the Commonwealth on the development of a national industrial relations system. This government particularly commends the Rudd government for the unprecedented level of consultation it has undertaken. The two-way communication that has happened over the past two years could become the model for future interactions between the Commonwealth and states on significant reform.

The Bligh government is committed to seeing the implementation of an effective national industrial relations system which provides fair protection to employees and reduces the regulatory burden on employers. A national industrial relations system for the private sector will provide greater certainty for workers and employers in Queensland.

There are clear benefits for business and for the economy through the reduction of red tape and the increased productivity which will result from a single national industrial relations system, but these benefits must not be reached at the expense of workers' rights. At the most recent meeting of the Workplace Relations Ministers Council on 11 June, I indicated the Queensland government's in-principle support for joining a national workplace relations system for the private sector subject to a number of key issues being resolved, and I wish to reiterate those for the benefit of the committee.

These issues include continued state regulation of training arrangements for apprentices and trainees as well as regulation of conditions of employment for apprentices and trainees; a high degree of state government control and input within the national system regarding changes to law and policy to protect Queenslanders from any future ideological crusades like Work Choices; acceptable service

delivery particularly in regional Queensland in the areas of education services, tribunal and compliance services; and the protection of state awards and agreement entitlements for employees transferring to the national system.

This meeting built on the historic commitment of the previous council meeting on 3 April 2009 which agreed to commence developing a model occupation health and safety act. I and other industrial relations ministers are committed to working to finalise a multilateral intergovernmental agreement regarding a national industrial relations system for the private sector by August 2009. The agreement will set out the key principles that will underpin the new system into the future. I am also committed to ensuring that no Queensland worker or their employer will be disadvantaged by moving to the new system in the best way possible. We are going to strive for that to ensure they are protected. To this end, we are working closely with the Commonwealth and other states to resolve a number of key issues. For the first time all jurisdictions have committed to working cooperatively and collaboratively to ensure seamless and consistent industrial relations laws in our nation.

**Ms O'NEILL:** Page 1-164 of the Service Delivery Statement relates to the department's investigations and prosecutions regarding wage arrears. Can the minister outline the number of audits and finalised wage investigations undertaken by the department, the amount of wages recovered for the state's workers and the number of successful prosecutions?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the member very much for the question. This goes to the heart of what government does every day, which is to protect workers in the workplace and to ensure their entitlements are protected and they receive what they are entitled to receive. It is a very critical part of what the department does, and I am very pleased with the work that my officers do, sometimes in difficult circumstances. Sometimes it is hard to tell employers that they have not done the right thing, but they work cooperatively and positively to ensure workers are protected and they get their benefits.

Government industrial inspectors carry out vital work, as I have said, ensuring compliance with Queensland's fair and balanced industrial laws. The audits protect employees and help to provide a level playing field for the vast majority of employers who do the right thing by their staff and pay proper levels of award entitlements. I know that this is something you are very interested in, given your former career before entering the parliament.

These audits are about protecting some of Queensland's most vulnerable workers and ensuring they receive a fair wage for a fair day's work. In 2008-09 the department's industrial inspectors conducted 3,360 audits of Queensland workplaces in relation to compliance with state industrial laws and recovered \$1.16 million for employees. There were another 2,759 complaints resolved by government industrial inspectors, recovering \$2.44 million for workers. The combined total recovered for workers in 2008-09 was \$3.85 million—so almost 4 million—counting the figures I have already mentioned as well as prosecutions for that year.

There were 102 prosecutions finalised in 2008-09, recovering \$248,000 through the courts. It could be asked: how do the enforcement measures affect workers at the grassroots level? One series of audits in the Bundaberg area targeted fruit and vegetable growing in and around Bundaberg, Elliott Heads, Kinkuna, Welcome Creek and other areas. Inspectors carried out 143 audits locally and recovered nearly \$152,000 for the workers, with 100 per cent going to casual employees, of whom a third were young workers.

The Queensland government is committed to ensuring fair workplaces, and so will continue providing information on wages and awards via the Wageline hotline and the Wageline website as well as continuing compliance services through wage complaint activity and general audits across the state. Specific audit services in relation to child employment legislation will also continue. Audit campaigns have revealed that noncompliance with industrial obligations by employers continues to be an issue that needs to be addressed by a strong compliance regime backed with education and prosecution where necessary.

The industries are chosen for audit activity based on information gathered by inspectors in each region or through monitoring trends in complaints from workers. Poor time and wages record keeping by employers continued to be an issue. Inspectors will continue to carry out audits in all areas of the state while the issue of the future delivery of compliance and information services is being discussed and negotiated with the federal government.

**Ms JOHNSTONE:** The Queensland government has had to make some tough decisions in the current unprecedented economic environment. Could the minister explain what the government's new wages policy is and how it will interact with the previous commitments?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the member for Townsville very much for her question. The Queensland government is committed to ensuring that public sector employees continue to receive fair pay and conditions while delivering on high-quality and efficient community services to the people of Queensland. At the same time, the government must balance these obligations with responsible financial management, particularly in times of tough economic conditions as are being experienced

around the world. This is because we have an obligation to the community to implement strategies and initiatives to ease current fiscal and economic pressures while ensuring growth and prosperity measures are given every chance of success.

This year the public service wages policy was revised during the 2009-10 state budget processes, as it weighed up the needs of the community with its commitment to job security and economic growth. The fact is that the government is committed to maintaining wage increases as prescribed in the memorandum of understanding with unions for all agreements covered by the memorandums. This memorandum of understanding operates for 36 months and provides for wage increases of 4.5 per cent in the first year and four per cent in the second and third years, or \$34 per week, whichever is the greater, applying from the first day after the expiry of each of the previous relevant agreements.

The parties and all other agreements that have expired or are due to expire by 31 December this year will have until 1 September 2009 to reach an agreement. Where an agreement is not reached by this date and for agreements expiring after 31 December 2009, a new government wages policy will apply. The new wages policy limits wage increases to 2.5 per cent annually until the budget returns to surplus. The new policy will also apply to chief executives, senior executives, senior officers and their equivalents from 1 July 2009. This is a responsible decision and an essential element in our fiscal strategy.

This is a long-term measure that reflects the challenges and the reality of what lies ahead. The Bligh government will not shy away from making tough decisions in tough times. Officers of my department will continue to work with agencies and trade unions and represent the government in the negotiation of workplace agreements which maximise efficiency, effectiveness and service delivery. The government will continue its commitment to govern responsibly in the current economic and fiscal environment.

**CHAIR:** Minister, my question relates to workers compensation for employees suffering from work related latent onset diseases such as the dreadful mesothelioma. I refer the minister to page 1-164 of the Service Delivery Statement and ask: how have workers and their families benefited by recent changes to legislation?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable member for her question. As you have indicated, latent onset diseases are insidious conditions, many of which are terminal. The Bligh government worked closely with unions, the Queensland Asbestos Related Disease Support Society under the leadership of the late Shirley White, whom I acknowledge here today, and WorkCover Queensland before introducing legislation into parliament last year on behalf of workers and their families.

The changes contained in an amendment to the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2003 meant families of workers suffering work related latent onset diseases such as mesothelioma would face fewer financial hardships. The changes provided additional benefits to the families of workers who die. The Bligh government is committed to protecting workers and their families, and ensuring provisions are made for victims of latent onset diseases.

Under the changes, when a deceased worker has already received a payment of lump sum compensation or damages for a latent onset injury, new family entitlements are a one-off lump sum payment of approximately \$63,920 and reasonable funeral expenses of approximately \$8,526. In the past, where a sufferer died before claiming their full lump sum entitlement, dependant family members received full death payments. However, this was not the case with dependants of sufferers who had been paid their full lump sum entitlement. This caused financial hardship for the surviving spouse when it came to paying funeral expenses or simply moving on with life after caring for a sick partner for many years.

There can be no doubt that families of sufferers of latent onset disease are under huge stresses and strains often for many years, but now benefits for sufferers of latent onset illnesses in Queensland are arguably the most generous in Australia and something we should all be proud of. Queensland entitlements are no-fault statutory benefits, meaning that the person does not have to go to court to receive lump sum compensation. Importantly, it is still possible to take common law action for further damages provided that their work related impairment is 20 per cent or more.

Where a latent onset injury is asbestos related, WorkCover Queensland gives priority to processing a claim for compensation irrespective of whether the claim is lodged by the worker or the worker's dependants. On average, 85 per cent of these claims are decided within 14 days of receipt—a very efficient turnaround of those applications. Again, it is another way that we are seeking to deliver on our commitments for Queenslanders but also to help some of the sickest and most vulnerable Queenslanders.

**CHAIR:** The remaining time for the examination will be divided equally between the non-government and government members. I call the member for Southern Downs.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Can I go back to an answer which the minister provided earlier with regards to the number of workplace health and safety breaches within the government sector in the last 12 months? I think the minister indicated 1,007 inspections and 585 compliance orders or thereabouts and two infringements. Minister, you may take this on notice. Would you be able to supply the committee with the details of where these inspections, breaches and infringements occurred broken down by the various departments or GOCs involved?

**Mr DICK:** I am happy to consider the member's request. Obviously what officers of my department have to do is go out into the field and do the job. This is what I want them to do. I want them to ensure workplaces are safe. I want to ensure that employers of employees who are not getting their entitlements are audited so that employees who are being short-changed in the workplace get a fair day's pay.

I am happy to look at that issue for the honourable member, but I am not going to tie up officers of my department providing reams of detail. Perhaps a regional breakdown might be something we can do to give members a better idea. I acknowledge the importance of this committee and the proper examination of the portfolio, and I do not seek to diminish that, but a balance needs to be found between the work of officers of the department and the important service delivery that they have to do each and every day with additional administrative work. As you can imagine, an enormous amount of work goes into preparing for these estimates hearings, and I thank them for that. So I am happy to look at it perhaps on a regional basis to provide a breakdown so we know where the hot spots are on a regional basis in Queensland.

**CHAIR:** Will you advise the committee of your decision on that, Minister?

**Mr DICK:** I will.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I would have thought that the department would probably have an overview of the number of breaches in the various departments, whether it may have been health, education or thereabouts, but we will take the commitment from the minister and pursue it further if the information requires broadening.

I turn now to page 1-175 of the SDS which relates particularly to prosecution matters actioned within nine months of the incident. It says that the target estimate for the previous financial year was 70 to 80 per cent and the estimated actual was only 50 per cent. Can the minister give an indication to the committee why the department fell so absolutely short with regard to the prosecution of these particular workplace safety breaches?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the member for his question. I can indicate to the committee that my department seeks to achieve a balance in educating and informing industry in injury prevention matters and the enforcement of the legislation, as I indicated earlier in the hearing today. Prosecutions are an essential part of the department's role as a regulator and assist in prevention by deterring others from committing workplace health and safety offences.

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland aims to ensure prosecution activity is strategically targeted for maximum impact and is supported by evidence based research to help target identified areas of concern. The appeal of a prosecution outcome of an individual magistrate made by the defence to the president of the industrial commission provides an opportunity to test the legal validity of the legislation. On a number of occasions a decision favouring the defence has triggered amendments to workplace health and safety legislation. The department is constantly seeking to improve its compliance, monitoring and enforcement activities.

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland has revised its enforcement and compliance framework in line with the national policy. The new policy is nationally consistent and provides a more rounded approach that takes greater account of serious risk of injury or illness.

A total of 1,180 investigations were also conducted into incidents that caused death, grievous bodily harm or bodily harm. Of these, 370 had the potential to be considered for prosecution. The enforcement framework provides clear guidelines for determining whether an investigation will proceed to a prosecution.

I am pleased to report that in 2008-09 Workplace Health and Safety Queensland completed 146 prosecutions, and 115 of these were successful and resulted in over \$3.3 million in fines and a success rate of 90 per cent. The performance in 2008-09 is a significant improvement over the 2007-08 result, which had an 86 per cent success rate. Some 106 prosecutions were completed, with 87 successful and \$2.8 million recovered in fines.

As I have already informed the committee, the department's prosecutions are for incidents that have caused death or bodily harm. The Service Delivery Statement at page 3-229 refers to the target of actioning 70 to 80 per cent of prosecutions within nine months of an incident. In 2008-09, 50 per cent of prosecutions were actioned within this time frame. However, I can inform all committee members, and they should be assured, as all members of the Queensland community, that all prosecutions have been actioned within the statutory time frame.

In addition to the traditional prosecution activity, the department's alternative enforcement option—enforceable undertakings—is also performing well. Members may recall that I provided them with information on that earlier. The department accepted 20 undertakings in 2008-09, an increase of 12 undertakings from the eight accepted in 2007-08. When translated into financial terms, the community benefit is \$8 million compared with \$1 million in 2007-08.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** My next question relates to page 1-160 of the SDS with regard to keeping jobs safe both in the private and public sectors. I note that the minister has answered a question from the member for Townsville regarding the government's privatisation agenda. I note the minister has indicated that this is a strategic not a panic-driven approach. I would be interested to know how something which has happened so recently can be considered strategic. My considered question is: when did the department find out about the proposed privatisation agenda? Notwithstanding the two-year postprivatisation employment guarantee, which the minister referred to a moment ago, what advice is available to him as to the likely implication on job security for these privatised entities post that particular guarantee?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the member for the question. The Queensland government is facing, as I have indicated and as all honourable members would know, unprecedented economic and fiscal circumstances. The Premier has announced the Renewing Queensland Plan, which will restructure the Queensland government's assets, as indicated earlier.

We have recent history in Queensland of selling government owned corporations including the Cairns and Mackay airports. That has been very positive. The Renewing Queensland Plan involves the sale of Forestry Plantations Queensland's softwood business and possibly its hardwood plantations; the sale of Queensland Motorway Ltd's business, incorporating a major upgrade of the Port of Brisbane Motorway; the sale of the Port of Brisbane Corporation's business and assets; and the sale of Queensland Rail's above- and below-rail coal businesses and assets, along with the Ports Corporation of Queensland's Abbot Point Coal Terminal. The intention to instigate negotiations with the Australian government over the potential sale of other parts of QR's below-rail network to the Australian government's own Australian Rail Track Corporation and options involving the potential sale of QR's bulk intermodal retail and regional freight services will also be considered.

The plan will fundamentally reform the role of government in a modern Queensland. The sales will secure the government's ability to invest in new areas of activity, new forms of public transport, cutting-edge technology in communications, new industries and groundbreaking areas of knowledge. They will secure what people need most: schools, hospitals, roads, safer neighbourhoods and assistance for disabled Queenslanders. It is envisaged that the sales will be progressed in the market over the next three to five years. As part of the plan, the fuel subsidy, as all honourable members know, was discontinued as of 1 July 2009 to help secure, as I have indicated, what people require.

In previous government owned corporation sales or GOC reforms, industrial relations working groups have established sales or reform frameworks to protect employee entitlements and manage the transfer of employees to new owners or new entities through negotiation and consultation between the following groups: representatives of shareholding ministers' departments, representatives from the GOC industrial relations unit within my department, representatives from the relevant unions, representatives from relevant GOCs and representatives from other relevant stakeholders if necessary.

Individual working groups for each of the individual corporations and assets identified for sale will also be established to progress arrangements, including industrial relations and employment transition. There is some opposition to the sale but we are working closely with them and they are part of the process. They will have a place around the table.

As well, employment guarantees will be in place for two years beyond the date of sale. Employees transferring to the new businesses will experience no interruption to their continuity of service or accrued entitlements. I indicate that my department has hit the ground running on this issue and has already met and will continue to meet with stakeholders involved in the sale of Forestry Plantations Queensland.

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

**Mrs SULLIVAN:** Page 1-165 of the Service Delivery Statement refers to the government's ongoing commitment to improve worker safety. Can you provide an update on how the government has acted to improve safety in the use of swing-stage scaffolding on high-rise buildings?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable member for her question. This has been a significant matter. It is one that I announced at the community cabinet on the Gold Coast. As honourable members will know, swing-stage scaffolding is a very dangerous form of equipment used on construction sites. I am pleased to have announced the new code of practice.

It is very important because we have an \$18.2 billion Capital Works Program and major civil projects underway throughout the state. The safety of workers at construction sites remains an absolute priority. As I indicated, earlier this month I launched the new safety standards for the use of suspended swing-stage scaffolding on high-rise buildings. I was pleased to join with union and industry representatives to release the scaffolding Code of Practice 2009.

The safety of workers on Queensland construction sites is an absolute priority for the Bligh government. The new safety standards will greatly improve the safety of people working on swing stages in our state. These new standards are the latest step we have taken to improve swing stage safety following the tragic death of two workers when a swing stage failed on the Gold Coast last year.

This incident has been investigated and is currently before the Industrial Magistrates Court. The incident highlighted to the government and industry the need to review the standards for this type of work. The government acted immediately to implement stringent and mandatory interim requirements for swing-stage scaffolding while longer term measures were developed. Specialist Workplace Health and Safety Queensland construction inspectors conducted audits of construction sites and swing stages across the state and issued enforcement notices where necessary.

The government also acted immediately to set up an independent reference group including representatives from Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, the Builders Labourers Federation, the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, the Master Builders Association and the Scaffolding Association. I am pleased the resulting amendments to the code go a long way towards reducing the risk of this kind of tragedy ever happening again. They demonstrate clearly what we can achieve when we work together to improve workplace safety. It is another example of employer and employee groups and government working together to get safe outcomes for Queenslanders.

I indicate to the committee that the amendments include new standards for the design, installation and use of swing-stage scaffolding; practical advice on ways to manage exposure to the risk of death or injury relating to the erection, use, maintenance, alteration or dismantling of scaffolding; new checklists and verification forms to improve compliance across industry and ensure obligation holders are aware of their safety requirements; and mandatory training for swing stage installers and users.

Later this year the government will introduce two new industry training courses for the installers and users of swing stages to further boost safety standards for high-risk work. Workplace Health and Safety Queensland inspectors will continue to monitor the use of swing stages in Queensland to ensure compliance with the new standards.

**Ms O'NEILL:** Page 1-165 of the Service Delivery Statement relates to the activities of the workplace health and safety inspectorate. I ask the minister to inform the committee of the number of prosecutions finalised and the resulting fines?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the member for Kallangur for her question. Ensuring the state's workplaces are fair, safe and just is a priority for the Bligh government. The government, through Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, seeks to achieve balance between educating and informing industry about injury prevention and enforcing compliance with health and safety laws. This strategy encourages obligation holders to comply while ensuring there are fair and swift consequences for those who do not.

The Bligh government is committed to making Queensland workplaces among the safest in the world. Building a safe workplace has a few benefits for businesses. It improves staff morale and productivity. Most importantly, by ensuring Queensland workplaces are safe we can ensure Queensland workers return home to their families each night.

Prosecutions are an essential part of Workplace Health and Safety Queensland's regulatory role and assist in injury prevention by deterring others from committing workplace health and safety offences. The prosecution activity of Workplace Health and Safety Queensland is strategically targeted for maximum effect and is supported by evidence based research to help target identified areas of concern.

In 2008-09, 146 prosecutions were completed compared with 106 in the previous year. A successful prosecution rate, as I have indicated earlier, of 90 per cent was achieved. As I have also indicated to the committee, more than \$3.3 million in fines were ordered by the courts for breaches of the Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995 and the Electrical Safety Act 2002. These fines send a strong message that workplace health and safety must be a priority.

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland responds to a large range of incidents and complaints each year according to the Queensland workplace health and safety enforcement framework. This framework outlines how these events are prioritised to ensure an appropriate and proportionate response. Under the framework, a wide range of enforcement measures are available from advice, education and information to issuing compliance notices and directives, the removal of licences, enforceable undertakings and prosecution.

Inspectors conducted 24,303 workplace visits and issued more than 10,000 enforcement notices as part of its compliance and education activities in 2008-09. Inspectors are only able to act within the constraints of their authority and jurisdiction. Before an investigation occurs officers must determine that the incident falls within the jurisdiction of the Workplace Health and Safety Act. Where this is not the case, the issue is referred to the appropriate agency. Where an investigation reveals noncompliance, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland will consider whether or not a prosecution should be commenced or another sanction applied or some other appropriate action taken.

**Ms JOHNSTONE:** Minister, on page 1-165 of the Service Delivery Statement I note that the department is increasing its focus on education and awareness initiatives as one of the strategies to reduce the rate of work related injury and disease. What is in place for construction workers? Does the department have a program to assist construction workers to look after their health as well as their safety on the job?

**Mr DICK:** I thank the honourable member for Townsville for her question. The Bligh government's Toward Q2: Tomorrow's Queensland strategy aims to make Queenslanders the nation's healthiest people by 2020. The government's priority is to reduce current levels of obesity, smoking, heavy drinking and unsafe sun exposure by one-third. Workplaces can play a key role in achieving this.

The department, together with Queensland Health, has convened a task force of government, union and employer groups to develop better health strategies for outdoor workers. The task force will report back to government towards the end of 2009. The health and wellbeing of workers is vital to the success of any workplace. This new program will not only help workers to improve their personal health; it will serve to make them more productive. The Bligh government wants Queensland workers to be the healthiest in the country. Programs like this will help us to achieve this important goal. I encourage all members of parliament to focus on that as well.

The catalyst for this initiative was the alarming result of a recent study of 1,000 construction workers conducted as part of the construction work health initiative pilot. It found disturbing levels of poor health in construction workers compared with the Queensland average. We are going to continue to work with those construction workers and those construction groups.

I also acknowledge the Building Employees Redundancy Trust, known as BERT, Boulderstones, the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, the Builders Labourers Federation and the Plumbers Union Queensland for a new program that has been initiated, 'Your Health. Your Future.', at the South-East Queensland correctional precinct near Gatton. I was very pleased to go out and launch that program. It is great to see industry, union and government working together on their initiative—particularly through BERT and Boulderstones—to have a fitter and healthier workplace. I acknowledge them publicly.

**CHAIR:** The time allotted for the consideration of the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of the Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations has now expired. Thank you, Attorney. I would like to thank the ministerial advisers and all of our wonderful public servants who I know have put in many thousands of hours. Minister, I would ask you to pass on the committee's thanks to all the officers concerned. The committee will now break for lunch and resume at 1.15 pm to examine the estimates for the portfolio of the Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland. Thank you for your attendance.

**Mr DICK:** Before we adjourn, can I put on the record my thanks to the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. The change to incorporate industrial relations within the justice portfolio has been a very positive one. I want to thank all the hardworking officers who do the work in the field but also those who have supported me in this hearing today. I also thank the committee for their work today and their ongoing commitment to the open and accountable functioning of this parliament and this government.

**Proceedings suspended from 12.17 pm to 1.14 pm**

## ESTIMATES COMMITTEE E—PRIMARY INDUSTRIES, FISHERIES AND RURAL AND REGIONAL QUEENSLAND

### In Attendance

Hon. TS Mulherin, Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland  
**Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation**

Mr P Henneken, Director-General

Mr B Turner, Deputy Director-General, Strategic Directions

Mr J Groves, Deputy Director-General, Fisheries

Mr M Richards, Chief Financial Officer, Corporate and Departmental Services

Mr M Bermingham, Executive Director, Regional Development and Services

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**CHAIR:** I declare this meeting of Estimates Committee E now open. I am Jo-Ann Miller, the member for Bundamba and chair of the committee. Joining me on the committee are Glen Elmes, the member for Noosa; Ray Hopper, the member for Condamine; Amanda Johnstone, the member for Townsville; Mary-Anne O'Neill, the member for Kallangur; Lawrence Springborg, the member for Southern Downs and deputy chair of the committee; and Carryn Sullivan, the member for Pumicestone. This afternoon the committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2009 for the portfolio of the Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland. Welcome, Minister Mulherin, and advisers.

**Mr MULHERIN:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIR:** The committee will examine estimates for the portfolio until 3.45 pm. The proceedings today are lawful proceedings subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. As such, I remind all visitors that any person admitted to this hearing may be excluded in accordance with standing order No. 206. In relation to media coverage of the hearing, the committee has resolved to allow television film coverage and photography during my introduction and the minister's opening statement. 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. Before we begin, may I ask that all mobile phones be now switched off.

The time limit for questions is one minute and three minutes for answers. A warning bell will chime 15 seconds before the time runs out. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask all advisers, if you are called by the minister to give an answer, to please state your name and position before speaking. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister Mulherin, would you care to make an opening statement? If so, you have five minutes.

**Mr MULHERIN:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to thank my parliamentary colleagues who form Estimates Committee E for the opportunity to address them this afternoon and answer questions regarding the Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland Service Delivery Statements. In 2008-09 the Queensland agricultural sector was worth \$13 billion and employed more than 100,000 people, and that does not take into account the flow-on effects in terms of jobs and economic growth. During the most challenging financial period of our lifetime, agriculture is leading the way. It has demonstrated its resiliency in its important role in economic growth and job creation. Following the 2009 Queensland election, the government formed the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation to bring together in one department the three key sectors of economic growth in Queensland—mining, agriculture and tourism. This highlights the importance of agriculture and shows that this government is meeting its commitments to be focused on jobs.

The inclusion of Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries in DEEDI positions my agency to play a more central role in the government's jobs and economic development agenda. At the same time, QPIF remains committed to delivering biosecurity, fisheries and agricultural research, development and extension services. I continue to marvel at the work being performed in this great agency—whether it is remote-sensing technology that can pinpoint a fire ant mound in an area the size of a football field or genetics research that will lead to more tender beef or sweet corn varieties that can help preserve eyesight. Cutting-edge science and research is the core of nearly everything we do in Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries.



Much has been achieved over the past year since my last estimates hearing. In December 2008 I launched Queensland's first Biosecurity Strategy which maps out our key areas of focus over the next five years to build on Queensland's world-class biosecurity system. It is a system that continues to deliver successful prevention, monitoring and surveillance strategies to deal with damaging pests and diseases. This protects Queensland's production base, preserves our clean and green reputation and maintains our access to markets. In the last 12 months Biosecurity Queensland helped restore Australia's status as an equine influenza free country, addressed the Hendra virus incident and achieve the eradication of citrus canker.

