

WEDNESDAY, 22 JULY 2009

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE F—TOURISM AND FAIR TRADING

Estimates Committee F Members

Mr JD O'Brien (Chair)

Ms DE Farmer

Mr HWT Hobbs

Mr RD Messenger

Ms M O'Neill

Mr CW Pitt

Mr RA Stevens

In Attendance

Hon. PJ Lawlor, Minister for Tourism and Fair Trading

Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation

Mr P Henneken, Director-General

Ms L Lamb, Deputy Director-General, Corporate and Departmental Services (Acting)

Mr D Ford, Deputy Director-General, Liquor, Gaming, Racing and Fair Trading and Commissioner for Fair Trading

Office of Trading

Mr B Bauer, Executive Director, Fair Trading Operations

Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing

Mr M Sarquis, Executive Director, Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing

Mr M Kelly, Executive Director, Office of Racing

Tourism Queensland

Mr L Longland, Executive Director, Tourism, Food and Wine Industry Development

Mr A Hayes, Chief Executive Officer

Ms M Clarke, Executive Director, Business Performance and Planning

Committee met at 8.30 am

CHAIR: I declare this hearing of Estimates Committee F now open. Good morning everybody. On behalf of the committee I welcome the minister, departmental officers and members of the public to the hearing. I am Jason O'Brien, the member for Cook and the chair of this committee. Mr Howard Hobbs, the member for Warrego, is the deputy chair of the committee. The other committee members are: Ms Di Farmer, the member for Bulimba; Mr Rob Messenger, the member for Burnett; Ms Mary-Anne O'Neill, the member the Kallangur; Mr Curtis Pitt, the member for Mulgrave; and Mr Ray Stevens, the member for Mermaid Beach.

The committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2009 for the portfolio areas of the Minister for Tourism and Fair Trading, the Minister for Local Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships and the Minister for Transport. The committee will examine the portfolio areas in that order. The committee will suspend proceedings for morning tea from 10 to 10.15, lunch from 12.15 to 1.15 and afternoon tea from 2.45 to 3.

I remind all those participating in the hearing today that these proceedings are similar to parliament to the extent that the public cannot participate in the proceedings. In this regard, I remind members of the public that under the standing orders the public may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. The committee has resolved that the proceedings of the committee be broadcast and that photography be allowed during the chair's opening statements and the introductory statements of each minister as well as for a short period during each changeover in organisational units.

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

I ask advisers to the minister to identify themselves when they first come forward to answer a question if the minister refers a question to them so that Hansard can record their name. I also remind members, witnesses and members of the public that no food or drink is permitted in the Legislative Council chamber. Before we begin, I ask that any mobile phones and pagers be switched off or switched to silent mode.

I declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Tourism and Fair Trading open for examination. The time allocated is two hours and 30 minutes. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, under standing order 177 you are able to make an opening statement that does not exceed five minutes. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr LAWLOR: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I would like to take this time to acknowledge the hard work of my department and Tourism Queensland and also highlight how the Bligh government is delivering on its commitments to Queensland. These are extremely challenging times and all areas of my portfolio have been faced with difficult issues.

The Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing has worked tirelessly to bring in new aggressive changes to deal with the negative impacts of alcohol and gambling on the community. It has always been Labor government policy to ensure that liquor and gaming complement Queensland's unique lifestyle and freedoms without destroying our very way of life.

In December we introduced tough new liquor licensing laws—laws that have seen increased risk management guidelines, tougher rules for patron security and new education campaigns targeted at changing the culture of binge drinking in our younger generations. I would like to acknowledge the hospitality industry for being proactive in embracing these changes. The department has had strong support for change from the entire sector.

A majority of licensed premises in Queensland have proactively increased security measures through additional technology such as ID scanning and metal detectors as well as introduced plastic or shatter-proof glasses to ensure patron safety. I look forward to this strong relationship continuing as we implement new proactive harm minimisation measures like mandatory plastic glasses in high-risk venues. I would also like to highlight the need to change the dangerous culture of alcohol fuelled violence within our younger generations. This government is delivering on its commitments in this area by implementing new education campaigns such as the highly successful \$3 million Every Drink Counts campaign. We are dedicated to achieving this cultural shift.