QPIF finalised the management arrangements for Queensland's biggest fishery, the inshore fin fish fishery, after an extensive consultation process. The new arrangements ensure a fair allocation of resource and a profitable sustainable fishery. We have continued to meet our commitment to build on the sector's economic potential through the Fresh Approach strategy. During the past 12 months this partnership has been fully embraced by staff and stakeholders. In fact, industry was by my side last December when I launched the beef 2020 plan, which is a key element of Fresh Approach. Following the 2009 election, responsibilities for rural and regional Queensland were added to my portfolio duties. This provides an ideal opportunity to build on strong partnerships I have formed with stakeholders in rural and regional Queensland.

Looking to the year ahead, this government will deliver on a range of commitments to assist Queensland's agricultural industries and to enhance job creation in rural and regional Queensland. We will continue our disinvest and reinvest strategy to drive the Fresh Approach agenda. We will implement the Queensland Biosecurity Strategy and modern legislation in association with the creation of Biosecurity Queensland. We will finalise and put in place a fisheries strategy to enhance the economic value of Queensland fisheries on a sustainable basis and support the recreational fishing sector. We will implement the next phase of Blueprint for the Bush initiatives with a greater focus on economic drivers to ensure the viability of remote and rural communities.

We will finalise the strategic plan for the Australian Agricultural College Corporation. There is no fire sale plan, but there will and must be reform of the business model. The message from industry is that high-level qualifications, business management and supervisory skill sets for existing workers are needed along with improved full-time residential farm scale programs for school leavers. Our aim is to make the corporation the premiere provider of rural and related industry training. I am pleased now to take questions from my parliamentary colleagues in relation to the Queensland Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland Service Delivery Statements.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. We will start today's examination with non-government questions. I call the member for Condamine.

**Mr HOPPER:** Good afternoon to the minister and your staff. Minister, I refer to the Service Delivery Statement at page 2-7. Your very brief outlook statement for DPIF for the coming fiscal year covers 300 words—300 words, Minister, for your department with an operating budget of over a third of a billion dollars. You have given us one word for every million dollars that you are spending. Do you think that that is an adequate summary for an outlook statement for a department of this size?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the honourable member for the question. Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries plays a very important role in the economic development of this state. With regard to the Service Delivery Statement, you have only focused on one narrow section of it. It is quite extensive. We have a core budget of \$263.4 million in 2009-10. As I indicated in my speech, there is a lot of reform agenda within this great portfolio. I have outlined on a number of occasions Fresh Approach, developing the strategy for the Agricultural College Corporation, our biosecurity legislation and our fisheries strategy. I believe that Primary Industries under the new Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation will certainly assist this industry—the agribusiness sector—to be one of the key agencies in creating job and wealth creation in this state.

Within the new department, Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries is a distinct stream in recognition of the high priorities of this function. I have remained the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries and my portfolio now includes additional responsibilities related to rural and regional Queensland. Mr Peter Henneken is the acting director-general of DEEDI and Mr Robert Setter is the associate director-general of Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries. As part of the DEEDI portfolio, the government has brought together the key economic drivers that have driven the wealth of this state—mining, agriculture and tourism. The government will continue to invest in a range of services that will assist agribusiness and rural and regional Queensland to prosper into the future.

**Mr HOPPER:** Minister, I refer to the Service Delivery Statement at page 2-64 and the amount of \$82.402 million listed for supplies and services compared to \$107.17 million for 2008-09. Can you please detail the major areas and specific services to be affected by the \$24.768 million cut?

**Mr MULHERIN:** As I said in my previous answer, the core budget for Queensland Primary Industries is expected to decrease from \$270.8 million in 2008-09 to \$263.4 million in 2009-10. This is a reduction of \$7.4 million or 2.7 per cent. In relation to supply and services compared to the previous year, \$107.17 million is the estimated actual expenditure on supply and services in 2008-09. The

\$83.4 million is the estimated expenditure on supply and services in 2010. The two cannot be directly compared, as the former is known for expenditure after the event and the latter is for the estimated expenditure before the event.

The major differences between the two years are in the following areas: reduction in travel and budget for general purchasing, for example, day-to-day office materials; use of external consultants and contractors; lower overhead costs due to rationalisation of infrastructure; tighter and more controlled management of motor vehicles and plant hire; and savings due to changes in life cycle management of computers. These reductions will apply across all of QPIF and budgets will be reduced accordingly. There are known changes in the annual national cost share of exotic pest and disease eradication programs. Some programs have been successfully ended and therefore have no funding. For example, in 2009-10 citrus canker and equine influenza have been successfully completed. The National Electric Ant Eradication Program has approved nationally cost shared funding of \$1 million in 2009-10 and the expenditure on the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program has yet to be agreed in 2009-10 and is therefore not yet able to be budgeted.

Negotiations are continuing for up to \$15 million in 2009-10 under the National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program and all expenditure against that funding will appear in the 2009 estimated actuals in next year's budget papers. One-off funding deferrals in 2008-09 from 2007-08 included a Fresh Approach initiative; planning for the disinvestment and reinvestment in infrastructure; design options for enhanced service delivery, including integration of science, extension of vocational training services, support for and engagement with staff and industry stakeholders, workforce realignments of skills in line with changing infrastructure and the services of the department; the Land Protection Fund for our Plague Pest Contingency Fund; capital expenditure upgrades of the Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries IT platform across the whole portfolio; and the Veterinary Surgeons Board. 2009-10 budget deferrals from 2008-09 have yet to be finalised.

**Mr HOPPER:** Sounds like slash and burn to me!

**Mr MULHERIN:** It is interesting to note that you made the comment during the election that what you would do is get rid of contractors, so it is a bit like the pot calling the kettle black.

**Mr HOPPER:** My questions have not finished yet. I refer to page 2-07 of the Service Delivery Statements. You intend to upgrade the department's IT platform, with the goal of having 50 per cent of services online by 2012 and to provide extra mobile offices. Minister, what offices that are currently open do you intend to close in regional centres between now and 2012? How many staff currently employed in regional offices and in regional based roles are to be either redeployed or made redundant in the drive for half of the services to be online?

**Mr MULHERIN:** During the election campaign I said that our target by 2012 is to put 50 per cent of our services online. Already this has been welcomed by industry. In fact, recently I sat in on a conference—a webinar as it is called—with Leading Sheep. The people who participated in that webinar were saying how great it was not only that they had access to me and other senior departmental officers but that it saved a considerable amount of time and travel. They were able to share their information with other Leading Sheep producers.

Another example is a single web conference with 10 participants from regional centres around Queensland can save 50 hours of travel time, over \$2,500 worth of air fares and over three metric tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>. Perhaps more importantly, it will enable greater collaboration between staff and agribusiness clients, leading to a greater adoption of QPIF innovative science. In addition, we are pulling together all our tools that our own people have used to do modelling on that will assist enterprises to make informed decisions.

The mobile office was a trial. The evaluation of that has indicated that it has been well received within rural and regional Queensland. It gives us the ability to get out into areas where we currently do not have any coverage or physical structure.

As I said, under the Fresh Approach one of the pillars was modernising the services of the department. Feedback from clients and stakeholders who have been involved in the engagement have welcomed the approach. In fact, industry is very critical in the design and implementation of this. There are no secrets in this. I have held a number of dialogues around the state. I have engaged with industry and so has the department in developing Fresh Approach. Industry has welcomed this approach.

Over the next 12 months we will be looking at establishing a series of agribusiness service centres located strategically throughout regional Queensland. With our IT capabilities, our agribusiness services, our mobile offices—a whole range of things—I believe we will provide better service delivery for agribusiness.

**Mr HOPPER:** I refer to page 2-7 of the SDS and your statement that the proceeds of the sale of 'outdated' research stations—your word—will be used to finance new investment in the beef industry. What research stations and facilities have been or will be sold? What guarantees are there for all the moneys raised from the asset sales to be reinvested in the DPIF research facilities?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the honourable member for the question. We have made no secret of Fresh Approach. It is an initiative that has been welcomed by industry. We have indicated that there are a number of assets that we will dispose of and use the proceeds of the sale from those assets to reinvest in new facilities. If you start at the south-east corner, we have already seen major investment around the Ecosciences Precinct at Boggo Road, the Redlands cropping centre and the Centre for Advanced Animal Science at Gatton which will be in partnership with the University of Queensland. That will also include the Queensland university veterinary college. The Mutdapilly dairy research facility, at industry's request, want to relocate to that Gatton facility. I believe the Gatton facility will become a world-class research facility. But not all the money is being spent in the south-east corner. We went through—

**Mr HOPPER:** Is it all in the DPI?

**Mr MULHERIN:** It is all being reinvested back in. Treasury has given us approval to reinvest, through the asset sales, into new facilities. We went through an independent process up on the Tablelands, where we looked at our ageing facilities that were on the Tablelands. We have announced that we will spend, all up, \$8 million on reinvesting in new facilities on the Tablelands.

Already we have sold the dairy herd from the Kairi Research Station. We will retain about 24 hectares of land at Kairi for the maize breeding and peanut breeding program, but most of the effort will be focused at Walkamin. There will be a new facility built at our Mareeba street office, where currently there is a PC2 laboratory, but we will build a new facility that will integrate scientists, extension officers and the Mareeba agricultural college into one new facility.

In addition, we will be selling off the Southedge research facility. When we move to Townsville, we announced that we will be building a PC3 biosecurity laboratory at James Cook University as part of the 2020 Beef program. This will result also in the sales of Toorak, Swans Lagoon and Brigalow, with that money being reinvested in the purchasing of the new research facility at Charters Towers. We have made no secret of this and we will continue to work with industry in the design and the implementation of Fresh Approach. Fresh Approach is what industry wants.

**Mr HOPPER:** I refer to your answer to question on notice No. 4 on the research dairy herd on the Atherton Tableland, which really was the only tropical research dairy herd of its type in the world—until you sold it. You state that the funds from the sale of that herd will contribute to the state's economic development, innovation and biosecurity. Can you guarantee that the sale of that herd will be spent 100 per cent on the Atherton Tableland research facility by you and your department and that none of that money will go into consolidated revenue? A straight-up answer: yes or no.

**Mr MULHERIN:** Yes, I will give you a straight up and down answer. The answer is yes, it will be reinvested.

**Mr HOPPER:** That is good.

**Mr MULHERIN:** We sold off the dairy herd. In fact, that dairy herd was really about supplying milk to the dairy. We have sat down with industry and we have committed to developing new strategies around the tropical dairy. As I said in answer to the previous question, the dairy industry approached us about the Mutdapilly research facility. They will be relocating there. There are a number of programs that we will be implementing, with industry support, on the Tablelands which will support the tropical dairy.

Of course, we are working under a national R&D framework. Victoria will take the lead in that area but I believe, with the facilities that we are investing in at places like Gatton, we will see further research done for the national dairy industry. The dairy industry on the Tablelands is an important issue. It supports a processing facility there and creates jobs for people in that region. As I said, we are developing a program with the dairy industry in relation to their needs, particularly around extension and training. That is the approach that we are taking.

When we look at the investment, as I said, the \$6.5 million will be spent at Mareeba and \$1.5 million will be spent on Walkamin. We expect, through selling Kairi, that we will get about \$6 million, for Southedge about \$0.8 million, and for the herd \$0.5 million, which gives us a total of \$7.3 million. That is what we anticipate in return on these assets and we will invest \$8 million.

**Mr HOPPER:** I refer to page 2-8 of the SDS and your comments on the Blueprint for the Bush about how you will guide the implementation of the next phase, in your words, 'with a greater focus on the economic drivers that ensure the viability of rural and remote communities.' Minister, what do you have to say about the manager of the Blueprint for the Bush's strategic office in Mackay—in your electorate—who pulled the pin? This man was a dedicated and respected public servant who resigned in disgust over the lack of direction and disinterest from your government. What do you have to say about him and half his staff of the seven or eight who have gone too? Please tell us.

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the honourable member for the question. The former employee, Mr Frank Gilbert, did a great job working for and supporting people in rural and regional Queensland. Mr Gilbert did resign, but not for the reasons you have indicated. I have read nowhere where those comments have been used. It is only supposition on your part.

The Office of Rural and Regional Communities in Mackay will continue. I think the Blueprint for the Bush is a great program. It was a partnership between AgForce and the Local Government Association of Queensland. It was a 10-year program and we will continue to work with our founding partners, AgForce and the Local Government of Association Queensland, but the partnership has now been extended to the Queensland Farmers Federation and the Queensland Resources Council.

I think the key to rural and regional Queensland is to make sure that we have strong, robust, economic communities that will drive job creation in those communities. The Office of Rural and Regional Communities comes from the former department of local government and it is now part of DEEDI. By bringing together from the old tourism, regional development and industry portfolio the office of rural and regional Queensland and the office of rural and regional communities from local government under my portfolio, that will enable us to do greater things. Over the time that I have been the minister, I have engaged extensively with stakeholders and that is why the focus of the Blueprint for the Bush will be how we enhance economic activity in those regions.

**CHAIR:** It is now time for government questions.

**Mrs SULLIVAN:** Minister, I refer to page 2-17, paragraph 1 of the Service Delivery Statements regarding fisheries. Can the minister outline what steps are being taken to restore populations of native fish, such as jungle perch, and enhance recreational fishing opportunities in Queensland waters?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the honourable member for the question. The Queensland government, through QPIF, has responsibilities for ensuring that Queensland's native fish are managed sustainably and will be available for future generations. In support of that, in July 2007 the Queensland government embarked on a three-year recreational fishing program as part of the Living the Queensland Lifestyle policy. Through this policy, the Queensland government committed \$1.5 million over three years to recreational fishing. This included important freshwater fish stocking initiatives, such as the provision of annual grants to community fish stocking groups for the purchase of fingerlings, the provision of fish tags and tagging equipment to community fishing groups to improve local fisheries monitoring, financial assistance with the building of the Lake Macdonald community fish hatchery following cyclone damage, and the restoration and management program for the jungle perch species.

The restoration and management program for jungle perch has been particularly successful. Research has determined the natural breeding cycle for jungle perch, the potential spawning sites and a range of other genetic and reproductive information. Given the considerable progress made to date in understanding the breeding biology of the jungle perch, the project will receive a further \$134,000 in funding in 2009-10. This will enable QPIF to successfully spawn jungle perch. It is expected that the spawning will commence in November 2009 and go through until March 2010. During this period it is anticipated that the fingerlings will be produced for release into selected sites. If spawning is successful the fingerlings will be able to be produced for releases into locations such as the Mackay-Whitsunday region, the Mary River, the Mooloolaba River, Six Mile Creek and Elimbah Creek in Pumicestone Passage. Restoring the population of jungle perch into these waterways would greatly improve the biodiversity of these ecosystems.

In addition, successful spawning could enable jungle perch to be bred and released into 33 dams which currently form part of QPIF's highly successful Stocked Empoundment Permit Scheme. The opportunity to catch jungle perch would attract increased numbers of recreational fishers, thereby creating increased tourism opportunities for regional communities throughout Queensland.

Ongoing research by QPIF, along with the workshop proposed to be held at the end of the year, will look for opportunities to extend the breeding techniques to private hatcheries. The range of freshwater and fish-stocking initiatives currently being undertaken by QPIF, along with the success being experienced in these initiatives, will ensure the sustainability of native fish stocks into the future as well as enhanced recreational fishing opportunities in Queensland.

**Ms O'NEILL:** I refer to the successful prevention strategies noted on page 2-13, dot point 2 of the Service Delivery Statements. With respect to the animal pest barrier fences, what is the Queensland government's plan for the future protection of our important primary industries?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the honourable member for the question. Queensland has three separate barrier fence systems—the wild dog barrier fence, the Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board fence; and the wild dog check fences—for the prevention of movements of various pest animals into particular parts of the state. The governance and financial management arrangements for the three pest animal barrier fences have a long history and have evolved to where they are today through various governments, acts of parliament and departmental arrangements.

Biosecurity Queensland recently engaged an independent consultant, Hyder Consulting, to review the economic, environmental and social benefits of the barrier fence as well as the operational efficiencies, funding and government arrangements for the fence. The consultants have provided a comprehensive report with recommendations to direct future administration, advisory arrangements, funding, governance and operational management of the fences. The consultants ran a public

consultation program with a cross-section of interest groups at focus group meetings in six regional centres within the pest animal barrier fences. The review was guided by a stakeholder steering committee that will advise me on the implications for implementing the recommendations of the review.

A consultation process is being undertaken with all stakeholders, including each of the 17 regional councils with an interest in the pest animal barrier fences, to formally discuss issues and future actions in relation to the Hyder report. The government will provide a formal response to the report following completion of the consultation process, taking full account of stakeholder contributions.

**Ms JOHNSTONE:** Minister, I refer to page 2-13, dot point 6 of the Service Delivery Statements. Please outline what funding the Queensland government has committed to strengthening service delivery programs and growth in rural and regional communities?

**Mr MULHERIN:** The Strengthening Rural Communities initiative is a key component of the Blueprint for the Bush program. Funding of \$11.7 million has been approved over three years—that was the financial year 2006-07 to the financial year 2008-09—to three activities under this initiative: the Our Place, Our Future funding program, the Rural Service Access Initiative and the Revitalising Rural Image program. In 2008-09 almost \$5.2 million was allocated under the Our Place, Our Future grant funding program and the Rural Service Access Initiative to support local projects in rural communities across Queensland. As all available funds have been committed in the early years, new funding was not allocated in 2008-09 to the Revitalising Rural Image program.

More than \$4 million was committed under the Our Place, Our Future grant program as a result of four funding rounds held in 2008-09 and almost \$800,000 was committed to the Rural Service Access Initiative grants. The fourth funding round of Our Place, Our Future was administered by DEEDI, and I am pleased to highlight that 55 organisations across the state shared in \$1.3 million in funds committed under this round assisting people in rural and remote communities to shape and manage their own futures.

These were the final rounds of the funding for all initiatives under the DEEDI component of the Strengthening Rural Communities initiative. This funding is now fully allocated except for about \$9,000. The Our Place, Our Future grant funding program assisted people in rural and remote communities to shape and manage their own futures through projects such as providing a coordinated regional approach to current skills shortages in the Mackay-Whitsunday region, creating the Liveable Cassowary Coast plan outlining management strategies for the protection of regional coastal zones, developing a community plan for the Atherton Tablelands community and assisting in the establishment of the RM Williams Bush Learning Centre at Eidsvold.

Of the almost \$800,000 allocated to Rural Service Access Initiative in 2008-09, seven projects were funded to support coordinated community based transport schemes in rural and remote communities. This has included the implementation of community transport schemes in Goondiwindi, the Burdekin shire, Sarina, East Palmerston, South Burnett and Mossman.

The state government's investment under the Strengthening Rural Communities initiative has helped enhance the relationship between rural and urban areas as well as build the networks and support needed for a sustainable and prosperous future in Queensland. A large number of projects commenced under this initiative are ongoing, and the benefits will be felt in rural and remote communities across Queensland for many years to come.

**CHAIR:** I refer to page 2-2, paragraph 4 of the Service Delivery Statements regarding the minister's role in reviewing and reforming national and state legislation and policy. Can the minister please advise how the Queensland government is providing advice and influencing federal government decision-making processes in order to develop appropriate policy and support for rural and regional communities in Queensland?

**Mr MULHERIN:** Regional Development Australia Queensland is a joint initiative of the Australian and Queensland governments. RDA provides a unique opportunity for Queensland to work with the Commonwealth, local governments and the community to improve Queensland's regions. Through RDA the Queensland government will be positioned to influence Australian government support for rural and regional communities in Queensland. Twelve RDA committees will be established across the state and will become the principal regional engagement mechanism of the Queensland government.

As leading members of the community, RDA committee members will be well placed to provide advice on a range of issues. Collectively they will have experience across business, industry, community and local government. RDA committees will already be well connected with local networks and will be encouraged and supported to tap into these networks to provide advice to government on regional development matters. They will be informing government about exactly what is happening at the grassroots level in regions and influencing government and other stakeholders in advancing regional development priorities to assist in retaining jobs and growing local communities.

RDA committees may also provide an alternative engagement mechanism for the state agencies seeking advice on service delivery options for rural, regional and remote communities. RDA committees will also be well briefed on government programs, services and initiatives and will be encouraged to promote these government activities in their region.

Advice from RDA will provide further weight to discussions with the Commonwealth on rural and regional Queensland. The Queensland government is providing a significant in-kind contribution to establishing RDA to the value of approximately \$2.1 million per year. The Queensland government's in-kind contribution includes accommodation and related expenses, Queensland government officers who will work with RDA on aligned joint activities and support for some RDA state-wide activities. The Queensland government will also align some of its regional economic development project funding with RDA priorities.

Committee members, including chairs and deputy chairs, will be volunteers who will not receive sitting fees or financial remuneration. I am currently working with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development in Northern Australia, the Hon. Maxine McKew, to finalise appointments to the RDA committees which will be announced later in the year.

**Mrs SULLIVAN:** Minister, I refer to page 2-13, dot point 2 of the Service Delivery Statements in relation to Biosecurity Queensland's efforts in preventing and monitoring damaging pest and disease outbreaks. Can the minister please outline the fire ant eradication program's key achievements to date?

**Mr MULHERIN:** The National Red Imported Fire Ant Eradication Program is continuing in the urban and semirural areas of southern Brisbane and has significantly reduced the level of fire ant infestation in both South-East Queensland and Gladstone. In Gladstone there have been no new detections of fire ants for a number of years, and Biosecurity Queensland is in the process of completing the final year of surveillance. If no fire ants are found, Biosecurity Queensland operations will cease and Gladstone will be considered to have pest freedom status. The program has also resulted in significant reductions of infestations across urban and semirural areas of Brisbane.

The program is continuing the treatment phase, baiting the equivalent of approximately 46,000 hectares of South-East Queensland in the last financial year to eliminate remaining infestations. The Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council has agreed in principle to funding of \$15 million for fire ant programs in 2009-10, subject to each individual jurisdiction's budgetary process.

Up to \$1 million within the budget has been dedicated to the development of remote sensing technology to enhance detection of fire ant colonies in rural and sparsely populated areas. Genetic analysis has provided with a high level of certainty that there have been three separate incursions of red imported fire ants: Port of Brisbane, Port of Gladstone and south-west Brisbane. The current focus on genetic analysis is to identify the parent-child relationships of nests that will provide a lot of information about the spread of the pest.

Odour detection dogs have been successfully incorporated into the fire ant program and there are currently three dogs that are operational and providing post-treatment validation and site inspections. The dogs have an extremely sensitive detection ability and are able to find a single foraging fire ant. There are also another seven dogs undergoing training for induction into the program including two which have been validated. The remaining dogs will also be independently validated and all will be operational shortly. The program to date has been notably successful, particularly considering that fire ants are widespread in the United States. In Texas alone \$1.2 billion is spent each year on the control of the pest.

We have made tremendous progress on this particular incursion. Back in 2001 something like 65,000 colonies were detected and treated. At the end of 2008 we detected 402 infestations that were treated and eradicated and currently we have 30 infestations. So a lot more work is happening in that area. The program I believe is successful.

**Ms O'NEILL:** I refer to page 2-17, paragraph 2 of the Service Delivery Statement. What initiatives have been developed to support the needs of rural and regional communities across Queensland?

**Mr MULHERIN:** The Blueprint for the Bush program commenced three years ago. As I said previously, it is a unique partnership agreement promoting the sustainability and prosperity of rural and remote communities. The program has involved more than 150 state government initiatives being delivered into rural and remote parts of Queensland this year alone. Outcomes include the inaugural Rural Women's Symposium, held in Roma in September 2008, looking at challenges and opportunities for women and their families in rural Queensland; the pest offensive, implementing \$4 million worth of projects to manage pest plants and animals in several Indigenous communities; establishing three additional rural and remote education centres of excellence in Wide Bay West, Tablelands, Johnstone and Central West; paid internships for 120 preservice teachers as part of the pilot program in rural and remote schools in Gayndah, Richmond, Weipa, Proston, Palm Island, Cherbourg, Barcaldine and Mirani; and completing training for 19 paramedics in the graduate certificate in rural and remote paramedic practice, with another 25 officers currently training. Support for rural and regional Queensland is now entering a new phase under the broader focus of regional economic development, spearheaded under the new Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation.

This new direction for the Blueprint for the Bush includes integration with the federal government initiative of Regional Development Australia. Integrating those programs maximises the value of resources from all stakeholders: those living and working in regional Queensland, industry and business

groups, non-government organisations and all three levels of government. As I have said before, Regional Development Australia, Queensland, provides a means by which all stakeholders can focus on identifying regional priorities and pool significant resources to deliver on those priorities. Within the statewide model of Regional Development Australia, Queensland, the Blueprint for the Bush program will ensure that the specific focus on rural and remote communities remains strong. As I have said earlier, we have expanded our partnership to include our founding partners, AgForce and the Local Government Association, and the Queensland Farmers Federation and the Queensland Resources Council have come on board. My counterparts from the partner group regularly provide input and advice that has proven of value in my new role as minister for rural and regional Queensland.

**Ms JOHNSTONE:** I refer to the Service Delivery Statements, page 2-27 paragraph 1, under the heading 'Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries'. How will Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries, under the Fresh Approach, ensure its priorities match the key directions and concerns of industry?

**Mr MULHERIN:** Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries invests in a range of services to assist agricultural industries to remain viable and competitive in the current economic climate, as well as position those industries for the future. In the provision of those services, QPIF ensures that priorities match the key directions and concerns of industry. QPIF seeks to understand appropriately those industry issues through the participation in a broad spectrum of local and national industry related forums and industry analysis, including: active leadership in the development and implementation of industry-specific strategies as part of the national research development and extension framework for primary industries under the auspices of the Primary Industries Standing Committee and the Council of Rural Research and Development Corporation's Chairs; participation in local industry discussions through ministerial dialogues for action stakeholder meetings linked to QPIF regional management meetings and purpose-built consultation around emerging issues or changes to regulation or legislation; the analysis of industry production and economic prospects of primary industries; regular consultation with peak industry groups at state and national level to understand industry concerns and impediments to industry growth.

**CHAIR:** Minister, it is now time for non-government questions. I call the member for Condamine.

**Mr HOPPER:** Minister, in your last answer you spoke of renewing and enhancing, and we have spoken about Mr Gilbert and his staff. Those staff were definitely unhappy and moved on. From your statement on page 2-8 of the SDS, can you please explain how you personally will drive the Blueprint for the Bush program when, apart from the problems in your own electorate of Mackay, at least six regional officers have been removed and redeployed to head office and onto other duties from this program?

**Mr MULHERIN:** The Office of Rural and Regional Communities Queensland has come from the department of local government to the new Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation. We will certainly enhance the way that we have been able to build on what we have already done in the 10-year strategy around the Blueprint for the Bush. The employees in the former office of rural and regional Queensland have done an excellent job in promoting rural and regional issues to government. This office will continue to do that in the new Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation. In relation to the operational issues of that, I call on Mr Mark Bermingham to provide further advice around that issue.

**Mr Bermingham:** Minister, I wanted to clarify the element that you wanted me to expand on there.

**Mr MULHERIN:** Coming across from the department of local government to the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, the role of the office of rural and regional Queensland in the Office of Rural and Regional Communities and the synergies that will be created there. The question that the member for Condamine raised relates to staffing. Page 2-8 shows the full-time equivalents adjusted for 2008-09 is 51, for 2009-10 actual full-time equivalents in the SDS is 46. It is important to note that the figure relates to the pre machinery-of-government changes that resulted in the Office of Rural and Regional Communities becoming part of DEEDI. Can you elaborate on those issues?

**Mr Bermingham:** The number of FTEs that had come over to amalgamate with the department had already been reduced from 51 to 46. Since that group has come over, three temporary positions have left the organisation and they were contract positions and their contracts had come to an end. Those positions related to parts of the program that had also been finalised. They were brought on for the particular purposes of managing those programs. As part of program managing, as projects come to an end resources are reallocated.

I think the exciting thing is that the Office of Rural and Regional Communities was a stand-alone unit. It has now been integrated fully into 15 service delivery centres throughout the state. That enables us to use the engagement capacity that resided within that office with the regional economic development capacity of those regional centres to enhance the services that we provide for our regional and rural communities.

**Mr MULHERIN:** And they will have a role to play in supporting the Regional Development Australia committees. I think they are best placed to put forward the issues of rural and regional Queensland from the expertise that they have gained since the establishment of that office. As I said previously, it has given them a lot more synergy by aligning the Office of Rural and Regional Communities with QPIF. Now we are able to focus on developing the regions, both rural and remote, so that there is a future for people who live in those areas.

**Mr HOPPER:** I refer to the Minister's answer to my question on notice No. 7. I will table that question. I refer to the number of front-line, on-the-ground staff. You say there are only minor changes, but on the Minister's figures the number of front-line staff will be down seven per cent from two years ago. Minister, during the election you and your government spent a fortune on advertisements claiming a three per cent productivity dividend would cost thousands of public servants' jobs. That was your scare campaign. Minister, what do you have to say about your own seven per cent cut to front-line staff?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I will read back the question on notice. This is in relation to non-government question No. 7; is that right, member for Condamine?

**Mr HOPPER:** Yes. I have tabled the question.

**Mr MULHERIN:** For the past three years Biosecurity Queensland has not differentiated between stock inspectors and other officers with inspectorial powers. The total base of those officers remains relatively static and is supported periodically by casual and temporary engagements to cover work fluctuations. Biosecurity and animal welfare programs with BQ have officers appointed under a number of acts. The number of officers specifically dedicated to those programs and available to deliver front-line services using their inspectorial powers ranges from 84 officers in 2006-07, 82 in 2007-08 and 80 officers in 2008-09. The slight decrease was due to the transfer of two positions to specifically deal with plant biosecurity issues. In addition to those officers, there are another eight biosecurity officers located regionally in other Biosecurity Queensland programs that have Stock Act appointments, as well as 16 veterinary and specialist compliance officers with the same appointments. Those officers are available to work on livestock related matters. Research agronomists are considered to mean plant science, focusing on the research of grains and cropping et cetera.

In relation to 2009-10, eight new high priority projects will be undertaken including in the area of biosecurity. They include improved banana production and assistance to build international competitiveness and sustainability; improving vegetable root stock for increased productivity and sustainability; scoping studies in robotics and sensory technology for horticulture to enable mechanisation of major crop product systems in pre- and post-harvest operations; technical assessments for the Great Sandy Straits aquaculture plan; the use of an innovative pest management system, for example, infochemistry, for tropical fruits and forestry; protecting the Australian citrus industry from greening disease to enable early detection and management of diseases in the Australasian-Pacific region; obtaining strategic intelligence from NLIS in the area of cattle movements to inform pasture requirements and conditions, infrastructure, biosecurity needs and staffing placements; funding for tropical rock lobster research. We work with industry and work out what are the industry's priorities and we are able to adjust accordingly. As far as efficiency dividends go, we will implement savings that will not impact on front-line service delivery.

**Mr HOPPER:** Minister, my question was about the front-line staff numbers which are down seven per cent. We want a guarantee that there will be no further front-line jobs cut. We want a guarantee from you to this committee that you will not cut any more front-line jobs. Minister, the figures that I have just tabled show that you have run your own seven per cent productivity dividend. Will you be calling on Alex Scott from the QPSU to explain? What further staff cuts are you planning? Next year you will be here on your own, the way you are going.

**Mr MULHERIN:** I will give you an example. In the area of research and development, we extend key strategic issues likely to provide the greatest long-term economic benefit to Queensland primary industries. QPIF investment in research development extension is guided by how well activities contribute to the key criteria, including Toward Q2, which prioritises creating or building on existing competitive advantage for Queensland agribusiness, job creation and providing economic benefits to Queensland. Research areas that have a less demonstratable benefit when judged against the above criteria are considered a lower priority. With any research program it is usual that funding for lower priority areas is redirected to higher priority initiatives. Over time some areas of research prove to be more successful than others. I have highlighted what, in 2008-09, we see as some of the priorities for 2009-10. As Premier Bligh indicated, there will be no forced reduction of staff. QPIF is committed to reskilling and relocating.

What the member for Condamine has to remember is that within QPIF, the research and development programs are partnership programs with industry bodies and people are employed for the life of those projects. The core funding, that is, government's commitment to primary industries, has decreased slightly. As I indicated earlier, red imported fire ants is a good example. It is not reflected in the budget papers because we are still waiting on the agreement of the other state jurisdictions that are part of the national program to provide that \$15 million. We are confident of that. Likewise with R&D



programs, we are currently in the process of negotiating R&D programs that will continue through 2009-10. What you see with QPIF's budget is that it will start off at an amount and at the end of the year the actual expenditure will be more than what was anticipated at the beginning, because of the partnership arrangements that we have. We bring on staff as needed around those research and development areas. Our core funding has slightly decreased. Members opposite on your side of politics seem to forget that there is a global financial crisis and that it has impacted on all aspects of the economy, including government.

**Mr HOPPER:** You were in trouble before the global financial crisis, Minister.

**CHAIR:** Member for Condamine.

**Mr HOPPER:** I refer to SDS 2-30 and animal welfare and keeping animal welfare codes. Minister, what code was in place to protect approximately 150,000 head of cattle that died during the gulf floods this year? They starved to death waiting for fodder drops that never came. They died waiting because of the failure of your government to provide fodder and secure helicopters in the same manner as provided for the Charleville floods, where Defence Force Caribous and Black Hawk helicopters were used to save stock.

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the honourable member for the question. With the floods in the north-west, I participated in weekly teleconferences with mayors of the impacted regions. I visited those regions on three occasions. I took advice from people on the ground, not from people in Brisbane. It was people on the ground who gave us direction about what we needed to do to deal with the situation. What you have to remember with those floods up in the north-west is that we had an area about the size of South Australia covered in floodwater. People like Don McDonald were saying that fodder drops were totally impractical. I respect Mr McDonald. I do not know whether you have the same view, but that is the sort of advice we were getting from people up there.

In addition to that, as floodwater receded, on advice again from industry people up there whom I met with, we arranged for fodder drops and we also assisted with helicopter mustering to get cattle to higher ground. Since then we have set about working with industry in the recovery of the beef sector up there. We are currently working with AgForce and the gulf catchment NRM group up there in putting together an exceptional circumstances application, which is quite unique because exceptional circumstances usually refer to drought. But the ponding of water over pastures since the water has receded has created the same effect as a drought. So we are working closely with industry to put that application forward. Minister Burke has indicated to me that he will ask NRAC, which is an advisory body, to assess the EC application for that area and he will act on NRAC's recommendation.

We have also provided grants of up to \$15,000 to assist industry and small business, and those grants were available from last Friday. In addition, we have run a number of workshops on production, pasture management and a whole range of things. Our response has been guided by industry, with the support of AgForce and some of the larger pastoral companies up there. The last time I was up there the people I met were happy with the response.

**Mr HOPPER:** Minister, following on from that question, the floods wiped out approximately one-tenth of the northern beef herd. What triggers, if any, have you personally put in place to ensure that such a frightful animal welfare situation never happens again? What are you going to do to cater for it next time?

**Mr MULHERIN:** You can never say never, member for Condamine. The history of this country is that we are savaged by drought and when the drought breaks we have floodwaters.

**Mr HOPPER:** I am not saying that it will never flood again; I am asking what are you going to do about it.

**CHAIR:** Member for Condamine, please let the minister answer.

**Mr MULHERIN:** As a consequence, unfortunately, there is loss of stock and crops. We try to work with industry to make sure that we assist in the feeding and treatment of animals as well as humane destruction. It is important to understand that a response to disaster management is managed through the Queensland disaster management system and DEEDI. DEEDI and RSPCA also advise local government on a range of issues in relation to animal welfare. While owners have the responsibility to ensure the welfare of the stock, the state government recognises that in times of natural disaster some owners may not be able to do so. That is why we embarked on a whole series of assistance to assist industry, including fodder drops.

No-one could do anything in relation to a land mass the size of South Australia completely covered by water. I went up there I think on three occasions and took advice from industry. They were the people on the ground who can best assess these situations. When you were out there ranting and raving that nothing was being done, we were taking advice from industry. It is a pity you did not get on the phone and talk to a couple of industry people up there. They would have told you.

As I said earlier, Emergency Management Queensland works with local government. We provide assistance in response to any natural disasters. The RSPCA has a role to play. I think those issues are being addressed by EMQ. Advice given to me was that we had taken appropriate steps to address the

animal welfare issues under the circumstances. As I said, we had weekly meetings with mayors. A lot of these mayors are property owners who have practical experience. We took advice from them. We had an airport meeting at Cloncurry and we did a flyover. From the advice given to me by people who are actively engaged in the industry and from what I saw firsthand, we have done things that have assisted the industry, and we will continue to work with industry in its recovery.

**Mr HOPPER:** Talking about getting on the phone, Minister, I think you might have been on the phone to Wayne Goss finding out how to slash a primary industries department. Minister, what has to happen before you will sign off on the provision of fodder assistance in future floods so that that scale will never be repeated? Put something in place now so that when a flood occurs again you have provisions in place.

**Mr MULHERIN:** So you want me to lock something in place—

**Mr HOPPER:** I am still asking the question, Minister. \$15,000 will not even buy 18 cows. That is what we are up against. I realise the scale of the situation. But let us put something solid in place so that you have a backup plan and a program to rely on.

**CHAIR:** Member for Condamine, can you tell me where that relates to the Service Delivery Statement, please?

**Mr HOPPER:** SDS 2-30, animal welfare and keeping of animal welfare codes.

**Mr MULHERIN:** So you want me to put something in concrete that is inflexible. We work with industry and come up with flexible programs that meet the needs at the time. Each disaster is quite different. That is why cyclones are rated by different categories. Communities that may not be impacted by the direct forces of a cyclone may cop the consequences of flooding, which is what happened in the north-west. There were three flood events up there in that period. As I said, I had weekly dialogue with mayors on the phone. I paid visits and met with major producers up there who gave me advice.

Under the EMQ arrangements there are local disaster committees that are coordinated by local government, working with Emergency Management Queensland and bringing those issues back to government and government responds to the requests of those industries. In addition to that, we set up our own group to work directly with industry. We provided fodder drops and cattle mustering when it was available. At the beginning of the flood—as I said, there were three flood events up there—fodder drops were impractical. That was the advice given to me by both AgForce and the producers on the ground up there.

**CHAIR:** The time for non-government questions has expired. Minister, I refer to page 2-11 under the heading 'Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries' and dot point 2 of the Service Delivery Statement. How is Fresh Approach delivering real research, development and extension outcomes that meet industry needs in particular in relation to Queensland's dairy industry?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the honourable member for the question. Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries through Fresh Approach is embarking on a major revitalisation of its research facilities. This initiative will change the way QPIF operates, giving it world-class research facilities that deliver smart science and innovation, increasing economic development for Queensland and improved biosecurity outcomes for primary industries. To support the dairy industry in Queensland, as I mentioned earlier in response to the member for Condamine, QPIF has commenced consolidating the dairy research from Mutdapilly and Kairi research stations into a single facility for Queensland in partnership with the University of Queensland's Gatton campus. The partnership will create a dairy centre of excellence that fosters world-class innovation to grow the future of the Queensland dairy industry.

The partnership will provide one high-quality dairy research facility for Queensland, with QPIF dairy research staff being located at UQ Gatton and integrated with UQ staff to develop a collaborative approach to dairy research and development. This strategic move will strengthen dairy research capability, including capitalising on the closer interaction with the Centre for Advanced Animal Science and UQ staff and facilities, and maintain a critical mass of scientists to better service the industry R&D needs.

In addition, the model proposes close linkage with industry and with QPIF dairy extension capability to ensure research outcomes of industry relevance and adoption of results. Planning for the relocation and infrastructure improvements are well advanced so the implementation can start soon after there is a formal agreement with the UQ on terms. Formal agreements on the required developments are anticipated to be realised in the next two months. There has been extensive consultation, as I have said in previous responses, with the Queensland Dairyfarmers Organisation, the Subtropical Dairy and the UQ over the past 18 months. All parties are supportive of the proposal to relocate to Gatton.

The relocation is proposed to be completed by April 2010. Completion by this time will enable a seamless transition of research programs from Mutdapilly to UQ Gatton as part of the reorganisation of dairy R&D services across Queensland, as I said in previous responses. Separate study and discussion with industry has begun in North Queensland to develop a Tablelands dairy development plan. QPIF will

further optimise government R&D investment in Queensland's dairy industry by focusing on the tropical and subtropical production systems' water use efficiency, managing soils, nutrient and climate variability as part of the national R&D strategy.

**Mrs SULLIVAN:** I refer to page 2-7, paragraph 2, dot point 2 of the Service Delivery Statements. Can the minister outline the benefits that the proposed Queensland Fisheries Strategy 2009-2014 is seeking to deliver to Queenslanders?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the honourable member. Fishing is integral to Queensland's lifestyle and economy. Every year almost a million people fish for recreation, for a living or for traditional customary purposes. Countless others rely on sustainable fisheries as a focus of tourism and other businesses, but our fishery resources are finite. We are facing challenges such as the potential for overexploitation, increasing consumer demands for seafood, growth in coastal development and the effects of climate change.

The Draft Queensland Fisheries Strategy 2009-14, released in June 2009, represents an overarching framework to support the future management of fisheries, aquaculture and fish habitat in Queensland. The strategy aims to ensure we derive the optimum economic, environmental and social benefits from Queensland fishery resources. The draft, developed in conjunction with key stakeholders, is based on three platforms: habitat protection, harvest management and maximising value. Habitat protection, based on the principles of ecology and science for the long-term protection of the fish habitat, is a major focus of the strategy as it is essential for maintaining sustainable fisheries.

Harvesting our natural fisheries resources must also be undertaken sustainably. However, the strategy directs effort to fostering investment in fishing and related industries, and improving the profitability of commercial fishing and aquaculture within the boundaries of sustainability. Socioeconomic and regional development aspects will also be enhanced.

We are strengthening industry-government partnerships to encompass emerging cooperative approaches and ecosystem based fisheries management, bringing government and industry together to manage the fisheries based on a responsibility across all sectors. The strategy also centres on developing a more flexible and adaptive regulatory and management framework. The new focus, as identified in the strategy, is on maximising the value of the fishing and aquaculture sectors in Queensland. This will bring new relevance to fishers, farmers, tourists, the community and all other industries that benefit from fisheries.

One of the industries in which the government has been maximising value following the 2000 election is recreational fishing through the Living the Queensland Lifestyle policy. Through this policy the government has committed \$1.65 million over three years for recreational fishing activities. The funding included \$150,000 for up to 100 free fishing clinics for young people in 2008-09. Thirty-four clinics were conducted across Queensland, with five of these catering for disabled children. Similar numbers are planned in 2009-10.

**Ms O'NEILL:** Minister, I refer to page 2-7, paragraph 1 underneath 'Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries' of the Service Delivery Statements. How does Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries plan to build capacity to deliver on its strategic Fresh Approach agenda?

**Mr MULHERIN:** To capitalise on the challenges and opportunities facing Queensland's primary industries sector and QPIF's commitment to accelerating growth of primary industries and the state government's priorities of Q2, QPIF has been implementing Fresh Approach over the past several years. QPIF has been on a clear path forward to build a constructive culture to deliver its strategic agenda. One of the specific change initiatives we continue to implement is a dialogue based around forums attended by me which bring together industry, government and the community to engage in strategic conversations. These forums help to forge constructive interaction and to achieve workable and innovative solutions to issues facing the primary industries sector.

We routinely hold two-day senior leader forums with the top two levels of the organisation's management. The forums are held to coincide with key points of the portfolio business cycle, for example the budget. Here we focus on strategic issues facing the portfolio and draw on the collective knowledge and expertise of our leaders in the room. Last year my then director-general introduced a blog as an online conversation tool to link staff conversations on topical issues facing QPIF. The blog complements the DG chat line, which provides a just-in-time pulse check on what the organisation is thinking in relation to issues of concern. Electronic communiques are provided to all staff every fortnight on current issues. It is approached from the standpoint of 'what I know you know' and being open, honest and transparent with staff as well as giving a consistent message. These mechanisms support building our capacity to deliver on the strategic agenda.

**Ms JOHNSTONE:** With reference to page 2-13, dot point 2 of the Service Delivery Statements, can the minister please outline what efforts are being made by Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries to ensure Queensland's most invasive weeds are located and controlled?

**Mr MULHERIN:** Weeds cost Queensland in excess of \$600 million annually. There are more than 1,500 introduced plant species that have naturalised in Queensland, many of which have or could have a significant impact on our economy, environment and way of life. Of these, 116 invasive weeds are

declared in Queensland. Globally there are more than 18,000 alien plant species which have the potential to escape our quarantine barriers and cause significant impacts. Through a combination of improved detention technologies and volunteer spotter networks, Queensland will be better positioned to identify and respond to new and existing weed threats. Satellite technology, with the potential to detect objects on the ground as small as an individual tree, provides an opportunity to improve strategic planning and on-ground management of many of Queensland's most invasive weeds.

Biosecurity Queensland, with the Department of Environment and Resource Management, the University of Queensland and the natural resource management groups for the southern gulf, desert channels and Burnett-Mary regions, is working on a Blueprint for the Bush project using satellite imagery to define prickly acacia, rubber vine and cactus locations. The funding provided was \$248,000. The technology uses Landsat Thematic Mapper and Quickbird satellite imagery, which measures reflected light from objects on the earth's surface. Computerised formulas are used to search across the satellite image for unique reflectant signatures which identify the weed in question.

The project aims to develop a timed series of maps of prickly acacia in the Mitchell Grass Downs region and to develop methodologies to detect rubber vine and cactus. It is to be completed within the next six months. The project work complements state and federally funded projects using Landsat satellite imagery to map the distribution of lantana throughout Queensland and New South Wales. Queensland government expertise in mapping data has contributed significantly to this \$450,000 federally funded project to ensure regional scale mapping of an estimated 80 per cent accuracy is provided to key stakeholders.

The results of both remote-sensing projects will be used by government agencies and regional natural resource management groups to determine the future use of this technology for tackling invasive weeds in Queensland as well as using the map for improving management of the subset of weeds that were studied. Biosecurity Queensland is also partnering with the Department of Environment and Resource Management and Queensland Herbarium to support a state-wide network of 120 trained weed spotter volunteers to focus on early detection of new and emerging weeds.

**CHAIR:** With reference to page 2-12, dot point 2, subpoint 2 of the Service Delivery Statements, can the minister please provide details of the export opportunities that Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries has developed for the avocado industry?

**Mr MULHERIN:** Queensland produces more than 70 per cent of Australia's avocado crop, and it is estimated that national production will increase from the current 46,000 tonnes to 65,000 tonnes within five years. The avocado industry has identified that one of the key strategies to maintain industry sustainability and drive revenue growth is to grow existing export markets and develop new export markets. Through our global market initiative, QPIF is working with business and industry to develop new and existing export markets and capture opportunities that will allow the Queensland avocado industry to continue to grow. This is really about meeting our commitments to the avocado sector.

In 2008 QPIF commenced a project focusing on developing the European market and growing sales in the near Asian markets, working in partnership with commercial companies. With the support of Horticulture Australia and supply chain businesses, including Maersk shipping, the team set out to show that Queensland avocados could survive the 40-day-plus shipping journey to Europe and present a quality product for European countries. The trial was a success. It proved that the fruit had an excellent shelf life. This was a significant achievement, combining all the technology on fruit production, fruit handling and transport to set the path for shipping into the European market.

There is a large European market with avocados. Imports in 2007 were estimated to be in excess of 280,000 tonnes and worth an estimated \$680 million. The UK market alone imported 44,000 tonnes in 2007. In 2009 the GMI avocado project team are working with commercial partners to conduct trial shipments of avocados to demonstrate the feasibility of supply and assess the marketability of products from Queensland.

Our research staff has facilitated the loading and setting up of the containers and are evaluating the fruit on its arrival in Europe. A QPIF trade office is currently placed in the Trade Queensland office in London. It is assisting with the market evaluation of the fruit, the first shipment of which arrived earlier this month.

Europe is important, but it does not mean that we are neglecting the key markets in Asia. During the project QPIF trade officers will also be conducting market research and helping to establish key relationships in our near Asian markets, including Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong, to grow sales and returns to the Queensland industry. This is a significant step for the Queensland and Australian avocado industry. It is opening up new markets and providing solid and sustainable export growth.

**Mrs SULLIVAN:** Minister, I refer to page 2-7, paragraph 2, dot point 2 of the Service Delivery Statement in relation to your entity's efforts to enhance the economic value of Queensland fisheries on a sustainable basis. Can the minister advise on the sustainability of Queensland's fisheries resources?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the honourable member for the question. The Queensland government has the responsibility to ensure that our fisheries are managed in a sustainable way and that they will be there for future generations, to ensure that our fisheries management is among the world's best and to demonstrate to the public that our fisheries are sustainable and employ world's best practice. These are core responsibilities of Primary Industry and Fisheries.

QPIF is continuing to review and improve methods currently employed to evaluate the status of Queensland's fish stocks. This knowledge is critical to ensuring that our fisheries are being managed sustainably and that the economic returns are maximised. A comprehensive program of fishery monitoring through compulsory daily commercial fishery logbooks and voluntary recreational fishers' diaries has been in place in Queensland for many years. These provide information about the fisheries' catch, the commercial and recreational fishing effort and the value of the commercial fisheries harvest.

Other monitoring being undertaken by QPIF provides critical information on the age, size and distribution of major fish and crustacean stocks. An at-sea observer program has recently been expanded to provide information on the aspects of commercial fisheries not able to be obtained through other sources.

QPIF also monitors progress towards filling quotas through the use of satellite technology. This ensures commercial fishermen do not exceed the sustainable quota levels identified for a range of key fisheries. Using this information, Queensland is continuing to demonstrate to the public and the Australian government that its major fisheries are being managed to meet strict national sustainability guidelines.

Commonwealth export approvals are necessary to maintain important international market access for Queensland's fisheries as well as to ensure continual improvement in fishery resource management practice to ensure the long-term sustainability and viability of the industry. The 134 recommendations needed to be met in order to gain these approvals have been fully implemented across 23 fisheries since December 2005, representing a collaborative effort across fisheries and a number of other QPIF business units.

In 2008-09 QPIF successfully renegotiated new export approval conditions and recommendations for six fisheries. In general, the number of recommendations attached to the export approvals halved, demonstrating that my department has implemented measures to sustainably manage the state's fisheries resources for the benefit of all Queenslanders as well as ensure that our valuable fisheries are ecologically sustainable.

**CHAIR:** We will now turn to non-government questions. I now call the member for Condamine.

**Mr HOPPER:** We have to go back to the last couple of questions that I asked before and the same subject. I refer to the SDS at page 2-30—animal welfare. You said you took a lot of phone calls. My phone ran hot. Opposition members' phones ran hot. In Charleville they organised fodder drops. They brought the army in. They did something during the floods. It was not until I caused the publication of photographs in the *Courier-Mail* that you actually got active. Before that you had done absolutely nothing. This was a major animal welfare problem—

**CHAIR:** Can you get to the question please, member for Condamine. It should not be a statement; we need a question.

**Mr MULHERIN:** It is your question time. We can repropose this all afternoon.

**Mr HOPPER:** I may be happy to do that. It depends on the answers we get.

**Mr MULHERIN:** I know I am on pretty solid ground.

**CHAIR:** Minister, I want the member for Condamine to get to the question.

**Mr HOPPER:** It is obvious that what you are saying is unacceptable. What plans do you have in place for when this happens again? This will happen again. You said that history repeats itself. What plans do you have in place for the protection of animal welfare in Queensland when another major flood comes through?