It is of great concern to me that reports suggest large increases in gaming machine usage. It was this Labor government that introduced minimum note accepters in 2001. While I have publicly stated that increases in premium gaming areas would allow Queenslanders to compete with other states and international cities for more tourism dollars, I fully support the Premier's decision to have rules regarding administrative changes amended to ensure that in the future they go before a rigorous cabinet and responsible gaming advisory committee review.

This government continues to deliver on its commitment by prohibiting gaming before 10 am, placing a permanent gaming machine cap on hotels, pubs, clubs and casinos as well as increasing funding for problem gambling assistance by \$1.1 million in this year's budget. We also recently completed extensive precommitment card based gaming gambling trials. That reported significant success in minimising the time and money people spent on machines.

I would like to highlight that despite the Liberal National Party voting for the independence of the Queensland racing industry I have received numerous requests by LNP members to interfere in the day-to-day operations of the industry. As racing minister I will not allow Queensland to return to the era of racing plagued by pay-offs, dodgy deals and an unfair distribution of race dates as we experienced under the opposition.

I would like to recognise the tireless work of our front-line Fair Trading officers who are on the ground delivering on the Bligh government's commitment to provide the highest level of consumer protection to Queenslanders. Today I am happy to announce that a series of state-wide operations by the Office of Fair Trading inspectors during 2008-09 resulted in nearly 1,000 retail outlets and more than 25,000 items checked for correct pricing. Of the stores inspected throughout Queensland, 79 per cent were fully compliant with no errors found. However, 206 stores or 21 per cent had one or more overcharges. From show bag inspections to consumer scams to blind cord safety toggles, the Office of Fair Trading is working tirelessly to deliver on the Bligh government's commitment to protect Queenslanders.

The past 18 months have been some of the most torrid in the history of Queensland's tourism industry. However, we are not alone. Just about every city, state and country has experienced a retracted tourism market. I would like to publicly congratulate the CEO of Tourism Queensland, Anthony Hayes, and his team for being one of the most progressive and dynamic tourism organisations in the world. The Bligh government has given TQ a clear charter and they are working hard to deliver.

If you have not heard of the Best Job in the World campaign over the past six months you are obviously not from this world. This campaign won more international advertising awards than any other in the 54-year history of the Cannes International Advertising Festival Awards. It was beaten for the top gong by the election campaign of US president, Barack Obama. The Bligh government took a clear commitment to the last election—increase marketing, build new tourism infrastructure and lure more airlines. The Bligh government is now delivering on those commitments.

CHAIR: Time has now expired. We will now commence our examination of the Office of Fair Trading followed by the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing. The first period of questions is allocated to non-government members. I call the member for Mermaid Beach.

Mr STEVENS: I refer the minister to page 2-33 of the Service Delivery Statement and point out that 15 per cent of Fair Trading conciliations were not completed in 30 days. Of those 15 per cent that were not finalised how long have they been ongoing? What is the reason for these outstanding conciliations and disputes that have not been settled?

Mr LAWLOR: What line?

Mr STEVENS: Page 2-33 where it refers to the Fair Trading conciliations not being completed in 30 days.

Mr LAWLOR: Some 85 per cent of the conciliations were completed within 30 days which exceeded the target of 80 per cent. You will see the target in the third column to the left. Although most traders are willing to refund or come to an arrangement with an aggrieved customer, there are occasions when a consumer needs the assistance of the Office of Fair Trading to conciliate. Conciliation involves contacting both the consumer and the trader and attempting to negotiate an outcome acceptable to the parties.

In 2008-09 the case assessment and conciliation team took on additional functions, including dealing with general website enquiries and conducting low-level investigations, making these results even more impressive. The fact of the matter, though, is that in some of these situations there can be no resolution.