**Mr MULHERIN:** As I said before, we look at these natural disasters case by case. Flood events and droughts are quite different in different locations. In February we started the weekly telephone conference with mayors. Most of the mayors are property owners who are practical people, understand their enterprises and understand the animal welfare issues that need to be dealt with in these times. Those mayors were also part of the local emergency management groups that were coordinated through Emergency Management Queensland.

We also consulted with a number of graziers in that area. We took advice from them in relation to these particular issues. They said at the time that fodder drops would be impractical. We put additional biosecurity officers into Normanton to provide on-the-ground advice around animal welfare issues.

When the time was appropriate we provided fodder drops and mustered cattle and ran a series of workshops to assist in the recovery. We are now working with industry in relation to exceptional circumstances funding for areas of the gulf that are experiencing drought-like conditions because of the impact the floodwater had on their pastures. Small business grants of \$15,000 have also been available. There is also assistance under QRAA.

Each flood event or drought event is different from region to region. We will develop responses in accordance with the needs of those communities at the time. We take advice from AgForce and local governments. That is whom we consulted on this occasion. We consulted with the people who actually run those big grazing operations in the north. Emergency Management Queensland has a whole-of-government approach. We also had a group that worked with the industry on these specific matters.

**Mr HOPPER:** I refer to the SDS at page 2-31 and mention shark control. Minister, what do you say to a fishing family who have their life savings in boats and equipment and are about to have their symbol stripped from their boats which will effectively and immediately destroy their enterprise without compensation? I have met with these people. Minister, would you be willing to accompany this family and me to see firsthand how your regulations are destroying Queensland fishing families?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the honourable member for the question. What particular fishery are you referring to?

**Mr HOPPER:** These people were shark fishermen just off Caloundra.

**Mr MULHERIN:** I will go back to the beginning. A couple of years ago we started on a process of looking at inshore fish management. The shark fishery is part of that inshore fish management plan. I instructed the agency to go out and meet with stakeholders—commercial, recreational, conservation and Indigenous groups—at 45 locations. We asked about the management of the inshore fishery. From the data we collected there we asked people to put forward their views. Those views were taken into account in the development of the regulatory impact statement. The draft regulatory impact statement was put out. We received further responses about that. The MAC provided advice to the fisheries and finally the plan was implemented.

There were concerns about sustainability of the shark fishery. As I have said in previous responses to questions, this fishery is an export fishery that requires Commonwealth approval under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, which is a legacy of your coalition government in Canberra. We had to demonstrate that we are using sustainable fishing practices.

The new arrangements for the shark fishery came in on 1 July. The total allowable commercial catch is 600 tonnes, with a maximum legal size of 1.5 metres. There is a restriction on the access to the fishery. The commercial fishers with licences that permit fishing in both the net and inline fisheries have had to demonstrate past participation in the shark fishery to maintain their capacity into the future. Licence holders that have met specific catch criteria have been issued with 'S' fishery symbols.

These measures have been put in place after negotiations with the Commonwealth Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. The 600 tonnes was based around a precautionary approach to the shark fishery. There are a number of no-take species.

**Mr HOPPER:** I refer to the SDS page 2-31 and fishing inspectors. How do you expect a fishing family on holidays from Western Queensland and fishing in Moreton Bay or the Pumicestone Passage to define where the green zones are? What leniency will your government show to visitors? Should they forget about fishing with their families in the bay if they cannot follow these zones and easily find out where to fish? That is a problem that has been coming to me a lot lately.

**Mr MULHERIN:** The Queensland government has the responsibility of ensuring fair access to public resources, including the state fisheries resources. As I said, there are a number of rules that apply to both commercial and recreational fishers. I think you are referring to the green zones and the Moreton Bay Marine Park. I would suggest that you direct those questions to the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability. The marine parks and the zonings are covered by legislation administered by that minister. They are not covered by fisheries legislation. As far as our involvement—

**Mr HOPPER:** The fishing inspectors are, Minister.

**Mr MULHERIN:** As far as our involvement—

**Mr HOPPER:** You run the fishing inspectors, don't you?

**Mr MULHERIN:** Just let me answer your question. We not only provide services to Maritime Safety in enforcing our fisheries regulations but also provide services to other agencies like the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Department of Environment and Resource Management in the compliance issues around the management of marine parks as well as fisheries regulations. In terms of anyone who is holidaying who goes out to buy bait and all of that sort of thing, this information is on display at local bait and tackle shops. It is fairly well understood by most people. With regard to the boating and fisheries patrol, we have 110 staff at 22 centres from the New South Wales border to the Gulf of Carpentaria who carry out duties in a range of vehicles and vessels ranging from three metres to

25-metre patrol boats. With over 220,000 recreational and 5,500 commercial vessels in use, they carry out compliance in that area. As I said earlier, as part of the enforcement of marine parks, enforcement comes under the Department of Environment and Resource Management. What our officers do is education work in relation to the marine park. I understand that DERM has produced 70,000 detailed maps in relation to this. I would suggest that you direct your question to the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability.

**Mr HOPPER:** Minister, I refer to the SDS at page 2-12 relating to achievements in 'establishing and building closer and stronger strategic relationships and partnerships'—your words—with the Australian Agricultural College Corporation. Minister, now that you are deciding to sell off the college assets and pocket the proceeds, what relationship will be left with local communities, local staff and local students who are attending or did have plans to go to these colleges?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the honourable member for the question. The Australian Agricultural College Corporation became part of the Primary Industries and Fisheries portfolio as at 1 July 2008. In that time, we have looked at addressing the issues that needed to be addressed in making sure that the ag college plays its role in terms of providing training needs to industry. As part of that, the Queensland government provides \$16 million a year in funding. Local boards were originally in place, but they were removed following serious financial management and planning and reporting deficiencies from 2000 to 2004. These issues were identified by independent reviews conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers and Deloitte as well as by government, so our concerns were validated by independent organisations.

It has taken almost three years following the creation of the Australian Agricultural College Corporation for these governance breaches and consequential organisational issues to be addressed. As I said, the colleges came across to this portfolio on 1 July 2008. We are currently developing a strategic business model to take these colleges forward. We believe that the colleges have a very important role to play in providing training to rural and related industries within Queensland. We want to see the college be the premiere rural training provider. I have embarked on a series of dialogues for action. I do not know how transparent I can be. You yourself have been sitting at these dialogues. It was interesting listening to you at Dalby compared to the one at Emerald with the honourable member for Gregory, Vaughan Johnson. It was like the tale of two cities. I could not believe that members of the same party had different views around what was needed to be done for the colleges. The member for Gregory has a very positive approach and he will participate in the next dialogue.

We are about ensuring that these colleges provide what industry needs. We take advice from industry. You sat through the dialogue. I think you said you were a bit of a lone voice at the Dalby forum, and from forums we have conducted around the state that appears to be the case. We will continue to have these dialogues. The Agricultural College Corporation will finalise the strategy and make a series of recommendations. I want to assure you that there is no fire sale of assets, but it is not business as usual. We have to reform these to make sure that they continue to play that important role in providing the training needs of industry.

**Mr HOPPER:** Minister, following on from that last question I again refer to the SDS at page 2-12 and our agricultural colleges and the vision that was apparently shared by your director of education out there. I always read *Country Life* and last week I noticed a very large ad for a new director, and I table that ad now in *Country Life*. What has happened to the vision? Has it been lost there, too? Is it the same as your Mackay manager?

**CHAIR:** Minister, would you like to see the tabled document?

**Mr MULHERIN:** Yes. The ad in the *AgTrader* calls for the director of education and training. That is the position that is currently occupied by Mr Ross Murray. Mr Ross Murray has indicated that he wants to retire from work, like Mr Gilbert. They have made valuable contributions to the state in their respective fields. What are you saying—that we should keep people in the harness and not allow them the choice of when they want to retire? I just find the question quite odd.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr HOPPER:** I hope you do not find this question as odd, Minister; I would just like you to answer it. Thanks very much for answering question on notice No. 8 on timber royalties for the past three fiscal years and your projection for 2009-10. Minister, could you pick a worse time to be flogging timber assets off given the income—that is, royalty payments—will be down nearly 28 per cent on two years ago? Why would you sell those assets at a time when there is such a downturn?

**Mr MULHERIN:** The sale of Forestry Plantations Queensland is being handled by an asset sales team within Treasury. I would suggest that you direct those questions to the Treasurer.

**Mr HOPPER:** Don't they come under your department?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I just want to make one point—that is, people who make these investment decisions do not make them in relation to one or two years. They look at the strategic investment. These are valuable assets and those people will take into account a longer term economic cycle than the one that you have just painted.

**Mr HOPPER:** I will follow on from that question. I refer again to the SDS at page 2-94. You have told me that income will be down, yet Forestry Plantations Queensland's assets are up for sale. Your government is saying if and when they are sold current employees will be protected and that their jobs will be safe. How can you say that their jobs will be safe?

**Mr MULHERIN:** The Queensland government has made a decision in relation to the sale of certain assets in Queensland under the Renewing Queensland Plan, which the Premier announced on 2 June. As you said, Forestry Plantations Queensland will be part of that as will Queensland Motorways, Queensland Rail's above and below rail coal business and assets of the Ports Corporation of Queensland such as the Abbot Point Coal Terminal. The intention is to instigate negotiations through the sale of these through a Treasury assets sales team. This plan will fundamentally reform the role of government in Queensland. The issues in relation to staff will be dealt with in those sales.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. The time for non-government questions has expired. I now call the member for Kallangur.

**Ms O'NEILL:** Minister, I refer to page 2-13 dot point 2 of the Service Delivery Statement that states that Biosecurity Queensland has successfully implemented prevention, monitoring and surveillance strategies to protect Queensland's production base and access to markets from damaging pest and disease outbreaks. Will the minister please detail recent progress and developments in monitoring and surveillance strategies for the Electric Ant Eradication Program?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I thank the honourable member for the question. The Electric Ant Eradication Program is a national four-year program worth \$6.883 million which will be shared across other state and Commonwealth jurisdictions. It will be managed by Biosecurity Queensland. The initial discovery and surveillance of electric ants in 2006 identified that their distribution was confined to Smithfield, with one small additional area of infestation near the suburb of Kewarra Beach. These areas have now received a comprehensive treatment program, and post treatment surveillance activities to determine that treatment has been effective are currently being conducted. Within the last six months there have been four more electric ant infestations found in other northern Cairns suburbs outside of the restricted area but within the pest quarantine area.

Investigations following these detections indicate that residents had been aware of these stinging insects for some time but, due to the difficulty in physically seeing these tiny ants—they are approximately 1.9 millimetres in length—they did not contact Biosecurity Queensland to report electric ants. The recent area of infestation has been surveyed to determine the extent of the infestation and has received initial rounds of treatment. Further treatment and monitoring of these sites will continue. Biosecurity Queensland is ensuring electric ants continue to be detected by implementing an amended range of communications strategies incorporating feedback from residents of the recently detected sites, as well as developing enhanced surveillance techniques such as using our odour detection dogs. Electric ant odour detection dogs have been validated as recognising electric ant odour and are now in the process of being implemented into active surveillance in the program in Cairns.

Biosecurity Queensland has also engaged a professional abseiler to scale cliffs and rock walls to leave baits which will be tracked using the GPS system, the global positioning system. In addition, an outdoor cinema evening took place on 13 June 2009. Attendees were encouraged to submit an ant sample—the smallest they could find—collected from their properties and local areas in exchange for entry to the event. In total there were 111 people in attendance and 31 samples were submitted with no electric ants identified. At this stage the recent detections pose no risk to the overall success of the program and the infestations are confined to small areas and the spread of electric ants is naturally slow.

**Ms JOHNSTONE:** Minister, I refer to page 2-7 paragraph 2 dot point 2 of the Service Delivery Statements. Can the minister please advise what Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries is doing to improve the profitability of the fishing industry in Queensland?

**Mr MULHERIN:** As a result of a crisis in viability experienced by the east coast trawl sector in 2008, a trawl action plan was developed by industry and QPIF to address key issues that were impacting on their businesses and profitability. Actions to be undertaken in the plan included reduction of the regulatory burden, marketing, relationship building, extension and support, and future management arrangements. Issues were designated to be addressed in the short and medium to longer term.

Significant progress has been made in completing these actions in partnership with industry, such as improved regional consultation, added permitted trawl species and increased trip limits. Some actions, such as reviewing the use of multicommmercial fishing symbols, will be addressed in the review of the east coast trawl plan, which will commence later this year. Others are to be addressed through the implementation of the viable fisheries initiative, including the development of an industry development plan for the East Coast Trawl Fishery in partnership with industry.



A recent example of Fisheries responding to the business needs of the industry occurred following Cyclone Hamish, with efforts made to reduce the impact on the reef line fishery. A working group was formed with key stakeholders, and all options to assist an industry facing significant drops in its catches were examined. A policy regulating the filleting of some fish species was put aside for a year to provide enhanced opportunity to market them.

The line fishing industry will receive additional benefits as a result of an extensive review of the spawning closures in the Coral Reef Fin Fish Fishery. The review has resulted in a significant reduction in the length of closures, which will minimise the economic cost of the closures to the fishing industry while ensuring that valuable stocks are adequately protected.

One of the most important actions in the plan was an independent review of the state's seafood supply chain to provide feedback as to what opportunities there were to improve the future viability of the sector. This review was undertaken by Ruello & Associates. The review identified a commercial fishing sector that was focused on production and sale volumes but with insufficient attention to customer, consumer and seafood promotion. It recommended that building customer focused supply chains could raise consumer demand and pull up prices along the entire chain back to the fisher. It also advised that better performing seafood supply chains would need to include seafood handling, quality and presentation along the entire supply chain combined with the better promotion of seafood. This is our business. This is getting on and working towards meeting our commitments as an economic agency to the fisheries sector.

**CHAIR:** I refer to page 2-7, paragraph 1, dot point 1 of the Service Delivery Statements and also to some of the questions asked this afternoon by the member for Condamine. Minister, what actions have been taken to encourage young people into a career in agriculture?

**Mr MULHERIN:** Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries, in partnership with the Department of Education and Training, is developing the agribusiness gateway school project. This project was launched by the education minister, the Hon. Geoff Wilson, and me in April 2009, with an initial eight schools selected. It is considered a vital initiative in attracting a future skilled workforce in agriculture. It is our intention to increase the number of schools to 15 by the end of 2010.

Through the agribusiness gateway school project, it is intended to develop pathways into agriculture by establishing close links with industry, vocational training organisations such as the Australian Agricultural College Corporation as well as the university sector. It is important to demonstrate the breadth of a career in agriculture to overcome the stereotype image that agriculture has currently. The agribusiness gateway school project is seen as vital in breaking down that image.

Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries, in partnership with the Department of Education and Training, also supports the school-to-industry liaison project that is located within AgForce. This project supports career expos, school visits and demonstrations; provides teacher resource support on agricultural careers; and has developed AgForce volunteer career champions who go to schools to promote agricultural careers. A number of QPIF research stations are also involved with schools to promote science and agriculture as a rewarding career. The Hermitage Research Station has successfully run its plant science competition in schools. Active support is given to Siemens week activity in Toowoomba and various career markets and expos across Queensland.

The Australian Agricultural College is also active in the promotion of careers in agriculture through the development of its TASTE program, where it invites school students to spend a week at the college in August and September of each year. QPIF is also active through the development of workforce development strategies across a range of industry sectors to assist industry to understand the vital role that they play in attracting and retaining young people to and in agriculture.

In relation to the plant science competition that the Hermitage Research Station conducts every year, I want to place on record the wonderful work that Kerry and others at Hermitage do in promoting this. We not only get schools—both primary and secondary schools—from Queensland participating in the plant science project; we have schools from interstate as well. So I think it is unique. I think what we are doing in this space is ahead of most other states.

**Mrs SULLIVAN:** Minister, I refer to page 2-3, paragraph 4 of the Service Delivery Statements regarding the Queensland government's commitment to delivering jobs. Please detail the future prospects for jobs in the primary industries sector.

**Mr MULHERIN:** There has been a latent demand for agricultural jobs over the past five to 10 years during the prolonged drought and growth in the mining sector. The positive seasonal outlook for primary industries means that sector demand for jobs will continue for some time. A range of factors have combined to create this positive outlook. Favourable climatic conditions, including decent rain, have set up the sector for good seasons ahead. Farmers are also benefiting from lower interest rates and a weakening Australian dollar, which is making our exports more attractive.

According to our QPIF March *Prospects* update, the value of Queensland's primary industries commodities for 2008-09 is forecast at \$13.04 billion—five per cent higher than the previous year. It is anticipated that the growth will boost employment in industries such as beef and cropping. However, the

report also recognises that the level of growth in the primary industries sector will be influenced by the availability of highly skilled workers. To that end, my portfolio has, as part of Fresh Approach, focused on strengthening workforce skilling and training to overcome labour and skill shortages in the sector by transferring the Australian Agricultural College Corporation to QPIF, as I have mentioned in previous answers.

I have mentioned in a previous answer the gateway schools initiative for agribusiness. We have also developed a number of skill strategies and initiatives for industry sectors, such as beef and sugar, as well as industries in regional communities like horticulture. We have committed to the provision of 10,000 hours of tailored training to Queenslanders affected by the mining sector to reskill and take advantage of jobs in primary industries. We have also established a new science and training precinct for horticulture at the QPIF Bundaberg Research Station. If we took the approach to rural training that the member for Condamine has, the use of the research station for training in horticultural in Bundaberg would not exist.

Recently the Premier also invited the president of AgForce, John Cotter, to the jobs task force. So the inclusion of AgForce in the task force recognises the rural sector's potential as an employer and an economic powerhouse for the state. QPIF, along with other entities within DEEDI, will continue to work collaboratively with industry to attract, retain, skill and train workers in order for the sector to grow and remain competitive.

**Ms O'NEILL:** I refer to page 2-12, dot point 1, subpoint 2 of the Service Delivery Statements. What has Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries done to build a better understanding of the heavy-vehicle driver fatigue reforms affecting the livestock industry?

**Mr MULHERIN:** Livestock transport is an essential link in the supply chain, ensuring Queensland continues to lead the way in having a profitable and sustainable primary industries sector. The heavy-vehicle driver fatigue reforms are necessary to ensure ongoing road safety. These reforms have limited the number of hours a carrier can drive without sufficient rest, have altered the definition of 'work' and now hold all parties along the supply chain accountable for fatigue management under the new chain of responsibility.

The heavy-vehicle driver fatigue reforms present some challenges to industry as it requires greater communication and planning between all parties involved along the supply chain to ensure that drivers comply with the new regulations and that animal welfare is not compromised while drivers take rest breaks. Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries, working in cooperation with Queensland Transport, AgForce and the Livestock Transporters Association of Queensland, has delivered a series of agreed actions to assist the livestock industry to better understand the new reforms.

A comprehensive map, the *Queensland Livestock Transport Guide*, has been developed to assist the livestock carriers better plan their journeys. A collaborative livestock transport seminar and a stand was delivered at Beef Australia 2009, providing producers and transporters with information on animal welfare and fatigue management during livestock transport.

A driver fatigue tour of animal welfare awareness has also been implemented, where driver fatigue regulators have gained a greater understanding of the welfare risk associated. Driver fatigue tours involve 17 information sessions for the Queensland Police Service, targeting attendance by approximately 3,000 officers at key centres around the state. During the tour, 400 animal welfare information packs were distributed to police stations throughout Queensland. QPIF is now working with the Stock and Rural Crime Investigation Squad and Queensland Transport to continue to create awareness of livestock welfare issues.

QPIF has been diligent in its response to the new reforms, working with industry representative bodies to provide producers and transporters with the necessary information to gain a greater understanding of the new requirements. Our responses provide support for producers and transporters alike while encouraging the whole of the industry to work together for better road safety and animal welfare outcomes.

**Ms JOHNSTONE:** I refer to page 2-98, dot point 1 of the Service Delivery Statements. How effective has QRAA been during 2008-09 in delivering assistance to businesses affected by adverse seasonal conditions?

**Mr MULHERIN:** QRAA has played a significant role in providing valuable financial assistance to Queensland businesses affected by the seasonal extremes of drought, cyclones and floods. With regard to drought, QRAA approved almost \$100 million to primary producers and small businesses in 2008-09 under the joint Australian-state government Exceptional Circumstance Interest Rate Subsidies program as well as the state government's Irrigators Fixed Water Charges Rebate Scheme and the emergency assistance Drought Carry-on and Drought Recovery Loans program. This drought related assistance has been provided on top of the \$118.6 million provided under these programs during 2007-08.

In terms of natural disaster relief and recovery assistance, QRAA approved an estimated \$24 million to primary producers and small business in 2008-09 under the joint Australian-state government natural disaster relief and recovery assistance loan and grant program. The disaster related assistance has been provided on top of almost \$40 million provided under these programs in 2007-08.

QRAA's response to the needs of primary producers and small business has been commendable. It is typified by its efforts in administering the Special Disaster Flood Assistance grants in the latter part of 2007-08 and the beginning of 2008-09. In a period of approximately six months QRAA processed more than 4,300 applications under this program, approving more than \$41 million in grant assistance within an average of 10 working days of receipt of each application.

**CHAIR:** The remainder of the time for this examination will be divided equally between the non-government members and the government members. I call the member for Condamine.

**Mr HOPPER:** Minister, again I refer to page 2-11 of the SDS and the rosy picture about primary industries and the beautiful things you are doing. Minister, I ask what are you saying to the Premier and to transport minister Nolan about the loss of cattle trains to our meatworks, the loss of processing jobs, particularly at our largest works, Swift Australia at Dinmore, the largest meatworks in Australia, and Teys Brothers at Beenleigh? Because I am informed that both works could easily run an additional two shifts a week. We are talking real jobs—lots of them—and export dollars for this state going begging because your government has run these cattle train services down. Your government is supposed to be focused on jobs. What are you doing about this?

**Mr MULHERIN:** Transport planning issues are not within the Primary Industries—

**Mr HOPPER:** They are carting your product. It is the beef industry.

**CHAIR:** Member for Condamine, please let the minister answer.

**Mr MULHERIN:** As I said, transport planning issues are not within the Primary Industries—

**Mr HOPPER:** The question is are you lobbying the minister and the Premier on this?

**Mr MULHERIN:** If you give me the courtesy to answer the question I will answer the question. Every time you interject I will take it as another question. I seek guidance from the chair. Do you want me to answer the question or do you not want me to answer the question?

**Mr HOPPER:** You were going to pass it on to other ministers. You are saying it is their responsibility.

**Mr MULHERIN:** If you would allow me to answer the question you would get a response to your question.

**Mr HOPPER:** I eagerly await.

**Mr MULHERIN:** You have interjected on three occasions not allowing me to complete what I was about to tell you.

**Mr HOPPER:** I await your answer.

**Mr MULHERIN:** If you show some patience and respect you will get a response.

**CHAIR:** Member for Condamine, can we please allow the minister to answer.

**Mr MULHERIN:** Are you ready? You are not going to interject?

**Mr HOPPER:** No.

**Mr MULHERIN:** That is good. Transport planning issues are not within the Primary Industries and Fisheries portfolio and should be referred to Rachel Nolan MP, Minister for Transport. But I have been actively monitoring the proposed changes to rail service availability and pricing in Queensland because of the potential impacts on our livestock and grain industries. I am informed that the industry stakeholders have been told by QR that their livestock and agricultural commodities division face financial challenges and this will impact on the availability of future rail services. I am aware of the concerns raised by industry about deficiencies in existing infrastructure, particularly loading facilities and rollingstock and track access to support the movement of record quantities of grain to storage or port and livestock to processors and markets.

In response to industry concerns, two forums have been held. A cattle industry rail forum bringing together major stakeholders was convened by Agforce in December 2008 and a similar grains forum was held in Central Queensland in late 2008. These and previous discussions secured rollingstock for the Central and Southern Queensland 2009 grain harvest. With current rollingstock availability I am advised that QR is currently able to transport around 1.25 million tonnes of grain per annum to the grain ports within Queensland. In April 2008-09 QPIF attended the inaugural meeting of the steering committee of the Integrated Transport Strategy for Agricultural Commodities which was convened by Queensland Transport and Agforce. From this meeting four working groups were set up for the grain, livestock, sugar and cotton industries that were to look at factors contributing to identified transport issues. I ask for an extension?

**CHAIR:** Member for Condamine?

**Mr HOPPER:** I would rather just ask another question.

**CHAIR:** Minister, the member for Condamine wants to ask another question.

**Mr HOPPER:** Have you directly spoken with meatworks managers about the previous question that I asked you? If not why not and would you be willing to?

**Mr MULHERIN:** I recently had a dialogue for action with a number of stakeholders involved across the whole supply chain in the beef industry. These matters have been raised. They gave a report back on their involvement in the integrated transport strategy for agricultural commodities. We are aware of the issues and, as I said in the previous response, transport planning is not part of QPIF's responsibilities, it is the responsibility of the Minister for Transport. I would suggest that you refer the questions to her. As I have said, we have worked with industry and the transport minister has set up a number of processes to get industry buy-in on the issues confronting that particular part of QR.

**Mr HOPPER:** So what you are saying to the previous question is that you are happy to pass the buck in this very serious export and job situation where two shifts are not being carried out at both meatworks. You are happy to say, 'I will pass responsibility on to the Minister for Transport because it is not my department'. Is that what you are saying to this committee?

**Mr MULHERIN:** Once again, member for Condamine, you did not listen to the response I gave because you kept interjecting.

**Mr HOPPER:** I heard the response very clearly, minister.

**Mr MULHERIN:** As I said, we have taken up the issues with the transport minister and as a result of that the transport minister set up the integrated transport strategy for agricultural commodities. It was the result of QPIF working with the sector that the transport minister set that process up. From this meeting there were four working groups that were set up for the grain, livestock, sugar and cotton industries that were to look at factors contributing to identified transport issues. Outcomes from these initial discussions will form the basis of a report due in late August. Each of these working groups have now met, with active participation from QPIF. QPIF have also held, as I said, dialogues with key stakeholders in the beef industry to provide them with the opportunity to express their concerns to senior officers from the Department of Transport.

In short, government agencies and industry groups are working together. In fact, at the dialogue for action representatives from transport and industry provided a report on the progress of the integrated transport strategy steering committee that was formed. We have worked with industry, as we work with other government agencies in relation to these issues, and we will continue to do so.

**Mr HOPPER:** Minister, are you aware of the problem of your green zones in Moreton Bay—SDS 2-31—now forcing southern fishermen north to Hervey Bay? I table a copy of today's *Fraser Coast Chronicle*. Has not your management of fisheries been a failure and what are you doing to protect the Fraser Coast fisheries?

**CHAIR:** Minister, would you like to see the tabled document before you respond?

**Mr MULHERIN:** You can bring it over, yes. I think the member for Condamine has got the issues confused. The meeting that is reported in the *Fraser Coast Chronicle* is not about the Moreton Bay Marine Park, it is in relation to a meeting that was convened by QPIF on our strategic direction for fisheries 2009-14. I will address some of the issues in relation to the green zones in relation to Moreton Bay, even though the marine parks are not covered under any legislation within the portfolio of Primary Industries and Fisheries. To add a bit more, I understand that the purpose of the meeting in Hervey Bay was, as I said, around the fisheries strategy for 2009-14. As with any fisheries meeting, there are always issues raised around environmental issues or around the allocation of the resource between the commercial and the environmental sector as well as the recreational sector. I will ask Jim Groves, the deputy director-general of fisheries, who was at that meeting at Hervey Bay, to provide an update for the interest of the committee.

**Mr Groves:** Thanks, minister. As the minister indicated, there was a meeting held yesterday at the department's instigation, primarily attended by a number of recreational fishers, as part of a listening tour I have been doing consulting on the draft fisheries strategy that the minister spoke about earlier. There were a number of issues raised by the people at the meeting yesterday. It was briefly suggested in passing that there was a problem of pressure on the fishery in the Hervey Bay region allegedly as a result of effort shift out of Moreton Bay. I have discussed that with my fisheries managers this morning and our assessment is that, while we accept there are pressures on fishing stocks in Hervey Bay, that reflects the fact of population growth in particular in the Hervey Bay region and the increasing demand for recreational fishing and tourism activities in that region. We are not aware, in fact, of any commercial fishing operators who have moved from Moreton Bay to Hervey Bay. Under the provisions of the Moreton Bay structural adjustment package, the way they would have worked, we do not see that there would have been any particular reason for people to have done that and with the particular fishery that we have been involved in managing closely in Moreton Bay, namely the tunnel net fishery, we believe there would not have been anyone associated with the structural adjustment there who would have moved to Hervey Bay. So we do not think that is really the issue.

**CHAIR:** The time for non-government questions has expired. Minister, I refer to page 2-12 dot point two subpoint one of the Service Delivery Statements. What was achieved by the ministerial trade mission to Papua New Guinea in October 2008?

**Mr MULHERIN:** In October 2008 I led the trade mission to Papua New Guinea. The mission was an invaluable opportunity to not only meet with PNG government ministers but also promote Queensland agribusiness products and services. Whilst leading this trade mission I was able to strengthen the government relationship between Queensland and PNG, promote opportunities for Queensland agribusiness products and services, discuss how Queensland can work with the PNG government on a range of cooperative issues that will strengthen PNG's biosecurity capacity and complement Queensland's own biosecurity program, officially open a trade showcase by Queensland companies at the National Agricultural Research Institute near Lae, visit the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research Project which QPIF is involved with and to discuss how to extend the value and the benefits from these projects for PNG and Queensland.

During the mission I signed two memorandums of understanding. The first MOU was with the PNG Minister for Agriculture and Livestock, the honourable John Hickey. This will support ongoing agricultural collaboration between PNG and Queensland, particularly in terms of cooperation on extension services and training, biosecurity and sustainable agricultural practices. The second MOU was with the PNG Minister for Fisheries, the honourable Ben Semri. This commits PNG and Queensland to collaborate and share knowledge with regard to fisheries.

The trade mission has paved the way for ongoing collaboration between PNG and Queensland in terms of building trade relationships and working with the Australian government to strengthen biosecurity arrangements which are so critical to us, PNG being our nearest neighbour.

**Mrs SULLIVAN:** Minister, I refer to page 2-13, dot point two subpoint three, of the Service Delivery Statements. What action has Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries taken to eradicate citrus canker in Queensland?

**Mr MULHERIN:** Citrus canker is a serious exotic bacterial disease of citrus and other related plants which was detected in Emerald in June 2004. An \$18.5 million nationally cost-shared eradication program was established and a dedicated project group was formed within the department's then biosecurity business group to implement the eradication strategy. The eradication strategy required the establishment of a pest quarantine area around Emerald and the destruction of all high-risk plants in the area. This was followed by an 18-month host free period and an 18-month high-intensity surveillance program on reestablished orchards in the area to verify the absence of the disease.

On 23 January the national management group declared citrus canker eradicated after consideration of a detailed pest free area submission prepared by Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries. The department's submission is also being used by Biosecurity Australia to seek recognition of country freedom for citrus canker from Australia's international trading partners which is very important. All states and territories have removed citrus canker related movement and market access restrictions that applied to the Emerald pest quarantine area.

Over 200,000 citrus trees have been planted into reestablished orchards in Emerald. Consignments of citrus fruit have once again commenced moving from the Emerald citrus production area. Most recently, on 26 June 2009, the Plant Protection Regulation 2002 was amended to reflect Emerald's pest free area status with the repeal of citrus canker related provisions that were first introduced in 2004 to deal with the incursion.

The nationally cost-shared program was delivered by Biosecurity Queensland on time and under budget. The eradication of citrus canker is a significant achievement for Biosecurity Queensland within QPIF. Critically, the newly implemented biosecurity strategy for Queensland sets out a new approach to biosecurity issues in this state aimed at building awareness, preparedness and response capability. This strategy fulfils the 2006 state election commitment outlining key priorities for Biosecurity Queensland.

**Ms O'NEILL:** I refer to page 2-31, item 2, of the Service Delivery Statements regarding stocked impoundment permits issued. Can the minister provide details of the level of success that is being experienced in the freshwater fisheries stocking program through the Stocked Impoundment Permit Scheme?

**Mr MULHERIN:** QPIF performs a wide range of functions to support the recreational fishing sector because we recognise the economic and social importance of the rec. sector in this state and to visitors of our state. Through our Living the Queensland Lifestyle policy, the government has committed \$1.5 million to fish stocking, including the purchase of fingerlings and the development of hatcheries to improve rec. fishing opportunities, particularly in our freshwater dams, closed waterways, rivers, creeks and estuaries. The success of our Living the Queensland Lifestyle policy to date has prompted a further commitment by the Queensland government to continue the fishing program into the future.

In addition to fish stocking undertaken through our Living the Queensland Lifestyle policy, QPIF also supports stocking through the Stocked Impoundment Permit Scheme. This scheme currently operates at 33 dams and was introduced to support the development of freshwater rec. fishers throughout regional Queensland. Most freshwater fish cannot reproduce in dams and therefore there is a need to regularly stock these dams with native fish. The Stocked Impoundment Permit Scheme has proved to be very effective and has raised over \$5.3 million to improve the quality of freshwater

recreational fishing since its introduction in July 2000. Over 75 per cent of this funding has been distributed to community based fish stocking groups and is provided for the purchase of fingerlings for stocking dams associated with the scheme, as well as other activities. To date, funding from the scheme has resulted in the release of approximately 12 million native fish into 33 dams throughout Queensland, including barramundi, golden perch, silver perch, Australian bass, Mary River cod, Murray River cod and saratoga.

The Stocked Impoundment Permit Scheme provides access to quality recreational fishing opportunities for rural communities throughout Queensland. In the past four years the program has grown in terms of the number of permits sold and revenue generated. Some time ago I was at Richmond and the Mayor of Richmond, John Wharton, was singing the praises of this scheme. They have a freshwater dam in Richmond. They were finding it hard to attract labourers to work on properties. Then the grey nomads started to come for the fishing experience, staying at the caravan park that John's council had built at the dam, and then staying on to work on properties. It was a good outcome all round for the community of Richmond and it proves the success of that scheme. As a government we are about getting out there and meeting our commitments.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. The time allotted for the consideration of the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland has now expired. I would like to thank Minister Mulherin, his ministerial advisers, the director-general and all the public servants here today. Our committee would particularly like to wish the director-general a happy and healthy retirement. At this point in time the committee will break for afternoon tea and resume at 6 pm to examine the estimates for the portfolio of the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability. Thank you.

**Mr MULHERIN:** Madam Chair, may I thank you, Deputy Chair Lawrence Springborg and other members of the committee for the way you have conducted the proceedings today. I would also like to acknowledge the support of Hansard and all the parliamentary attendants who make the proceedings of the estimates process proceed smoothly.

I would also like to place on record my appreciation to the Acting Director-General of the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, Peter Henneken, for his services to government over many years. Like some of the other people who have been mentioned in the estimates committee, Peter has decided to retire. I wish him and his wife an enjoyable retirement. I would also like to thank my Associate Director-General, Rob Setter, and the departmental team of DEEDI within the QPIF stream for the hard work and effort that they have put into the preparation for estimates. I would also thank my staff for the support they have given me during this process. Once again, thank you Madam Chair.

**CHAIR:** Thank you very much.

**Proceedings suspended from 3.51 pm to 4 pm**

## ESTIMATES COMMITTEE E—CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY

### In Attendance

Hon. KJ Jones, Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability

#### **Environmental Protection Agency**

Mr J Bradley, Director-General (Acting)

Mr T Wall, Associate Director-General, Operations and Environmental Regulator

Mr G Withers, Assistant Director-General, Office of Climate Change

Ms A Leverington, Assistant Director-General, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service

Dr C Williams, Executive Director, Sciences

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**CHAIR:** I declare this meeting of Estimates Committee E now open. I am Jo-ann Miller, the member for Bundamba and chair of the committee. Joining me on the committee are Glen Elmes, the member for Noosa; Ray Hopper, the member for Condamine; Amanda Johnstone, the member for Townsville; Mary-Anne O'Neill, the member for Kallangur; Lawrence Springborg, the member for Southern Downs and deputy chair of this committee; and Karen Sullivan, the member for Pumicestone.

This afternoon the committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2009 for the portfolio of the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability. Welcome Minister Jones, your ministerial advisers and officers of the department.

**Ms JONES:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** The committee will examine estimates for the portfolio until 6.30 pm. The proceedings today are lawful proceedings subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. As such, I remind all visitors that any person admitted to this hearing may be excluded in accordance with standing order 206.

In relation to media coverage of the hearing, the committee has resolved to allow television film coverage and photography during my introduction and the minister's opening statement. The committee has also agreed to the live broadcast of the hearing via the Parliamentary Service website and to receivers throughout the parliamentary precinct. Before we begin today, may I ask that all mobile phones be now switched off.

The time limit for questions is one minute and for answers it is three minutes. A warning bell will chime 15 seconds before the time runs out. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. For the benefit of Hansard I ask all advisers, if you are called by the minister to give an answer, to please state your name and position before speaking.

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister Jones, would you care to make an opening statement? If so, you have five minutes.

**Ms JONES:** Thank you. It is a great privilege to be the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability at what is a challenging time for governments and the community around the world regarding the environment and global warming. I have a portfolio that will continue to see a lot of major decisions being made at a state, national and global level. As world leaders prepare to meet for top-level climate change talks towards the end of the year, we are a government that already has its eyes firmly on the future challenges everyone will face in this difficult and complex area.

Our government has made a number of commitments not only to help Queenslanders and Queensland businesses prepare for major economic reforms in the coming years but also to expand our protected areas of the state—areas that will be locked up for conservation. In turn this helps us mitigate against the impacts of climate change. What I have been able to achieve and what Queenslanders can see in this budget is solid financial backing to deliver on our government's commitment relating to climate change and sustainability. The new Department of Environment and Resource Management was created in March this year to help us achieve our objectives through a revitalised and better coordinated Public Service structure. It has an overall budget of \$915 million this year, of which my portfolio presides over \$409 million, remembering that Stephen Robertson is the Minister for Natural Resources.

Some specific budget initiatives include \$43 million in new investments to coordinate the implementation of a revised Queensland climate change strategy to ensure Queensland remains at the forefront of climate change response; additional funding of \$50 million over five years for the Great Barrier Reef protection package, which will reduce the amount of pollutants impacting on reef water quality; \$1.2 million for an increase in comprehensive environmental impact statement assessments for new projects, which industry has welcomed; \$1.2 million for a feasibility study for a new Great Walk from the Daintree River to the tip of Cape York; \$900,000 a year for eight new rangers for the improved management of the Moreton Bay Marine Park; and resourcing for a biodiversity strategy being developed to allow government, industry and the community to work together to protect Queensland's wealth of biodiversity. This is truly a budget that delivers on the commitments our government has made to the people of Queensland.

Finally, one particular commitment I would like to highlight is our Q2 target to protect 50 per cent more land for nature conservation and public recreation by 2020. I am pleased to inform the committee of a significant milestone in achieving this target. Ecofund has recently been established by our government to provide innovative solutions and expert advice to assist government, business and individuals meet their sustainability objectives through ethical sourcing and trading of carbon and environmental offsets. I am pleased to say that Ecofund is now effectively up and running with its first major contribution from electricity government owned corporation Powerlink. Powerlink has kick-started Ecofund with a \$750,000 contribution, of which \$350,000 will be used by my department to purchase more national park estate. With the Rudd government's two-for-one funding deal currently on the table, we expect that \$350,000 total to grow to up to \$1 million as specific locations to purchase are finalised.

Ecofund is going to be a vital tool in our kit to meet our 2020 commitment to expand protected areas throughout Queensland. It provides a range of environmental offset project management and advisory services. Ecofund strategically locates those offsets to add to and buffer national parks and establish biodiversity corridors throughout Queensland. It also provides carbon offsets and related advisory services, including services for calculating carbon footprints, minimising greenhouse gas emissions and offsetting. Ecofund can also provide companies with Queensland based carbon offsets, including renewable energy, methane flaring and biosequestration projects. It is also set up to develop multispecies biodiversity forests that will mitigate climate change and further expand and link Queensland's protected areas.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. The committee will begin its examination with non-government questions. I call the member for Noosa.

**Mr ELMES:** Minister, I would like to begin with Service Delivery Statement 3, page 203, and non-government question on notice No. 2. Why has the training and administration of the ClimateSmart Home Service scheme been outsourced to a New South Wales based company instead of being provided by a suitable Queensland based organisation?

**Ms JONES:** Can you say that again?

**Mr ELMES:** Why has the training and administration of the ClimateSmart Home Service scheme been outsourced to a New South Wales based company instead of being provided by a suitable Queensland based organisation?

**Ms JONES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. As you would be aware, the Queensland government contract for implementing the ClimateSmart Home Service is with LGIS, which is a Queensland based firm. That is the contract that we have with LGIS here in Queensland. They are responsible for rolling out this program across the state. As you know, it has been hugely popular with over 70,000 Queensland homes already taking advantage of this program.

Our aim through the ClimateSmart Home Service is to deliver improved household energy efficiency for up to 260,000 homes over the next two years by installing energy-saving devices, providing customers—that is, Queenslanders—with behavioural change tools and offering detailed advice on ways to reduce energy use. We expect that a homeowner undertaking this service and changing ongoing electricity usage behaviour can save a total of up to 20.4 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions over the average eight-year life of the greenhouse friendly products installed and up to \$250 on their energy bill.

As I said, this service has been delivering right across Queensland. One thing that we made very clear when we announced it is that we want everybody in Queensland to take advantage of it. I am very pleased to inform the honourable member that this service has also created Queensland jobs right here in the state with more than 200 electricians and 50 customer service staff employed across Queensland. That is a significant green collar workforce.

Local Government Infrastructure Services, who delivered the highly successful Home WaterWise Service, was contracted by the government to deliver this service because of the success of the Home WaterWise Service that we have seen LGIS demonstrate here before. As you would also be aware, Local Government Infrastructure Services is a joint initiative and is a competitively neutral entity owned jointly by the Local Government Association of Queensland and the Queensland Treasury Corporation.



Local Government Infrastructure Services was put in place to address a need in the market within government for assistance in evaluation and delivering infrastructure in a cost-effective and efficient manner. Local Government Infrastructure Services works towards ensuring that the best value for money is achieved for governments in infrastructure provision. I can also assure the member that I found this to be the case in regard to the rollout of this service. This is being achieved by improving bargaining power, increased economies of scale and the collective knowledge of Queensland's local government.

Local Government Infrastructure Services was awarded the ClimateSmart Home Service delivery of contract under provisions of the state government's state procurement policy. This policy provides government agencies a capacity to deal directly with competitively neutral entities such as Local Government Infrastructure Services. This decision to utilise Local Government Infrastructure Services also took into account its unique skills and recent experience in implementing the Home WaterWise Service, as I explained to you. Quite frankly, our view was that Local Government Infrastructure Services was best placed to deliver this program because of the way that it effectively delivered the Home WaterWise Service.

**Mr ELMES:** Minister, the company or organisation that most people deal with is a group by the name of Fieldforce, who are based in Sydney. Why have we allowed the export of training and administration of this program to a New South Wales based organisation?

**Ms JONES:** In answering the question, as I have just done, I have made it very clear that the contract that the state government or my department has entered into is with LGIS. As a consequence of us entering into this contract with LGIS, 200 extra electricians have been employed through this great initiative which is creating a green collar workforce and new skills for electricians in regards to renewable energy.

Local Government Infrastructure Services, as I said, was viewed as a preferred supplier for ClimateSmart Home Service delivery because of its unique skills and recent experience delivering similar demand management programs. The Department of Environment and Resource Management in its previous form as the Environmental Protection Agency was involved in the competitive tendering process undertaken by Local Government Infrastructure Services to establish the major service delivery subcontractor, thus ensuring value for money.

The state procurement policy, of which I talked to you about in my first answer, requires that the Queensland government agencies conduct their procurement activities with the utmost probity. Probity is the evidence of ethical behaviour in a particular process, and awarding of the ClimateSmart Home Service contract to Local Government Infrastructure Services has followed the requirements of this whole-of-government policy.

The state procurement policy also delivers benefits for government suppliers and the community through the commitment to three equally ranked objectives of procurement: advancing government priorities, seeking value for money and purchasing with probity and accountability. The reality is that because of our government putting our money into this project and because we take climate change seriously—and we have the Climate Change Fund here in Queensland, and we believe that climate change is real and happening now, unlike your colleague sitting next to you—

**Mr HOPPER:** Oh!

**Ms JONES:** Which is true—we are delivering this service, which has created 200 jobs, which is rolling out right across Queensland. I think this is a great service. It is one that I am very proud that the Queensland government is delivering. I know that it is one that has been very popular in your own back garden and it is one that is very popular in my electorate area as well. We have actually seen the popularity of this program escalate so much that we have been servicing up to 1,000 households a day in Queensland. Once again I think this is an indication that the people of Queensland believe that climate change is happening, that it is real, and they are taking the steps they can even at their own household level to ensure that they are reducing their carbon emissions.

Although they are a national company, the company you are referring to have a large footprint in Queensland. They train local employees and, as I said, as a consequence of this program we now have 200 electricians working in Queensland. In actual fact because of the popularity of this service in the last couple of weeks they have had to put on an additional 50 electricians. Overall, this program is a huge success. Local Government Infrastructure Services are doing a good job, just as they did when they delivered the Home WaterWise Service last year.

**Mr ELMES:** Minister, I agree with you in terms of the ClimateSmart Home Service. It is a very valuable service. But what I am seeking to do today is to make sure that the state is getting value for money. I table for your interest a newsletter from the Electrical and Communications Association. I will read out the top bit to you, which states—

The ClimateSmart Home Service—a word of caution. The Electrical and Communications Association's CEO—

**CHAIR:** Member for Noosa, this has been tabled. I would like to allow the minister to read it herself. Can you just get to the question please?

**Mr ELMES:** Sure. I am referring again to SDS 3-203. How many tradespersons have been trained for the ClimateSmart Home Service since it began?

**Ms JONES:** So you are asking—

**Mr ELMES:** How many electricians have been trained in total for the scheme since it began?

**Ms JONES:** I think in my previous answer I said there were 200 electricians delivering this service. The government has a contract with LGIS to deliver this service. As I said, they are advising me and my department that as a consequence of this investment by the state government there are now 200 people working around the clock and throughout Queensland to deliver this program.

**Mr ELMES:** That, with respect, Minister, was not what I asked. I was looking to find out how many electricians in total have been trained for this service since it commenced. If I can follow on from that, how many days training did each of them receive?

**CHAIR:** Member for Noosa, can you tell me which part of the Service Delivery Statement you are referring to?

**Mr ELMES:** SDS 3-203.

**CHAIR:** Minister, you are entitled to answer this question whichever way you wish.

**Ms JONES:** I thank the member for Noosa. There are a couple of points I want to make. The first is, as I have said repeatedly in answering all of your questions, that our contract is with LGIS. It is actually a requirement of the contract that qualified electricians do the work. So, in answering your question, I am absolutely of the view that the electricians who are providing this service are qualified electricians and there are 200 of them doing it right now. In answer to your question, given the economic downturn we are seeing in the building industry, I actually think this is creating a great employment opportunity for 200 electricians. Quite frankly, I do not know what the working capacity of those qualified electricians would be like if we had not stepped into this space and delivered this program.

As you know, the ClimateSmart Home Service was a commitment of the Bligh government because we are working really hard to reduce carbon emissions in Queensland households. This was a way that we saw that we could partner with Queensland households and make them feel empowered about the way they do that.

I can update the committee with the most recent figures that I have before me in regards to the program. As I said, 200 qualified electricians have actually delivered more than 70,000 services across Queensland and 76,000 services have already been booked. Demand for this service has spread right across the state from South-East Queensland, including Toowoomba receiving approximately 75 per cent of service bookings. Other regional and remote areas are also receiving the service. I see the document before me but, in answering your question, as I said from the outset, we have a contract with LGIS. We entered into a contract with them because of their experience in delivering this kind of demand management program. As a consequence, they have employed 200 electricians here in Queensland and they are working to help us reduce our carbon footprint here in Queensland.

They are helping householders, such as the many that we talk to on a daily basis who are very concerned about climate change, to make the small changes in their home by putting in energy efficient lighting, changing shower roses and having the energy monitor. I am sure many of the other members participating in this committee today would be well aware that the monitor is probably the most popular part of the service because it is actually getting people around the kitchen table talking about how they can take the small steps to improve their carbon emissions.

Overall, I reiterate that this is an overwhelming success. I am very pleased with LGIS. I think they are really ramping up their services in regards to this. In actual fact, the most recent customer satisfaction survey showed that 97 per cent of people who have received the service are satisfied or very satisfied with the service they have provided.

**Mr ELMES:** Minister, when we started today you mentioned the ClimateSmart Home Service and you talked about what a great scheme it is, and I have agreed with you on that. But either LGIS is running this or the department is. I would ask you to perhaps take those last couple of questions on notice, because I am determined one way or another to find out where the cost benefit is to the state.

**CHAIR:** Member for Noosa, can you get to the question, please?

**Mr ELMES:** Certainly, Madam Chair. There has been an enormous number of trained electricians who have left the ClimateSmart Home Service program. Have you done any exit interviews with those electricians to find out why they were dissatisfied?

**Ms JONES:** Member for Noosa, I think I have answered your question. As you said in the opening of your question, is it the department running this project or LGIS? I think I have answered that consistently every single time. We have a contract with LGIS to deliver this service. In regards to satisfaction, the satisfaction that I am interested in is that of the people of Queensland who are taking advantage of this service. As I have just advised, the latest data I have is that 97 per cent of the 70,000 Queensland households that have taken advantage of the ClimateSmart Home Service are very satisfied or satisfied with the service they have been provided.

I thank the honourable member for his bipartisan support of the project as a whole in regards to what it is trying to achieve. I think it is a great service. I am very confident, given that this service has been operating now for only six months and 70,000 households have already taken up this service, that we will reach our aim of 260,000 households in the next two years. This is something that I am confident LGIS will be able to achieve. As I said, the reason we decided to go with LGIS, using the proper procurement processes of the Queensland government, was the previous experience they have had in delivering a previous service for us.

In regards to my concerns as the minister, my No. 1 priority is to make sure that as many people in Queensland are taking advantage of this service as possible and that customer satisfaction in regards to people who have this service is as high as possible. I have to say that, as the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability, I was very pleased with the latest data saying that 97 per cent of Queensland households were very satisfied or satisfied with the service that was undertaken.

I would not mind using this opportunity to advise all members of the House and those present to go back to your communities and encourage more households and more of your constituents to take advantage of this service. If they live in the Brisbane City Council area—I know that the Lord Mayor has also shown bipartisan support for this service, which costs \$50 but is worth \$450—he will reimburse the \$50 that they spend. I have to say that I did not take advantage of that; I let Campbell have the \$50. But it is a great service. It is one that speaks volumes about where the Queensland public is in regards to climate change. They want a government that is active about climate change, they want a government that takes it seriously and they want a government that puts its money where its mouth is and provides services that help them to reduce their carbon footprint.

**Mr ELMES:** So the answer to my question is: no, we are not talking to the electricians who are leaving the service, and the four days training at \$200 a day for those electricians who are leaving the service is being wasted. Can you also tell me, Minister, why it is that on some occasions one person will turn up as part of the ClimateSmart Home Service and one person follows up for an audit by telephone, on other occasions one person turns up to do the service and a phone call and on other occasions two people turn up to do the job and one telephone call to do the audit. While we are talking about staff, I understand that electricians are being sent from the Sunshine Coast to Far North Queensland. Could you tell me why that is so?

**Ms JONES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. I am really confused as to why you are continuing to ask me pretty much the same question in a different way. As I have said consistently since we started this hearing, we have a contract with LGIS to deliver this service. In regards to whether they send one or two people, it obviously depends on their staffing on that day and it is a matter for them.

If you were coming to me and saying—and the satisfaction surveys were showing this—that only half the people who were getting service were not happy, if they were not meeting their targets in regard to the rollout, if customers were saying to me that they were unsatisfied, then alarm bells would be ringing. But, quite frankly, I have to be honest with you, member for Noosa, what I have asked repeatedly of my officers since I have been the minister is: what is the satisfaction rate in regards to customers? My staff from the department can absolutely say that I have been pretty vigorous in making sure that I get good information on this. People are very satisfied or satisfied with this service. That is my No. 1 priority.

I will take some of your questions on board this afternoon and am happy to look into that further. However, I want to reiterate my point of view. That is, our job is to make sure that the Queenslanders who have decided to put their hand into their own back pocket, pull out 50 bucks to get this service and improve their carbon emissions in their home are satisfied with the service, and they are. That is my responsibility. My responsibility is to make sure they are pleased with it. I am happy to have a further look and take that on board, but quite frankly it has been very popular right across the state. We will continue to deliver this program as we roll it out.

**Mr ELMES:** Minister, on 27 January, about three weeks after this scheme started, the cost for each installation—that is, the payment to the electricians—went from \$41.80 to \$56.37. That is an increase of about \$14.57 a visit. If you look at the number of people who have had the installation done, the numbers still to be done to reach your 260,000 target, and some of the people that you are now visiting a second time because some of the equipment is not available, my basic maths suggests to me that there is about \$4 million in additional costs—

**CHAIR:** Can you get to the question, please, member for Noosa?

**Mr ELMES:** My question is that we have an extra \$4 million in costs to provide this service that we know about at the moment, and I do not see any reference to an additional cost in the budget.

**Ms JONES:** I am advised that is because we have entered into a fixed contract with LGIS.

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

**Mrs SULLIVAN:** Minister, I refer to page 3-205 of the Service Delivery Statement, which refers to managing the parks and wildlife estate to build resilience in natural systems. We wanted to first focus on Fraser Island, which is often the subject of public discussion and debate, and this year is no different. Minister, what steps has your department taken to ensure that the Great Sandy Region, of which Fraser Island is a part, is adequately conserved for future generations?

**Ms JONES:** When I first became minister, I made it an absolute priority to have a better understanding of the wide range of sensitivities and concerns that exist in this remarkable part of Queensland. One of my first ministerial visits was to Fraser Island. I know it was also one of the first visits of the shadow minister in this regard.

The Great Sandy Region rightly sits atop Queensland's crown of natural jewels, hosting around 350,000 visitors each year. World Heritage listed Fraser Island is a foundation of a vibrant tourism industry, attracting a majority of interstate and overseas visitors and has long been a landmark feature of many local family holidays. I want this reputation to not only continue under my watch but also to grow. As the responsible minister, I proudly give credit to successive Labor governments for their enduring commitment to this natural wonderland—from the Goss government in 1991 which had the commission of inquiry into the region and the state's partnership with the Hawke and Keating governments that saw the inscription on the World Heritage List in 1992, through to the significant investment by the Beattie government and continued investment by the Bligh government, while the Howard government strangled the supply of funding from Canberra down to less than what I would describe as a dripping tap.

To highlight this disparity, in the 2002-03 financial year the state government spent \$6.2 million with a contribution from the Commonwealth of just \$8,000. This trend continued through to the final year of the Howard government when the state government spent \$9 million on Fraser Island while the Commonwealth spent a paltry \$165,000. In contrast, however, I am delighted to inform the committee that the current federal government has recently committed \$1.8 million towards the preservation of Fraser Island.

This history of investment clearly demonstrates our government's enduring commitment to protect Fraser Island's values and demonstrates that we have the credentials to manage this World Heritage area. Some recent highlights of our initiatives include the construction of dingo fences around the townships and improved visitor facilities such as the Great Walk. Today I am proud to announce the Bligh government's further investment to keep the Great Sandy Region great. Building on the important work already undertaken, we will implement a raft of initiatives geared towards improving the management of the whole region.

I am today releasing for community consultation the regulatory impact statement for the proposed Cooloola recreation area. The declaration of a proposed recreation management area and its associated investment will ensure that Cooloola continues to provide safe and sustainable recreational opportunities for visitors.

**Ms O'NEILL:** Minister, you mentioned that you are about to commence public consultation on a proposal to declare the Cooloola region a recreation area. Could you please provide us now with more information about this proposal?

**Ms JONES:** I thank the member for Kallangur for the question. I would be very happy to, because it is delivering on a promise that our government has made towards conserving this wonderful region's natural attractions and visitor appeal. The Cooloola Coast is an important part of the Great Sandy Region and has the potential to become one of the most significant nature based ecotourism destinations in Queensland. Along with the World Heritage listed Fraser Island, it is a unique Australian icon and could be positioned globally as a must-see destination. Balancing sustainable use with conservation of this great area is a challenge that can be achieved only through individual, community, industry and government support.

Increasing pressure from visitors over recent years has led to concern about public safety, environmental damage and public health. One of the key management proposals in the strategic directions for Cooloola our government released last year was the declaration of a Cooloola recreation area under the Queensland Recreation Areas Management Act. Today I am releasing a regulatory impact statement, as I said, and calling for public submissions to be made about this proposal.

Declaration of a recreation area will allow for coordinated and formalised management arrangements to be applied over the Cooloola section of the Great Sandy National Park and adjacent to beaches. The regulatory impact statement will propose that a vehicle access permit be required from Middle Rocks, south-east of Rainbow Beach township, to immediately north of Teewah Village. Vehicle access permits will also be required for some inland park roads that provide access to the beach.

The proposal is that the beach area south of Teewah Village be included in the proposed Cooloola recreation area but a permit will not be required for this section. This will provide for continued day use of the beach and allow for free access for Teewah Village residents and visitors. It is proposed that the cost of a vehicle access permit will be \$38.25 for up to one month and \$191.50 for up to one

year. The Cooloola recreation area will be based on the Fraser Island and Moreton Island recreation areas. In addition, a three-day permit costing \$25 and a 20 per cent discount for visitors who purchase a monthly or yearly permit for both Fraser and Cooloola for the same duration will be available.

Should the proposal be accepted by the community, revenue from the permits will allow for a range of projects to be undertaken including upgrading internal roads that provide access to the beach, improved sanitation and toilet facilities in the Teewah Beach camping zone, dune stabilisation and formalised access to camping sites, and better signs and visitor guides.

**Ms JOHNSTONE:** Minister, you earlier referred to a range of projects for Fraser Island. Can you outline those to the committee?

**Ms JONES:** I thank the member for Townsville for the question. Fraser Island's World Heritage status not only affords the region the highest level of protection and recognition but also ensures development of the region is planned and delivered with the fragile nature of this beautiful place in mind. I am very pleased today to inform the committee of a significant joint investment initiative with the Commonwealth government. Together the Bligh and Rudd governments have committed in excess of \$2.8 million to improve the picnic facilities, shelters, toilets, walkways, roads and parking at Fraser Island's most iconic site, Lake McKenzie. These works are needed to ensure this pristine site is not loved to death and that visitors use sustainable infrastructure. Having committed a further \$250,000 at this year's election for the specific purpose of improving visitor facilities on the island, the Bligh government is continuing to build on our strong tourism infrastructure foundations in the Great Sandy Region.

It is essential that our work does not stop there. Facilities to cater for 350,000 visitors annually while still ensuring the beauty and integrity of this natural environment is a priority in our ongoing management. In addition, this year's capital works projects on Fraser Island are extensive, and they include \$88,000 for portable beach camping toilet facilities with assistance from the Commonwealth, upgrades around campgrounds worth a total investment of \$766,000, upgraded toilet facilities at Central Station campground worth \$470,000, enhanced facilities at Lake Allom, Harry's Hut and Seary's Creek totalling \$71,000, and a solar power system to improve the sustainability of park operations at a cost of \$920,000 with assistance from the Commonwealth.

These works are in addition to the millions of dollars worth of improvements to facilities undertaken in recent years such as the new Eli Creek southern boardwalk and upgraded toilet access, Dundaburra campground waste treatment system, dingo deterrent fencing and upgraded vehicle access and parking at several sites. In addition, I am informed there are a number of other projects under consideration to be funded in the parks and wildlife role in capital works planned beyond this year.

Our government has also supported the enormous potential for Cooloola to become a significant nature based tourism destination, as I said, within Queensland with the construction of a 90-kilometre Great Walk worth \$1.3 million. This walk will be completed by the end of this year and will link Noosa north shore with Rainbow Beach, providing a gateway for walkers to experience this area.

**CHAIR:** I refer to page 3-205 of the Service Delivery Statements, and I note that you have mentioned extending the Fraser Island World Heritage area to include the Cooloola area. Could you tell the committee more about why this area should be nominated and what the process will be?

**Ms JONES:** Thank you for the question. The addition of the Cooloola region to the existing Fraser Island World Heritage area is a commitment of our government—one that we are delivering on. The proposal is also supported by the Commonwealth government and a tentative boundary has been endorsed by both governments as a basis for undertaking public consultation. I want to see the outstanding values of the Cooloola area recognised internationally along with those of Fraser Island.

If we have additional areas that warrant international standing, then we should be in there paving the way for that recognition. To this extent, my position on this opportunity has been very clear. I point out that this is in stark contrast to the member for Noosa, who has been flip-flopping in regard to this issue. One week he wrote to me calling on Cooloola to be given a separate World Heritage listing. The next week he backtracks and supports my position. To make matters worse, his next-door neighbour, the member for Gympie, is completely at odds with him. He has publicly suggested that Fraser Island should be delisted as a World Heritage area. That is first-class local representation—

**Mr ELMES:** Because of what you have done to it. Because of what you and your department have done.

**CHAIR:** Member for Noosa, please do not interject.

**Ms JONES:** The World Heritage land is becoming more and more recognised by travellers of the world as a reliable pointer to some of the most outstanding features on earth. In short, this could have very positive economic outcomes for Cooloola and Queensland.

I intend to commence public consultation later this year on the proposed boundary for the Cooloola extension. Based on the results of the public consultation, the next step will be to prepare the nomination document in close consultation with the Commonwealth. Nominations can be submitted only by the Commonwealth in its role as a state party to the World Heritage convention. The Cooloola region is a logical extension to the Fraser Island World Heritage property as they share many features.

A few years ago the Fraser Island World Heritage Area Scientific Advisory Committee carried out a thorough assessment of Cooloola's World Heritage potential. It strongly argued the case for Cooloola to be added to the existing World Heritage property. However, as you would be aware, any formal nomination in this regard will take time. Nevertheless, the outstanding natural and cultural values of Cooloola are strongly protected and represented in the Great Sandy National Park under Queensland's nature conservation legislation.

Responding to the interjection from the member for Noosa. I think I made it very clear in my comments and answers that the Bligh government and the Labor government in Queensland continued and improved our effort in protecting Fraser Island when the Howard government felt it was appropriate to only provide \$8,000 in one year to protect the World Heritage values of Fraser Island.

**Mrs SULLIVAN:** Minister, earlier this year you called for public submissions for an audit being conducted on the dingo management strategy. Can you update the committee on the audit's progress?

**Ms JONES:** I thank the member for Pumicestone for the question. Dr Laurie Corbett was recently engaged to undertake a second independent audit of the Fraser Island Dingo Management Strategy that the department uses on Fraser Island. His audit is based on reports and statistical data from current research, field observations at major visitor locations, discussions with rangers and the more than 70 public submissions received. I can inform the committee that the report is currently being finalised. We should be receiving any recommendations from Dr Corbett very soon.

The committee may be aware that in the meantime I have instructed my department to review communication strategies used to educate the public about appropriate behaviour near dingoes to assure the approach remains at world's best practice standards. I would like to point out that we have come a long way during the past couple of decades when it comes to dingo management.

For example, previous research has shown that in the 1990s, prior to state government improvements to waste management, nearly half of the food consumed by dingoes came from humans. In recent times, this amount has been reduced to less than 10 per cent. This demonstrates that the dingo population is in balance with the availability of natural prey on the island.

Risk assessments conducted quarterly at 79 sites across the island show the risk posed to humans by dingoes has reduced significantly since 2001. This is in no small part due to the dingo deterrent fencing that we have erected around the township. We have some diagrams about the risk analysis and how the strategy has been working.

For example there is a consistent downward trend in the number of dangerous or aggressive dingo incidents from 68 in 2003 to 42 in 2008. As you see from these diagrams, the dingo incidents that have occurred on Fraser Island have continually trended downwards since our dingo management strategy was been put in place.

**Mr ELMES:** What was the management strategy—a 303.

**Ms JONES:** The dingo risk assessment was of extreme and high-risk sites. Since the dingo deterrent fencing—which I know the member for Noosa does not support—has gone in we can see that in high-risk areas, which is where people are visiting and the townships in particular, the incidents have gone down significantly. As the minister this gives me a lot of comfort. I do not want to see a young child or anybody attacked on Fraser Island while I am the minister. To me this demonstrates quite clearly that we are taking the right approach. Human safety is paramount. We need to do all we can to ensure that visitors and tourists who come to Fraser Island are safe and do not run the risk of being attacked by a dingo and, furthermore, are given the information they require to know that feeding dingoes is an extremely dangerous practice.

**CHAIR:** Minister, will you provide a copy of those diagrams for Hansard please?

**Ms JONES:** I am happy to.

**Ms O'NEILL:** Minister, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service's management of dingoes on Fraser Island has attracted plenty of interest. Could you inform the committee how rangers deal with managing dingoes in the tourist areas?

**Ms JONES:** I thank the member for the question. Following the tragic death of a young boy in April 2001, which I just mentioned, the state government developed a comprehensive strategy for the management of dingoes on the island. At the time the government faced strong calls to exterminate every dingo. The government chose the responsible approach which was to implement a strategy designed to minimise the risk to human safety while at the same time strive to conserve a sustainable population of dingoes on Fraser Island. As the diagrams I have just showed you indicate, we have come a long way in that regard.

Now, eight years down the track, I have confidence that it has been successful in meeting those twin goals. The strategy includes a range of interventions to change human and dingo behaviours and discourage human-dingo interaction using a three-pronged approach of education, engineering and enforcement.

A key principle of this strategy is that dingoes are regarded as wild native animals and should be interfered with as little as possible. That means that humans should not feed them. However, equally important is that individual dingoes identified as dangerous to humans will be humanely destroyed, remembering that our views is, and should be, that public safety is paramount.

I have listened to concerns about how this might affect the dingo population. I know that this is something that the opposition has been discussing. An independent audit in 2003 determined that dingoes remain prevalent and widely distributed across the island and that they are not in danger of imminent extinction. While data collected over the past decade suggests that the Fraser Island dingo population naturally fluctuates between 100 and 200, I am nevertheless keen to accelerate further research so we can be more certain of the numbers.

My department is working with organisations such as the University of Queensland, Griffith University and Biosecurity Queensland to draw together various techniques so that accurate figures on dingo numbers can be provided. The survey will provide a better understanding not only of the total numbers but also of other factors such as dingo dispersal across the island, the total number of packs and the age and composition of those packs.

I want to make it very clear to the committee that I will never support the opposition's proposal to treat dingoes as pets and feed them. This concept has been rejected over many years for the following reasons. As part of the island's natural biodiversity dingoes should be allowed to regulate their own numbers in response to natural food. Feeding dingoes would artificially increase numbers on the island, interfere with natural population dynamics and increase the frequency of dingo-human interactions.

**CHAIR:** It is now time for non-government questions. I call the member for Noosa.

**Mr ELMES:** I refer to the SDS at page 3-205 and conservation and environmental services. In October 2008, as a result of many reports stating that there was damage to Fraser Island lakes, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service advised that further testing would be done regarding the impact of tourists and camping on the island. Has this testing been completed? What were the results?

**Ms JONES:** Testing with regard to the quality of water in the lakes?

**Mr ELMES:** Water quality.

**Ms JONES:** I thank the member for the question. As I announced on Saturday night when we were both at a function, I have instructed my department to undertake water testing on Fraser Island and the lakes. I will ask Andrea Leverington, the head of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, to elaborate on that.

**Ms Leverington:** Quite recently officers within our agency undertook some sampling of selected lakes on Fraser Island. The early results have shown that tests at Lake McKenzie, Basin Lake, Lake Allom and Lake White indicate they appear to remain in good ecological health and that the water quality at Lake McKenzie and other lakes was very similar to that recorded 11 years ago. The full report on that testing should be available shortly.

**Mr ELMES:** Has the minister seen the results of the testing and inquiries being undertaken by the University of the Sunshine Coast in certain parts of the water catchment?

**Ms JONES:** No, I have not seen the results of that testing. I am happy to have a look at them. Any testing that we undertake with regard to the lakes on Fraser Island I will make publicly available. I think that our government has a very strong record, as I outlined this afternoon, with regard to the management of Fraser Island. This is despite constant criticism from the opposition and despite the Howard government all but walking away from its responsibility with regard to this World Heritage area. As I have outlined this afternoon, the Howard government thought it was appropriate to only make a contribution of around \$8,000 in one year. Contrast this to the newly elected Kevin Rudd government which has recently allocated \$1.8 million for Fraser Island management.

We understand the responsibility we have with regard to Fraser Island. We do not see that there is any benefit in people, like the member for Gympie, going out there and deriding it. At a time when tourism is doing it tough—and your community would know what tourism is like at the moment—we actually need to—

**Mr ELMES:** You have just made it tougher.

**Ms JONES:** I have just told you how much we are investing—and I can read the list again—on Fraser Island this year for capital works, particularly around camping grounds and providing better facilities, such as toilets, near Lake McKenzie. This government puts its money where its mouth is. What we find not helpful is the member for Gympie going out there and deriding Fraser Island.

What we actually need to do is sing the praises of the great natural heritage we have in Queensland. We are home to some of the most iconic areas of any state or, in actual fact, any country in the world. Our government has made it consistently clear that we will continue to provide services and upgrade tourism facilities in this area.

With the members indulgence, I have some further information to his questions he asked earlier with regard to LGIS. With regard to his last question, the member was referring to a contract renegotiation which occurred allowing savings being made through one area of the program budget to be redirected towards other program expenditure. Specifically, savings from the number of light bulbs needed at each house have been applied to allow more time to be spent at each household on average by the electrician. As a result of this change, the average visit time has generally been in the order of 45 minutes rather than 30 minutes. This provides more time for the electrician to provide information to the resident and provide them with services.

As you would know, when we announced this program we said that households could have up to 15 low-energy light bulbs installed in their home. In my home I certainly do not have 15 light bulbs. Where they have delivered savings they have redirected them into better services. I am advised, that that has been part of a contract renegotiation.

**Mr ELMES:** I will come to climate smart a little bit later on. I refer to the dingo numbers on Fraser Island which you referred to. I understand that the number of dingoes that the rangers on the island refer to constantly is 200. The locals on the island refer to numbers at somewhere between 75 and 100. Can you tell what you believe would be a sustainable number in terms of the population being able to carry on and not become extinct?

**Ms JONES:** I thank the member for the question. As I said, my department advises me that a sustainable population of dingoes on Fraser Island is between 100 and 200 dingoes. In response to concerns that have been raised publicly about the ongoing sustainability of the dingo population on Fraser Island I have directed them to work with the universities, which I outlined in my previous answer, to have a look at all the data available and revisit that issue. The advice I have is that it is between 100 and 200 dingoes. With regard to dingo management on Fraser Island I really want to make it clear that when you talk about a sustainable population of dingoes on Fraser Island what you are actually talking about is a dingo population which relies on native prey.

It is not a dingo population which relies on human beings to feed them. I really want to stress this point, because I want to make it very clear to everyone here that the opposition's proposal to have dingo feeding stations on the island is the worst possible solution that you could have for dingoes.

**Mr ELMES:** It was a suggestion. It was not a plan and it was not a policy; it was a suggestion.

**CHAIR:** Member for Noosa, can you please allow the minister to answer the question.

**Mr ELMES:** I am just trying to help her.

**Ms JONES:** I do not need your help, buddy.

**CHAIR:** I do not think she needs any assistance.

**Mr ELMES:** She does. On this occasion she does.

**Ms JONES:** So are you apologising for your policy?

**Mr ELMES:** It was not a policy; it was a suggestion, one of many that was put to the—

**CHAIR:** Please. This is not a debate in the estimates committee. Minister, can you answer the question.

**Ms JONES:** I thank the member for Bundamba for that. I will quote from the *Fraser Coast Chronicle*, which has a nice photo of the honourable member for Noosa.

**Mr ELMES:** I will sign it for you!

**Ms JONES:** It is headed 'Feed them and find a balance'. It goes on to say—

A special community meeting about Fraser Island dingoes was held in Hervey Bay last night with the LNP's climate change and sustainability spokesperson, Glen Elmes, visiting the Sunshine Coast.

He met with Hervey Bay MP Ted Sorensen ...

Actually, Ted Sorensen has also been in the parliament saying that we should invest in dingo stations. The reason I raise it is that I cannot open the *Fraser Coast Chronicle*, the *Gympie Times* or the Hervey Bay paper without reading that members of the LNP are calling on the government to install dingo feeding stations.

As I have said in the parliament during question time and as I have said consistently in any comments I make publicly with regard to Fraser Island and dingo management, my No. 1 priority is to ensure public safety. All of the scientific data makes it very clear that if you encourage human-dingo interaction by setting up feeding stations where humans can feed dingoes this will lead to more dangerous incidents occurring. I will not allow that to happen. As the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability, my No. 1 priority is to make sure that people have a safe experience when they visit Fraser Island. The reason I have asked Dr Corbett to do another audit of the dingo management strategy is to actually put these ideas to bed. In particular, I have asked him to look at the merit of dingo feeding stations.



**Mr ELMES:** I want to go back to the subject of water quality on Fraser Island. I am particularly concerned about the state of the camping areas in some parts of Fraser Island and the amount of usage of those camping areas, particularly by backpackers and organised tours of backpackers, and would just like to have your assurance again that when the University of the Sunshine Coast presents you with its findings of the water quality situation, particularly in the areas around the camping areas, that information will be made public.

**Ms JONES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. I can give him that assurance. I can also advise the committee that I recently met with John Sinclair of the Fraser Island Defenders Organisation and made it clear to him the government's commitment to ensure that the lakes and streams of the island remain in excellent condition. I am informed by my department that intermittent water quality testing conducted over the last 20 years has consistently shown the quality of the lakes and streams on Fraser Island to be in good condition. Water quality sampling of selected lakes has been undertaken as recently as this year, as we have previously heard, and early results of the tests at Lake McKenzie, Basin Lake, Lake Allom and Lake White indicate that they appear to remain in good ecological health. A full report will be made available shortly and, as I have indicated to the committee in previously answering questions, I am happy to make that publicly available.

In 2007-08 the Environmental Services Division of what was the former Environmental Protection Agency conducted a detailed assessment in conjunction with the Burnett Mary River group of the Wathumba, Coongull and Bogimbah creeks on Fraser Island which were all found to be in excellent ecological health. In December 2008 my department sought advice from the Fraser Island World Heritage Area Scientific Advisory Committee about monitoring the water quality of Fraser Island's lakes. The committee was of a general view that Fraser Island's lakes appeared to be in relatively good condition. The view is consistent with the scientific advisory committee's 2004 *Fraser Island World Heritage area: review of outstanding universal values* report, which states that the lakes and spring-fed streams are generally robust overall.

Over many years local QPWS rangers have undertaken ecological monitoring of selected lakes based on assessments of flora and fauna indicators without significant concerns being identified. Nevertheless, my department is keen to establish a formal water quality monitoring program for Fraser Island's lakes, and an application has been made to the Australian government under its Caring for Country program for \$400,000 to fund a four-year monitoring program. It is my view that calls questioning the integrity of Fraser Island's World Heritage area values, in particular the health of its water reserves, need to be accompanied by evidence based on scientific research, and I am sure that that is also the view of the member for Noosa.

**Mr ELMES:** I would be more than happy to show you some photos of how well the environment on Fraser Island is being looked after, Minister.

**Ms JONES:** I swam in Lake McKenzie in January.

**Mr ELMES:** I will show you some photos. I refer to your announcement about Cooloola and ask whether or not you have looked at any of the submissions made to your predecessor from community groups regarding their preference for the way this Cooloola announcement should be handled and further ask why you have ignored the overwhelming majority of those submissions.

**Ms JONES:** In the announcement that I made here today I made it very clear that as part of this I will be releasing a regulatory impact statement which will enable everybody in the community to have their say with regard to the Cooloola extension to the Fraser Island World Heritage area. A regulatory impact statement, as I am sure the member is aware, gives everybody in the community an opportunity to have their say. I have it here and I am happy to give it to the member, but this will actually look at all of the community's concerns. I encouraged the member for Noosa to be proactive, which I am sure he will be, in encouraging his community to take advantage of the public consultation that a regulatory impact statement offers the people of the area. In particular, I am sure that the member is referring to Teewah Village and the residents of Teewah Village, about which the member has been on the public record several times.

I am aware that there have already been submissions and representations about aspects of the 'Strategic Directions for Cooloola' paper directly to my predecessor. I am advised, for example, that some residents of the Teewah Village have expressed concerns about the point at which vehicle access permits could commence. I know that is of particular concern. These concerns will be included in my considerations of the vehicle access permit arrangements after the regulatory impact statement has been considered by the community.

As I have said, I am sure that the member for Noosa will be taking this opportunity to encourage local residents to use this process. My intention is to look at all of the public submissions to make sure that we can take them into account. Should the proposal be accepted, as I said, the money that would be raised through the management plan would actually be invested back into urgent infrastructure that is needed in the area. I know that this is something also of concern to the member for Noosa. This would

be with regard to upgrading internal roads that provide access to the beach, improved sanitation in providing toilet facilities in the Teewah Beach camping zone, dune stabilisation, access to camping sites—that is, formalising access to camping sites—and better signs and visitor guides.

I really do hope that the community, when commenting on the regulatory impact statement, recognises the urgent need for better management of vehicles to ensure visitor safety, improvement in sanitation and enhanced camping grounds. I also think—and I will just check on this—that normally under a RIS you are only required to make it open to public comment for 28 days. I have instructed that it should be available to the local people, given the issues, for up to six weeks, which is beyond what is required under law. I have made that decision as the minister because of the concerns that I know some people in the community have. I will be listening to the people of Teewah Village.

**CHAIR:** Minister, I note your generous offer to provide a copy of that document to the member for Noosa. If you wish to do so, you have to seek leave to table it.

**Ms JONES:** Sorry about that. I seek leave to table the regulatory impact statement for the proposed Cooloola recreation area 2009.

**CHAIR:** Leave is granted.

**Mr ELMES:** I will include that in my bedtime reading tonight, Minister; thank you very much.

**Ms JONES:** Welcome to my life!

**Mr ELMES:** And thank you for the extension in terms of those submissions. I refer to the SDS at page 3-203 and move now from dingoes that we cannot save on Fraser Island to koalas that I hope we possibly can. In 2005-06 the EPA estimated that the Koala Coast population of koalas was 4,611. In 2008 the survey estimated the population at 2,279. That is a 51 per cent decrease in less than three years. Given this alarming decrease in koala numbers in this area, what part did your department play in the decision to allow a Queensland state primary school to be built at Thornlands which has bulldozed all of the koala habitat on the site? I submit for the committee a colour photograph showing the area which has been bulldozed.

**CHAIR:** Member for Noosa, are you tabling this document?

**Mr ELMES:** I am tabling the document, Madam Chair.

**CHAIR:** Can I just ask for this document to be given to the minister before she responds.

**Ms JONES:** I am well aware of it. I thank the member for the question. In answering his question, I think that we should provide some context for all members of the committee with regard to what the state government is doing to protect koalas. The data that the honourable member is referring to in his question is data that we make publicly available because we provide the funding and the resources in order to monitor koala numbers in key koala habitats. So that is something that we do as an agency because we do think it is important. As a government we are absolutely committed to protecting this iconic species. Knowledge and response to their plight in South-East Queensland has increased over the past few years. We are taking action now through a Koala Crisis Response Strategy.

Since I have been minister I have demonstrated my commitment to protecting koala habitat from day one. One of the first things I did was address the Koala Task Force appointed by government to explore new ways of tackling this issue head-on. I gave it my commitment to release the Koala Coast koala population survey, to which you are referring. I released it in May after taking it to cabinet, where cabinet supported the continuation of the current freeze on the clearing of state land that we have had in place since December 2008. At the time that we announced the freeze we made it very clear that, when it came to urgent infrastructure—social infrastructure—such as schools, like the one that the member is referring to, then there would be an exemption on the basis of it being urgent social infrastructure.

**Mr ELMES:** There is one tree left!

**Ms JONES:** A school, in my view, is something that is urgent infrastructure, and I understand that we can expect over 700 families to go there. Since we are talking about comparing records with regard to koala habitat, I want to draw members' attention, now that the member for Southern Downs is back in the room, to the fact that you went to the last election as the LNP with no policy regarding koala habitat. Furthermore, you said that the Daisy Hill State Forest would become a trail bike park. The mapping that we are conducting as an agency about koala habitat mapping shows that this area is a high-value koala habitat. The LNP, if elected, would have turned this high-value habitat into what would be a trail bike park. I can quote—

**Mr ELMES:** You have just done it!

**Ms JONES:** It said that the LNP recognises that there are safety and noise concerns for many local residents and the closure of the dedicated trail bike riding facilities is pushing it into areas that are more difficult. It said that it knew that the 430 hectares of bushland is home to many native species. In actual fact, the local government asked the member for Southern Downs to rule out the Daisy Hill State Forest—

**Mr ELMES:** There is one tree left on that Thornlands state school site—one tree!

**CHAIR:** Minister, the time has now expired. It is time for government questions.

**Ms JONES:** The government has been very open about our policy in that regard.

**Ms JOHNSTONE:** Minister, page 3-203 of the SDS refers to the Premier's announcement to increase the national parks estate to 7.5 per cent of Queensland by 2020. What progress has been made on the gazettal of new national parks since the Premier's announcement?

**Ms JONES:** I thank the honourable member for this question. This is a significant commitment by our government to protect Queensland's unique landscape. Increasing the national park estate from five per cent to 7.5 per cent of Queensland will achieve a land area totalling 12.9 million hectares, which I know is a massive task. This is in stark contrast to the LNP's recent public commitments to protected areas, which I just talked about. They were contemplating and went to the people of Queensland at the last election saying that they would be happy to open up national parks and conservation areas to things such as trail bikes. You would be very pleased to know that we as a government, of course, ruled that out.

The member for Mudgeeraba recently attacked our government's decision to expand Springbrook National Park on the Gold Coast. I am pleased to say that, despite the knockers, we have made a lot of progress since the Premier gave our commitment in March last year. More than 382,000 hectares have been added to the state's national park estate in just 14 months since the Premier, Anna Bligh, became the Premier of Queensland.

I just want to reiterate this. The Premier has been the Premier now for 14 months. In that time, we have acquired 382,000 hectares. The reason I make this distinction is that when the Liberal National Party was last in government—or I think they were the National Party and Liberal coalition then—they acquired only 106,000 hectares in the 2½ years that they were in office. So I think this highlights where we make it a priority in regard to acquiring national park.

A key point, given the flavour of questions we have had here today, is that our view is that retaining and protecting these areas of national park is a good way to ensure biodiversity in Queensland. I have just been advised that the people of Queensland voted out the Borbidge government after 22 months; it was not 2½ years. Is that correct? The Premier has been in office for 22 months. Anyway, 382,000 hectares is almost three times what they did when they were last in office.

Among these acquisitions are the historic declarations last year of two areas of Aboriginal land in Cape York Peninsula totalling 194,000 hectares. They are managed under agreements that recognise Aboriginal ownership of the land and provide for cooperative management to protect the land's cultural and natural values.

More than 134,000 hectares of former state forest and timber reserve land has also been transferred to national park. This includes 112,000 hectares in South-East Queensland. Other recent forest transfers include 14,400 hectares in the Mackay-Whitsunday region and almost 8,000 hectares in the Wet Tropics region.

We are also adding to our state in more populated centres. For example, one of the great pleasures I had as minister was a declaration of the D'Aguiar National Park, which is right in my back garden.

**CHAIR:** I refer to page 3-203 of the Service Delivery Statements, which mentions the establishment of the Eco Fund. I note that you also touched on the Eco Fund in your previous answer regarding the national park estate. Could you outline how the Eco Fund is progressing and the environmental benefits that it will bring to Queensland?

**Ms JONES:** I thank the honourable member for Bundamba for that question. The Eco Fund, in my view, is going to be a vital tool in our kit to meet our 2020 commitment to expand protected areas throughout Queensland. It was established in January 2009 as the state government's main carbon and environmental offsets provider, serving government entities, initially, including local government. I am pleased to report to the committee today that Eco Fund has already raised more than \$900,000 in funding for national park acquisitions. Better still, we expect this to be matched on a two-for-one basis, with more than \$1.8 million from the Commonwealth's National Reserve System funding. These early efforts are expected to generate \$2.7 million in funds and the acquisition of more than 20,000 hectares of new national park—a great outcome for Queensland taxpayers and a great outcome for conservation. I would particularly like to thank the government owned corporation Powerlink for contributing much of the \$900,000 allocation to Eco Fund for national park acquisitions so far.

But it is not just national park estate that Eco Fund is targeting. In total, it undertook approximately \$3.5 million in carbon and environmental offset transactions from January to June. As at June, Eco Fund has engaged 29 clients, including Ergon, Queensland Rail, the Department of Public Works, Powerlink, the Scenic Rim Regional Council, LinkWater and Energex. Eco Fund has been established within the Department of Environment and Resource Management and over time will transition to become a government owned proprietary company. It provides a range of environment offset project

management and advisory services. It strategically locates these offsets to add to and buffer national parks and to establish biodiversity corridors throughout Queensland. It also provides carbon offsets and related advisory services, including services for calculating carbon footprints, minimising greenhouse gas emissions and offsetting. Once again, this is an example of the Bligh government delivering on its commitments and ensuring that Queensland is best placed to tackle the real threat of climate change.

Eco Fund can also provide companies with Queensland based carbon offsets, including renewable energy, methane flaring and methane flaring projects. It is also set up to develop multispecies biodiverse forests that will mitigate climate change and further expand and link Queensland's protected areas. These forest projects will lead to the revegetation of cleared landscapes, the re-establishment of wildlife habitat, and will contribute to improvements in the water quality of Queensland's creeks and rivers.

**Ms JOHNSTONE:** I refer to page 3-202 of the SDS, which mentions that a 2009-10 highlight will be the development of a biodiversity strategy. What actions has your department taken to set a clear direction for biodiversity protection in Queensland?

**Ms JONES:** I thank the member for the question. I know that this is something that the member is very passionate about. She and I have had discussions about this since she has been a member. This is also something that I care deeply about and it is something that I am really looking forward to working on as the minister.

Queensland, as I said, is fortunate to have some of the world's most spectacular biodiversity treasures. Indeed, Queensland has Australia's largest range of native plants and animal species. Our biodiversity provides significant economic, social, health and lifestyle benefits to Queensland. Tourism spending associated with our national parks alone is estimated to contribute more than \$4 billion a year to the Queensland economy. Our government wants to keep this trend, particularly in these tough economic times, which I have talked about—unlike the opposition, which is hell-bent on running down our protected areas to their detriment.

We have made some critical gains in biodiversity conservation over the past decade. The 1999 South-East Queensland Forest Agreement phased out logging of old growth forests on public land and commenced a transfer of state native forests to protected areas. The government phased out broadscale land clearing of remnant vegetation and also introduced laws to preserve our wild rivers in near pristine conditions by regulating developments in their catchments. The Delbessie Agreement fosters sustainable use of rural leasehold land and the appropriate management of future conservation areas. Earlier this year, we massively expanded the no-fishing zones in Moreton Bay, protecting 16 per cent of the area—up from just half a per cent. Despite these achievements, we want to do more to protect Queensland's biodiversity and in the face of some very real pressures: development and expanding population, increased grazing and competition from introduced pests. The increasing evidence of these pressures will significantly be exacerbated by the emerging impacts of climate change.

I want to just take this opportunity, while we are talking about biodiversity, to inform the committee of a development we have had today. Recently, I went to St George where we announced that Xstrata, one of our partners—and this will be in the budget documents—provided \$3 million to set up a second colony of the hairy-nosed wombat. Currently, there is only one place in Queensland where you can find the hairy-nosed wombat and there is 138 of them left here in Queensland. What we trialled was—I guess you could say, on talking to the staff, they were a bit concerned about it—quite risky, but I am very pleased to say that we have transported the first hairy-nosed wombat from its original habitat to the new habitat at St George. We had actually made man-made burrows in the hope that they would use them. I am very pleased to say that the first one that has been transferred there has gone on to the land and rushed straight into the burrow. So at this stage, it is very pleasing and I would like to thank Xstrata for their support for this wonderful project. I am excited about the wombats, because it is really important to their survival.

**Ms O'NEILL:** I refer to page 3-201 of the SDS, which mentions funding of \$1.2 million for a feasibility study for a new Great Walk from the Daintree River to the tip of Cape York. Can the minister advise what progress has been made towards meeting the government's commitments regarding the construction of Queensland's new Great Walks and what plans are being developed in partnership with Indigenous communities to develop an internationally renowned Great Walk in Cape York peninsula?

**Ms JONES:** I thank the honourable member for Kallangur for the question. The Great Walks of Queensland initiative represents a \$16.5 million investment over 10 years to create a world-class system of walking tracks throughout the very best of Queensland's protected areas estate, including four of our five magnificent World Heritage areas.

The first program, worth \$10 million, is complete and six Great Walks are open—from the Gold Coast hinterland to the Wet Tropics. Others are on the Sunshine Coast hinterland, Fraser Island, the Mackay Highlands and Airlie Beach, where I was recently. They provide new opportunities for visitors to access and enjoy our beautiful protected areas with the lowest possible environmental impact and deliver economic benefits for commercial operators in these regions.

The current \$6.5 million program will see four new Great Walks constructed and opened over the next 12 months. The first cab off the rank, at Carnarvon Gorge in Central Queensland, is already complete and open for business. In fact, I plan to officially open it next week. Cooloola and Whitsunday will be done this year and the Conondale on the Sunshine Coast hinterland will be finalised next year.

These are great outcomes for people wanting to experience the best of Queensland's natural beauty and what we have to offer. They are the result of a lot of work and consultation to bring them to fruition, including a thorough planning phase and close collaboration with local traditional owner groups. They create direct employment opportunities and increase business opportunities for local contractors and suppliers.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank our staff who are working on these. As I said, I went up and visited Airlie Beach last week. The staff who were working on that from our agency, along with some of the people who are assisting with building the Great Walk, are actually on a roster system. They are quite into the bush. They actually go out there and camp. So we are not asking for any small feat. It actually demonstrates a whole-of-government commitment to this project and the great work that the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service staff are doing to make this come to fruition. But more importantly—and this is why the government is investing more than \$10 million—this positions Queensland as a world-class bushwalking destination for the international ecotourism market.

We are not done there, just in case you were nodding off, given that it is so late in the day. We are currently in the planning stages of Queensland's newest Great Walk project—one that will stretch from the Daintree to the tip of Cape York. This was one of our commitments, as you would be aware, during the recent state election campaign. If built, this will be the longest and most spectacular walk in the world—one that will do what Cape York and what Milford Sound has done for New Zealand in generating tourism dollars and jobs.

**Mrs SULLIVAN:** I refer to page 3-203 of the Service Delivery Statements, which mentions the rezoning of Moreton Bay Marine Park, for which I take this opportunity to congratulate the government.

**Ms JONES:** Thank you

**Mrs SULLIVAN:** What was been the community's response to the rezoning plan for Moreton Bay since its commencement earlier this year? What further benefits will flow to the community and the environment as a result of the government's investment in the future of Moreton Bay?

**Ms JONES:** I am very happy to answer the question, because the Moreton Bay marine park rezoning plan delivers on a commitment that this government made to protecting this all-important waterway, which supports extraordinary natural values on greater Brisbane's doorstep.

In comparison, we have an opposition spokesperson who believes that we have a God-given right to drop a line wherever we want. The member for Noosa wants to open up the whole bay for fishing again and ignore the environmental consequences. He has publicly talked about his fond memories, which we all have, of as a kid going fishing with his father. What I want to say here is that that is something that we all believe every generation should have—not only the member for Noosa's great-grandchildren, and I hope he has great-grandchildren in his life, but also my great-grandchildren.

I think the opponents of the Moreton Bay Marine Park rezoning fail to understand that that is exactly the reason this government is acting. Sustainable fishing is something that we think is really important and the best way to protect this opportunity for future generations.

As a consequence of our government delivering on our commitments, 16 per cent of the marine park is now protected by green zones. This means that boaties can enter these areas and enjoy activities such as boating, snorkelling and sailing. However, all forms of fishing and collecting are prohibited. This is a plan that has robust scientific integrity behind it. We made sure that it was backed by reliable data, habitat mapping methodology and scientific guiding principles.

Since the commencement of the new zoning plan my departmental staff have conducted an extensive education campaign to help bay users familiarise themselves with the new zones. Feedback from marine park users indicates good acceptance of the zoning plan. Just to give you an idea of the kind of investment we have made in regard to ensuring that the people who use the Moreton Bay Marine Park, such as families, understand what it is, we have undertaken a significant public campaign. I have been on the radio many times in recent weeks talking about it coming into effect on 1 July. In addition to this, over 75,000 copies of the user guide have been distributed, over 200 signs depicting zone boundaries are currently being installed throughout the region and at boat ramps and eight new public moorings will be installed in coral reef habitats to improve access to these areas.

When we introduced the Moreton Bay Marine Park new zoning and it came into effect in March we actually had a grace period for three months between March and July. During this time I am very pleased to advise the committee that we only had to provide 70 warnings. What this says to me is that people are taking it seriously. I do not think that there are people out there who want to break the law. I think most people who want to enjoy the Moreton Bay Marine Park area want to do the right thing and have a nice family day, like the member for Noosa was talking about when he was growing up.

**CHAIR:** I refer to page 3-208 of the Service Delivery Statement which outlines the performance statement for pests and weeds. Can you advise what your department is doing to reduce the damage to our environment caused by pest animals and plants?

**Ms JONES:** I thank the honourable member for Bundamba for the question. I was actually hoping that the member for Condamine would be here because I know that this is something that he is always talking about in the Queensland parliament. I have some good news for the member for Condamine. Controlling pests is a vital part of the state government's management of parks, forests and other lands under our responsibility. Pest animals and plants have the potential to cause immeasurable economic and environmental damage to our protected areas. Of particular concern are the significant threats that pests pose to biodiversity.

We are a government that contributes significant resources to combating these pests in the areas that we manage. I am pleased to inform the committee that for the 2009-10 financial year a total of around \$4.5 million will be invested to manage pests on estates managed by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. Of this, \$1.5 million will be spent on 76 strategically targeted projects. A total of \$690,000 will be spent on 29 targeted projects to control pest animals, including feral pigs, feral cattle, wild dogs, feral goats, deer, foxes and feral cats. The amount of \$500,000 will be spent on 90 major projects involving feral pig eradication and control and other pest animals.

These projects will build on the successful work currently being undertaken in the Wet Tropics, on Cape York, in the Whitsunday ranges, at Carnarvon National Park, in South-West Queensland and on Curtis and Moreton islands. Of particular interest to the member for Pumicestone will be the fact that a feral pig control program on Moreton Island has been successful with pigs almost eradicated now on that island. I am also pleased to inform the member for Townsville that \$60,000 has been allocated in her electorate towards three separate projects involving weed and other damaging pests. The member for Kallangur may also be interested to know that \$10,000 will be spent to eradicate palm grass in Bellthorpe forest which is up the road from her. The other side of the committee have not been overlooked either and there is money for Noosa and Southern Downs.

**Mr ELMES:** You will find a pig somewhere in Noosa.

**Ms JONES:** No comment.

**CHAIR:** Before we go to non-government questions the committee will have a five-minute break and resume at 5.40 pm.

**Proceedings suspended from 5.35 pm to 5.40 pm**

**CHAIR:** It is now time for non-government questions. I call the member for Noosa.

**Mr ELMES:** Minister, I refer to SDS 3-203 and a media release issued on 6 December 2008 by Andrew McNamara, your predecessor. He said in that that the koala plan as it currently stands is clearly not working. This is a line in the sand. Seven months later all that we have achieved is the levelling of the Thornlands State School site and at least another two further deaths of koalas in the very recent past. In my seat of Noosa it is forecast that the last of our koalas will disappear by 2011. If your department cannot save the koala in South-East Queensland, can I ask what hope do the rest of Queensland's native animals and fauna have?

**Ms JONES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. I think the government has actually been very upfront and honest with the people of Queensland, in particular South-East Queensland, with regard to saying that we are dealing with a significant issue with regard to koalas. As a consequence of that we have done a number of things as a government to ensure that we are best placed to tackle this problem head-on.

One of the first things I did as the minister was to meet with the Koala Task Force. As you know, the Koala Task Force's No. 1 priority was for the government to undertake detailed koala habitat mapping. As a consequence the state government has provided up to \$2 million in order to undertake that. Since December we have undertaken this mapping. This mapping will be released soon. This mapping has also been used to inform mapping that will be in the South East Queensland Regional Plan. The great benefit of us investing in this mapping is that it will actually help local and state governments ensure that we are protecting habitat that is best suited to koalas—Daisy Hill would be one of them, as we talked about earlier here today.

We are taking action through our Koala Crisis Response Strategy. As you talked about in your questions, it contains a number of initiatives ranging from a state land freeze, assisting councils with domestic dog regulations in koala habitat areas, retrofitting known koala hot spots on main roads and, of course, detailed koala habitat mapping which I have talked about. I should draw the honourable member's attention to an article where the Brisbane City Council, run by your LNP colleague Campbell Newman, has actually called on us to lessen restrictions to develop in koala habitats. That is the LNP policy at a BCC level. The Brisbane City Council recently wrote to the state government requiring special treatment for the major infrastructure that they need to undertake. For example, they were talking about their bikeways programs, road upgrades and sewage infrastructure.

I know that you are trying to establish here in some way in the form of your questioning that we have not delivered on our commitments. We have—we have made it very clear. In that same press release you are referring to in 2008 my predecessor made it very clear that when urgent social infrastructure was required then that would be allowable. We have provided for urgent social infrastructure projects to be exempt from the freeze. I make no apologies for that. I understand that the children of more than 700 families are expected to attend Thornlands State School. So far nine—

**Mr ELMES:** I again refer to SDS 3-203. Most of the remaining koala habitat in the Redland City Council area is privately held. Will the minister give me and South-East Queensland's koalas a guarantee that this government will put its hand in its pocket and purchase enough of this privately held land to ensure the sustainability of koalas in this area and not regulate its responsibility onto landholders?

**Ms JONES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. As I have previously answered, our view is in line with that of the Koala Task Force which is that the most effective thing for us to do with regard to protecting koala habitat is to invest in detailed habitat mapping. To date this has not occurred at a local government level, or indeed at a state level in the past. I am very pleased to say that we have made \$2 million available for this. Quite frankly, the history in regard to the protection of koalas has been one where I think all levels of government have not done well enough. I know there has been a change of administration at the Redland City Council. I believe that the whole election was based predominantly on this issue. I believe that your colleague, the member for Redlands, was actually the chair of the development committee, I believe it was called, for the Redland City Council. I praise the new mayor of the Redland City Council. I think she has a genuine and true commitment to protecting koala habitat in her area.

As I said, my No. 1 priority is getting the koala habitat mapping completed. This will inform any purchases that are made in the future. Quite frankly, it is a logical step. The new State Planning Policy is what we are working on now. As I said, this process of a State Planning Policy in regard to koala protection normally takes two years to develop. I have agreement from my cabinet colleagues that this process should be fast-tracked and that this should be completed this year and should be in place by the end of this year.

The SPP will actually give a much stronger regulatory regime in regard to protecting koala habitat. It will also incorporate a new offset policy that will expand the net gain offset requirements already in place through the existing koala plan and the new State Planning Policy. In addition to providing resources for buying and restoring habitat, this offset requirement will also be a source of funding for other aspects of the government's response, such as reducing koala deaths in urban areas and conducting education, research and monitoring programs. Since the time you referred to in your question the Department of Main Roads has committed \$10 million towards incorporating koala safe design in their projects. I once again refer to comments made by your colleague that he would be happy to turn national parks throughout the state into dedicated bike paths.

**Mr ELMES:** Blinky Bill would be very happy on a bike, I am sure. On a change of subject, I refer to the Capital Statement 2009-10, page 22, and the Queensland Future Growth Fund. This government has a track record of failing to deliver on the projects it announces. Why have you failed the environment by underspending \$29 million on climate change projects as budgeted in 2008-09?

**Ms JONES:** Can you refer to the page number again so we can try to answer your question?

**Mr ELMES:** Page 22. In 2008-09 the budget was \$32 million. In 2008-09 the actual was \$3 million. Next year it is budgeted at \$43 million.

**Ms JONES:** Sorry, member for Noosa, we are just trying to get clarification.

**CHAIR:** Take your time, Minister.

**Ms JONES:** I will call on Greg Withers, the head of the Office for Climate Change, to answer the question.

**Mr Withers:** The \$32 million is the funding actually spent; the \$3 million is the estimated actual carryover and the estimate for 2009-10 is the \$43 million allocated in the budget this year.

**Ms JONES:** Does that clarify your answer?

**Mr ELMES:** I was referring to an actual spend. I was wondering why the actual spend was only \$3 million?

**Mr Withers:** I will have to get some detail on that for you.

**Ms JONES:** I am happy to take that on notice. In relation to climate change I am glad that you are asking this question, because our government has been absolutely clear that we take climate change seriously. We have invested significant amounts of money in this to encourage Queenslanders to make more choices with regard to climate change.

In answer to the question on notice that you asked me regarding the Climate Change Fund, I listed a number of programs that we are providing through this fund. It was established in 2007. The fund provides around \$30 million each year to support initiatives that assist Queensland households and

communities to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. One of the programs that the honourable member would be familiar with is the Low Carbon Diet. In this year's budget we have \$1 million or \$1.5 million for the Low Carbon Diet.

At the moment we are providing funding grants to local organisations to encourage people to make smarter choices about the cars they drive and what they do. I note that the honourable member for Noosa drives a silver Toyota Kluger, a V6 all-wheel drive. If he was to take advantage of the ClimateSmart diet and drive a Prius like myself, he would go from 259 grams for every kilometre that he drives to 89 grams per kilometre. I encourage the member for Noosa to get on board and drive a Prius and take advantage of the advice that we are providing to people like him.

**Mr ELMES:** I am pleased that you have noticed the advertising on the side of my Toyota Kluger.

**Ms JONES:** You can't miss it.

**Mr ELMES:** Very good. Neither did any of the Noosa constituents at the last election.

**Ms JONES:** That is because it was on a big V6 gas guzzler.

**Mr ELMES:** I refer to the decrease in the capital expenditure statement of 2009-10, at page 80. Why has this government's total commitment to environmental protection continued to trend down, from a capital program of \$55.7 million in 2007-08 to only \$33 million in 2009-10?

**Ms JONES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. I will get you an answer. Obviously this is something that I have asked my department for. From recollection it relates to the program for acquiring land. For environmental protection the decrease from the 2008-09 budget to the 2009-10 budget is \$11.7 million, as you rightly point out. I always forget the name of this program. It is the rainforest/green land acquisition program. Under this program we had allocated \$30 million over three years, primarily to acquire land in Springbrook, which the member for Mudgeeraba does not support, and also to acquire land in Cape York. Originally we had allocated \$30 million over three years. The department has been so efficient that they actually fast-tracked their spending—believe it or not—and spent \$20 million in 2008-09. Primarily that money is a consequence of \$10 million being brought forward. They will be spending another \$10 million this year on acquisitions in regard to this program.

I can also say that the decrease from last year's budget to now has to do with the Ma:Mu Rainforest Canopy Walkway, which was finished last year. The Premier opened it at the end of last year. That comes to \$11.7 million.

**Mr ELMES:** It strikes me as a little funny that we have to make a point of the government fast-tracking spending.

**Ms JONES:** It is for national parks that you do not support.

**Mr ELMES:** Labor is always very good at fast-tracking spending.

**Ms JONES:** And John Howard was not?

**Mr ELMES:** I would like to refer to SDS 3, page 205, and Sustainable Futures. The staffing of Sustainable Futures has increased between 2008-09 and 2009-10, while during the same period the output summary has decreased by some \$14 million. Why has this occurred?

**Ms JONES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. I do have a brief on this because I knew you would ask it.

**Mr ELMES:** Just pass it over.

**Ms JONES:** There are a couple of points with regard to Sustainable Futures. I have read some of the comments that you have made in the Queensland parliament about Sustainable Futures. I think you are of the belief that Sustainable Futures is purely about the Office for Climate Change. That is not the case. I am happy to provide you with some information about that.

Unlike your advice to the Queensland parliament, Sustainable Futures outputs include three former divisions of the Environmental Protection Agency: the sustainable communities division, the strategy and policy division—that is the division that is helping with the koala habitat mapping and the Koala Task Force, and I am sure you would not want less staff working on that—and the Office for Climate Change, which we have talked about. In 2008-09 the staffing outputs for Sustainable Futures increase, and the 2009-10 estimate of 22 full-time equivalent staff reflects the additional positions that we made available for the Great Barrier Reef protection package.

While we are talking about that, I am happy to talk about the operating budget output for this area. As I said, some of the reductions in funding with regard to the output have been because of the withdrawal of the Moreton Bay structural adjustment package—which has been in place, as you know—environmental offsets and transfers from the Queensland Climate Change Fund to other departments for disaster management initiatives. Partially offsetting this decrease was the new funding for the reef protection package. Other adjustments include funding for the new Brisbane CBD accommodation and the increase of \$8 million for the Conservation and Environmental Services output, which has also made a number of adjustments.



In answering your question, the primary difference between the business that we are going to be undertaking in 2009-10 compared to last year is because of the Moreton Bay structural adjustment package. This is because last year there was funding for the operational budget. This year we are putting on staff. I know from questioning earlier today that the LNP is concerned that people have access to the correct information when it comes to the Moreton Bay Marine Park. We agree with you. That is why we put on additional staff: to ensure that people do get the right advice.

As I said, we have been developing programs and information booklets. Seventy thousand have been distributed to people who use the Moreton Bay Marine Park. I am confident that we are doing a great job to ensure that people know what the rules are when fishing in the Moreton Bay Marine Park. This is demonstrated by the very low number of infringements that we have received to date. In actual fact, since 1 July, when it came in, there has been only one.

**Mr ELMES:** I refer to SDS 3, page 206. I appreciate the fact that you may need to take this on notice. I want to drill down a little further on staffing. Broken down by classification and role, how many staff were employed in the Sustainable Futures specification, in each role for each specification? I am referring to the administration stream, the professional stream, the technical stream, the operational stream and the SO classification?

**Ms JONES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. I will ask the director-general, who is the employer, to answer this question as best he can. If we cannot provide the information to you today, I am happy to make it available to you first thing in the morning.

**Mr ELMES:** That is fine.

**Mr Bradley:** Can I just confirm, Mr Elmes, that you are referring to the Sustainable Futures output in relation to those staffing figures?

**Mr ELMES:** The Sustainable Futures specification.

**Mr Bradley:** In relation to the classifications that you refer to, in terms of the 2009-10 estimate and staffing levels, the AO1 classification is at zero, the AO2 classification is at 12, the AO3 classification is at 24, the AO4 classification is at 31, the AO5 classification is at 46, the AO6 classification is at 29, the AO7 classification is at 32, the AO8 classification is at 31, the PO1 classification is at one, the PO2 classification is at 16, the PO3 classification is at 65, the PO4 classification is at 47, the PO5 classification is at 21, the PO6 classification is at seven, the SES2 classification is at two, the SES3 classification is at two, the SO1 classification is at nine, the SO2 classification is at seven, the TO2 classification is at zero, the TO3 classification is at two, the TO5 classification is at one, the TO6 classification is at one, the W002 classification is at three, the W003 classification is at five, the W004 classification is at two and there is a corporate apportionment across those bands of 44 in terms of corporate support, taking it to a total of 440 staff.

**Mr ELMES:** Thank you very much for that. I will try to work it into a speech some time.

**CHAIR:** The time for non-government questions has expired. I now call the member for Pumicestone for her question to the minister.

**Mrs SULLIVAN:** Minister, I refer to page 3-203 of the Service Delivery Statement, which states that the Queensland Climate Change Fund has committed \$29.3 million to support new climate change initiatives as part of an ongoing commitment to Queensland's response to climate change. Minister, you have already outlined some benefits, but are Queenslanders embracing the opportunity to be more efficient at home with water, energy and resources?

**Ms JONES:** Yes. I am very pleased to say that we are. Before I outline Queensland's climate change response, let me reiterate our government's commitments and targets in this area. Our Q2 target—and I know you are very passionate about this, member for Pumicestone and I know Q2 gets you very excited—Tomorrow's Queensland is the Bligh government's 2020 vision for Queensland. One of the targets of this vision was to cut Queensland's household carbon footprint by one-third. The average household in Queensland generates around 13.77 tonnes of greenhouse gas—in other words, our household carbon footprint. My department is helping Queenslanders reduce their household carbon footprint and become more water efficient.

I would like to outline some of these policies and programs we use to help do this. The government has been meeting its commitments through the Home WaterWise Rebate Scheme, the Big Light Switch giveaway and the ClimateSmart Home Service, which over 70,000 Queensland households have taken advantage of. They have all been extremely popular and they demonstrate in my view that Queenslanders understand that climate change is upon us, it is real and everyone has a role to play.

I think it is important, given that we have made a number of points about climate change this afternoon and that this is something we have been talking about, to note that I am very unclear about where the opposition stands when it comes to climate change. I went to the LNP website in preparation for today, thinking that it might have a climate change policy given that the member for Noosa says he wants to be the most sustainable and green LNP member who has ever walked the earth. I suggest that

he start with his car and downgrade from a V6 gas guzzler to a Prius. I am happy to go shopping with him if he wants to buy one. In fact next month they have their new generation model coming out. So there will be a brand new car on the market that you will be able to use.

If you go to the LNP website and click on the link for ClimateProof, it comes up with an error message and the page is unavailable. I have been in this role now for 118 days, but I think I have demonstrated that we are doing a lot of work in this regard. But if you click on ClimateProof on the LNP website you get an error message. I do not know whether that is because the LNP has no policy or because there is a problem with ICT. But it is worth pointing out that, while I do think the member for Noosa does have a genuine commitment and does believe in climate change—and he has been on the record in this regard—this is not the view of his colleagues. I do not know what chance or luck he has in this regard. I know that the member for Southern Downs, who has blessed us with his presence again, believes that climate change is caused by volcanoes. I can assure you that none of the money allocated to combating climate change here in Queensland is going to volcano mitigation.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Bill Ludwig said it should.

**CHAIR:** Maybe it is a getting a bit late in the day. I call the member for Kallangur.

**Ms O'NEILL:** Minister, will you please outline to the committee how the Queensland Climate Change Fund is supporting Queensland households and small businesses to reduce their carbon footprint?

**Ms JONES:** Dealing with climate change, as I said, requires immediate actions combined with the long-term investment, but it also involves making sure that you actually recognise that it is a problem and one that you want to tackle head-on. We do not have that commitment from the opposition. The Climate Change Fund was established in May 2007 to provide an ongoing funding source of \$30 million each year for priority initiatives that position Queensland to respond strategically and effectively to climate change. Last year's allocation from the fund includes a significant focus on helping households to reduce their carbon footprint through programs I touched on earlier, but there are other measures.

The amount of \$1.5 million was allocated to the Low Carbon Diet—a behavioural change program designed to help Queenslanders. I have a copy of the book here for the member for Noosa, if he would like it. I am not going to table it; I am just going to give it to him afterwards, Madam Chair. The program has a goal to have 500,000 Queenslanders take the Low Carbon Diet by 30 June 2010, with approximately 120,000 Queenslanders so far undertaking or soon to be involved in the Low Carbon Diet. A further \$1.5 million will be allocated to this campaign this year, as I previously advised the committee.

A further \$1.2 million has been allocated to assist the establishment of Ecofund, which will help us achieve our commitment of increasing protected areas in Queensland from eight million to 20 million hectares by 2020. An additional \$1.2 million was allocated to smaller projects including the running of the National Climate Change Adaption Research Facility at Griffith University, the Queensland Solar Homes Program and research on the costs of greenhouse gas abatement.

The 2009 election commitments included allocations from the Queensland Climate Change Fund, totalling \$13.5 million over five years to support Queensland's SES and rural firefighting personnel and for the Green Building Skills Fund. This is about the Queensland government acknowledging that we need to be investing in the skills of people so they can actually transition to an economy which has a price on carbon and takes the reality of carbon in our economy and in our community seriously.

Further, allocations from the fund totalling \$43.1 million over five years will be used to implement initiatives in the government's revised climate change strategy, which is currently being finalised. I am pleased to advise the committee that my intention is to release this in coming weeks. I am very excited about it. I think the strategy will place Queensland in the box seat in regards to tackling the challenge of climate change. I want to commend all the staff involved from my department, the Office of Climate Change, as well as departments across government, remembering that this is a strategy we are putting in place to ensure that all agencies are working towards the same goal when it comes to climate change.

**Ms JOHNSTONE:** Minister, I refer to page 3-205 of the SDS, which states that the department provides robust scientific evidence and monitoring and reporting of key environmental variables to support policy development and decision making for environmental protection. Can you tell the committee how Queensland is benefiting from the government's investment in climate change science?

**Ms JONES:** I thank the member for Townsville for that question. Queenslanders are actually benefiting from a government that backs the science and understands that climate change is not a fad or a school of thought, as the member for Burnett calls it in the Queensland parliament, amongst other things. He says, 'It is a theory and not based on scientific fact. In fact, climate change resembles a debate on religious ideology rather than one based on scientific fact.' I think that flies in the face of all the international science which is being recognised by people such as Obama. I tell you what, I would be backing Barack Obama over the member for Burnett any day when it comes to scientific evidence in regards to climate change.

Quite frankly, if the opposition were in government, Queensland would have no strategy to prepare us for a low-carbon economy or to mitigate the impacts of climate change because, apart from the member for Noosa, I do not think members of the opposition believe in it. The Bligh government recognises the fact that climate change is a reality. Like governments around the world, our response to climate change will continue to be informed by the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which is the world's leading authority on climate change.

In its latest report, the panel found that warming is largely due to the release of greenhouse gas emissions associated with human activity, not from volcanoes. In March this year, 2,500 delegates from nearly 80 countries met in Copenhagen to review the latest advances made in climate science since the panel's 2007 report. It confirmed that observed emissions are tracking above the panel's high-emissions scenario. These trajectories are confirmed by observed increases in sea levels, increased air and ocean temperatures, as well as increases in the number of severe weather events reported. These are significant risks that current trends will accelerate, leading to abrupt or irreversible climatic shifts.

The science of climate change is a rapidly evolving area and Queensland has a highly variable and complex climate system, as I know the member for Townsville in particular would be well aware. That is not always well represented in the available international climate science, but much remains uncertain in terms of the extent and magnitude of the impact of climate change. I am very pleased to inform all members, particularly the member for Townsville, that the Bligh government is changing that. We are improving the quality of information available on climate change here in Queensland, whilst ensuring our policies, programs and initiatives are informed by best available science.

Through collaboration with Australian and international specialists, the Queensland Climate Change Centre of Excellence within my department has access to and actively contributes to the best available climate science in the world. With input from the CSIRO, we are finalising—this is exciting so I might continue in the next answer.

**CHAIR:** Following on from your answer to the member for Townsville, can you tell the committee how Queensland is leading the response to climate change in Australia?

**Ms JONES:** Thank you for that question. As I was saying in answer to the previous question, through collaboration with Australian and international science specialists, the Queensland Climate Change Centre of Excellence within my department has access to and actively contributes to the best available climate science. With input from the CSIRO, we are finalising a detailed analysis of climate change projections for the 13 regions right across Queensland. Once these projections are finalised I will be making them available to the public. As each region of Queensland varies in terms of its climate, its economy, its population, its geography, its flora and fauna, the local impacts of climate change will vary across the state. Many of the models used internationally to inform our understanding of climate change need further refinement in my view to represent the key features that drive Queensland's economy. I am very pleased to say that this is work that we are completing now and we will be making publicly available very soon.

As I have spoken about, I am very proud to say that the Queensland government in my view is a national leader when it comes to research. We have also been very strong on the policy agenda. As we know, the introduction of land-clearing restrictions to achieve a range of environmental outcomes remains one of the earliest and most nationally significant climate change activities undertaken by any government in Australia.

Nationally, Queensland committed itself in 2007 to doing its part to meet a national greenhouse emission reduction of 20 per cent below 2000 levels by 2050 when it released our ClimateSmart 2050 strategy. This strategy has recently been reviewed and, as I said, I will be releasing a new version of this strategy very shortly. In addition, as I have mentioned earlier, we have adopted a 2020 target to cut Queensland's household carbon footprint by one-third.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions is central to the environmental, social and economic future of Queensland, Australia and in my view every other country. The Queensland government supports the concept of a national Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme but, as Australia's most emissions intensive state, it is in Queensland's interest to ensure that the scheme takes account of state specific issues. Queensland has provided important input into the design of the CPRS including a value add formula for determining assistance to the energy intensive trade expo sector based on emissions per million dollar of value add. Queensland has also raised the inclusion of regrowth vegetation as an eligible reforestation activity under the scheme so that Queensland leasehold landholders can participate in the scheme. This was an election commitment of this government.

Queensland is also an active participant in the Council of Australian Governments and its climate change working group. At the COAG meeting in May this year, the Premier endorsed a renewable energy target—

**Mrs SULLIVAN:** Minister, I refer you to page 3-210 of the Service Delivery Statement, which relates to carbon dioxide equivalent offsets. Could you explain to the committee how the government is demonstrating leadership in sustainable business practices?

**Ms JONES:** I thank the member for the question. Queensland has already made a significant contribution to reducing Australia's greenhouse gas emissions, but internally within the government a range of policies have been developed to reduce our vehicle, air travel and electricity based emissions. I am pleased to say that the Department of Environment and Resource Management will be taking a lead role in supporting these policies and supporting wider sustainability actions.

We have committed to conducting a comprehensive greenhouse gas emissions inventory of our entire operations this year. It is not an easy task with the diverse and in some cases remote nature of the work that the department undertakes, but it is one that I am very confident we are going to do very well and very thoroughly.

As part of its avoidance strategy, we switch all office related accommodation to certified 100 per cent green power, which accounts for about one-third of the department's emissions. Energy reduction activities undertaken by the former Environmental Protection Agency include focusing on staff behavioural change, technological change and relocation of staff into environmentally preferable facilities.

The department has also engaged Eco Fund Queensland to develop an offset strategy to complete our offset purchases. Eco Fund Queensland is also currently in the process of purchasing these offsets so that my portfolio can meet its carbon neutrality commitments. We will continue to support sustainable facilities for our staff. Last year approximately 100 staff were relocated to Green Building Council of Australia rated facilities at Manly and in Toowoomba. This year we will see a further 1,100 Department of Environment and Resource Management staff move into 400 George Street, which is a five-star green-star rated building.

We have also committed to leasing vehicles with a higher Green Vehicle Guide rating than required under the action plan. We also continue to support the use of more fuel-efficient vehicles, with 30 hybrid vehicles. So, on this side, we are leading by example. My department recognises that leading in innovation provides the experience and the ability to demonstrate tangible outcomes and to better assist other departments as they tackle the reality of climate change. These actions underlie the commitment that we have to improving our own performance and are a demonstration to the wider community and government of what they can also achieve.

**Ms O'NEILL:** Minister, I refer to page 3-205 of the SDS, which highlights your department's role in informing, involving and partnering with the community and industry to realise an environmentally sustainable Queensland. How is the Queensland government supporting business innovation that contributes to energy and water savings?

**Ms JONES:** I thank the member for the question. A lot of what we are doing has been through the Queensland Sustainable Energy Innovation Fund. At 10 years, it is the longest running Queensland government program to specifically target innovation in energy and water savings. Remember, we were moving in this space at a time when the federal government did not even want to acknowledge that climate change was real or that we really need to tackle energy and water savings head-on.

Last year four new projects were approved totalling \$500,000. They included a SmartWater consumption monitor, the development of lightweight electric vehicles, an innovative system to control the watering of plants in nurseries, and a precision irrigation and farming platform. The fund is highly successful, with over half of the completed projects to date having already been commercialised or having good prospects. Projects have leveraged an additional \$60 million in other investments, resources and sales revenue. Six projects were also successfully completed last year including a microbial fuel cell that will generate revenue from waste water treatment, new cement with less embodied energy, efficient lighting, tidal power generation, a highly efficient hydrogen storage system and a biodiesel demonstration project.

Originally intended to produce electrical energy from waste water, the microbial fuel cell is set to become a superior technology in the waste water treatment market, offering solutions with significant savings. Currently being demonstrated in Yatala, the project won \$100,000 in funding for the UQ Business School's Enterprize Competition.

Another project uses iron oxide instead of limestone to make cement, bringing reductions in carbon emissions in the order of 70 per cent as well as 70 per cent less energy required in the processing stage. This product has the potential to reduce emissions in the cement industry worldwide by more than 65 million tonnes a year, from an initial Queensland government investment of \$200,000. How is that for money well spent? A \$200,000 investment by the Queensland government and we have the potential to reduce emissions in carbon pollution by 65 million tonnes around the world—Queensland leading by example.

I would also like to point out that last year the ABC's *The New Inventors*—I know the member for Pumicestone watches that program when she is at home; she is normally out at P&Cs—inventor of the year was awarded to Dean Cameron for the technology which was supported by this fund.

**Mr ELMES:** I refer to page 3-206 of the SDS. I will not repeat my mistake of asking for all the classifications! There is another classification which is called W00. So it is either that or I have to do a Steve Irwin impersonation; it is one of the two. I appreciate that you will have to take this on notice, but I would like to know how many rangers were at work today, 21 July 2009, in national parks by region and by national park.

**Ms JONES:** So you want a breakdown by regions and national parks of where rangers work?

**Mr ELMES:** Yes.

**Ms JONES:** I am happy to provide that to you. While on the issue of park rangers, I would like to talk about the Labor government's record in this regard. Since 2000 we have increased the number of Queensland Parks and Wildlife rangers on the ground to 774. This is an increase of 50 per cent since 2000. In fact, it is an extra 270 rangers.

I think it is important for the committee to reflect on what the Springborg led LNP promised at the last election, with its three per cent efficiency dividend across the whole of the Queensland Public Service. If you were to apply that three per cent dividend to the number of park rangers we have in Queensland, there would be a reduction of 70 rangers in the first term of the LNP government.

**Mr ELMES:** There are 126,000 people out of work in Queensland now. That is thanks to your government.

**Ms JONES:** That is the policy that you took to the people of Queensland, and they rejected it because they knew it would cost jobs in the Queensland Public Service.

**Mr ELMES:** Our policy, your reality.

**Ms JONES:** Our record speaks for itself. Since 2000 we have increased the number of Queensland Parks and Wildlife rangers on the ground by 50 per cent. I am proud to say, as I have said before, that the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service has 774 full-time equivalent rangers including permanent, casual and temporary employees. These rangers are supported by approximately 340 additional staff assisting with technical support, administration and management.

QPW rangers professionally manage some of the Queensland's most precious natural assets including around 12.5 million hectares of parks and forests comprising nearly seven per cent of the state. In addition, our rangers manage over 72,000 square kilometres of state marine park and jointly manage another 345,000 square kilometres of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. As you also know, I announced earlier today that with the introduction of the green zones in the Moreton Bay Marine Park we will be putting on an additional eight rangers in that regard. This is a significant increase by anyone's standards. It clearly demonstrates the Bligh government's recognition that rangers are the key front-line service resource for management of our precious areas.

Like any large employer, a number of staff enter, leave or transfer positions within the department into other positions interstate and into the private sector. But I am very pleased that we are putting our money where our mouth is in regard to putting rangers on the ground. In regard to the regional breakdown, I am happy to take that on notice. I will get that to you as soon as I can. But I think it is important for the estimates committee to understand that, in regard to managing our national parks, we have put a significant investment into rangers on the ground—a 50 per cent increase since 2000 which is employing more than 270 new rangers.

**Mr ELMES:** I refer to page 3-202 of the SDS and the biodiversity strategy. Under the management of the EPA, could you list the captive breeding programs that have ceased and their supposed cost savings?

**Ms JONES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. As I have said, biodiversity and developing a biodiversity strategy is something that I am particularly passionate about. With regard to captive breeding programs, I mentioned earlier the partnership that we have with Xstrata, which is leveraging \$3 million from the private sector to invest in a captive breeding program in regard to the hairy-nosed wombat. The hairy-nosed wombat is one of the most endangered species here in Queensland. We have only 108 hairy-nosed wombats here in Queensland. Through the captive breeding process we will be moving them to a second location. We had a very real threat to the hairy-nosed wombat with flooding at the end of last year which almost took over 50 per cent of Queensland.

**Mr ELMES:** Madam Chair, I raise a point of order. I asked about the programs that have ceased rather than the ones that are ongoing.

**Ms JONES:** I thank the honourable member for the question.

**CHAIR:** Minister, you might like to take that on notice because the time has run out for non-government questions.

**Ms JONES:** I am happy to take that on notice. We have a very strong record when it comes to protecting biodiversity in this state.

**Ms JOHNSTONE:** I refer to page 3-142 of the SDS, which mentions an expanded state-wide compliance program for environmentally relevant activities including industrial sites. Can the minister please advise the committee what targets have been met by the Queensland government in relation to the enforcement strategy?

**Ms JONES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. I need to correct the record on one thing. I am not sure if I did this, but someone said that they heard it. There is dispute at the table, but for the purposes of the record I will correct it. During the break I became aware that one of my earlier answers may have implied a link between the regulatory impact statement in regards to Cooloola for the proposed Cooloola recreation area and the proposed extension to the Fraser Island World Heritage area. Just to be clear, the release of the regulatory impact statement relates to the proposed Cooloola recreation area and is not linked to the proposed adoption of the Cooloola extension of the Fraser Island World Heritage area.

**CHAIR:** Thank you for your clarification.

**Ms JONES:** In regard to enforcement of environmentally relevant activities, we have some very good news to tell. This approach involves planned compliance projects across critical and emerging business areas and an audit program and enforcement. Annual compliance plans identify the areas of greatest risk to the environment or the sustainable use of natural resources and ensure that our compliance activities are targeted to those areas.

The Department of Environment and Resource Management then develops programs to increase rates of compliance in those priority areas. These programs can encompass a range of approaches including education, partnerships, auditing and inspections. Where serious breaches are found, whether as a result of proactive compliance activities or because members of the public have notified us with their concerns, my department has a number of enforcement options at its disposal. Over the past 10 years the department has secured 15 sentences involving imprisonment and over \$3 million in fines and costs under the Environmental Protection Act 1994 alone.

In addition to these, there have been over 15 restraint orders and over 550 statutory enforcement tools utilised which have required at least \$440 million in spending on environmental improvements. I can give you some examples. Parkside Holdings was fined \$100,000 and Ronald John Bergman was fined \$20,000 in August last year in the Gladstone District Court relating to the unlawful burial of 78 drums of copper arsenic on the sawmill premises operated by Parkside Holdings.

The Department of Environment and Resource Management recently obtained an enforcement order under the Environmental Protection Act against Envirosole requiring it to cease dealing with a highly toxic substance and to lawfully dispose of this material from its site. Last December Orica Australia was convicted of breaching its development approval over the discharge of contaminated stormwater in excessive volumes of effluent to the local sewerage system. Orica was fined \$5,000, with the court recognising that it had to provide \$15,000 to establish a water quality monitoring program in the Gladstone area.

**CHAIR:** This will be the last question for this examination. Minister, what steps is the government taking to protect Queensland's valuable natural coastal assets and to ensure resilient and sustainable development into the future?

**Ms JONES:** Thank you for asking me that question. I am sure it is one that the member for Noosa is interested in too even given the time of night. I am sure it is actually something that he and I will be having many conversations about.

A review of the State Coastal Management Plan was completed in accordance with the Coastal Management Act 1985. As a result of this review I have decided that a new Queensland coastal plan should be prepared. Some changes to the act will also be proposed to improve its effectiveness and ensure its currency. This will include changes to discontinue the Coastal Protection Advisory Council and regional coastal management advisory groups in line with recommendations in the Webb-Weller review.

I also propose to remove the statutory requirements for regional coastal managements plans. This is consistent with the government's planning reform agenda as effective state planning instruments, under the sustainable planning legislation, will make regional coastal plans redundant. With advances in mapping data and access to technology, maps of coastal resources can be included in the state level coastal plan. Previously, this was the major purpose of the regional coastal plans.

The part of the plan dealing with land use planning and development assessment within the coastal zone will also be a state planning policy under the Integrated Planning Act which will be superseded by the sustainability in planning act if it is passed by the Queensland parliament.

**CHAIR:** The time allocated for the consideration of the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability has now expired. I thank you, Minister Jones, the ministerial advisers and also the officers of the Public Service who are here today. That concludes the committee's consideration of the matters referred to it. I now declare this public hearing closed.

**Committee adjourned at 6.31 pm**