I have had an example of that recently in my electorate office. The Office of Fair Trading did all they could to satisfy a gentleman's concern about the air conditioning in his car. There was a disagreement about exactly what caused the damage to the air conditioning. He got the air conditioning fixed by an air-conditioning mechanic. Two days later the air conditioning was no longer operating. He claimed that it was work that was done by the mechanic. The mechanic said there was nothing wrong with the air-conditioning system when he left. That is an example of a situation which could not be conciliated. The only thing that was left for the consumer was to exercise his rights in the small claims court. That is the advice that I gave him. That is the advice that the Office of Fair Trading also gave him. Whilst every attempt is made to conciliate these types of disputes, it is inevitable that some of them will not be resolved.

In 2008-09 the Office of Fair Trading received 317 complaints from consumers who live in the electorate of Mermaid Beach, for instance. Fair Trading obtained more than \$59,000 in redress for these consumers. The top 5 issues complained about by consumers residing in the Mermaid Beach electorate were personal and household goods, motor vehicle sales, real estate agents, business services and advertising, and personal and household services. The top 5 products or service complained about by these consumers were residential property management, motor vehicles, maintenance, service and repair of motor vehicles—which I just mentioned—and domestic furniture, carpets and other floor coverings. The electorate of Mermaid Beach is serviced by the Gold Coast regional office. The Gold Coast Office of Fair Trading negotiated many successful outcomes.

Mr STEVENS: Thank you for my backyard update. I refer to the Property Agents and Motor Dealers Act 2000, which is referred to at page 2-20 of the Service Delivery Statement. Can the minister detail how many breaches of the act and subsequent claims for compensation were made through the Property Agents and Motor Dealers Act claim fund? How much of the 1½ million dollars the fund receives each year was utilised in the 2008-09 financial year?

Mr LAWLOR: The Property Agents and Motor Dealers Act 2000 established a claim fund to compensate consumers who suffer financial loss due to certain actions or omissions by a licensee under the act. Queensland Treasury provided \$2.7 million in 2008-09 to the claim fund to compensate consumers who suffer financial loss. Interest earned on the real estate agents trust account is paid to the Queensland government to provide for the claim funds. In 2008-09 the amount of interest received was \$30.33 million. The Office of Fair Trading also attempts to recover moneys paid from the fund from persons found liable for the claimant's loss. In 2008-09 the Office of Fair Trading recovered \$450,757. During 2008-09, 326 claims worth over \$2 million were received with approximately 400 finalised.

During 2008-09, 212 claims were determined totalling \$1,262,695. Some 205 claims were paid from the claim fund in 2008-09 totalling \$1,774,253. The Office of Fair Trading has authority to determine minor claims which are valued at \$10,000 or less. In 2008-09 these included 189 claims, 20 of which were rejected and 169 allowed claims totalling \$374,498. The Commercial and Consumer Tribunal has jurisdiction to determine claims over \$10,000. The tribunal has determined 23 claims during 2008-09, four of which were rejected. The 19 allowed claims totalled \$748,978. The department attempts to recover from liable parties all amounts paid to persons from the claim fund, all fine and cost orders made by the tribunal in disciplinary matters and costs awarded in civil proceedings taken by Fair Trading. The claim fund allows consumers to be reimbursed for loss without taking costly and time-intensive civil proceedings through the courts. The Office of Fair Trading will continue to process and determine claims and to pursue persons who cause loss to Queensland consumers, thereby maximising repayment of losses.

Mr STEVENS: Minister, I refer you to page 2-14 of the Service Delivery Statement in relation to the Fair Trading licensing system which was upgraded to enable automatic overnight checking of licensees' criminal history. Minister, you are no doubt aware of the terrible situation which exists in the Wide Bay-Burnett area where there are many innocent victims—pensioners, retirees, families—who have lost tens of thousands of dollars after a company selling kit homes has gone to the wall. When did you and your department first receive complaints about a company director Mr John Biles? Did they check Mr Biles's criminal history? What action have your officers taken to ensure that the victims recover their money or receive the property that they have paid for?

Mr LAWLOR: I thank the member for the question. This is the Coral Coast Homes situation I presume that you are talking about?

Mr STEVENS: Correct.

Mr LAWLOR: It is unfortunate that the honourable member for Burnett did not find the time to raise his concerns during the estimates session of my colleague the Hon. Robert Schwarten, the minister responsible for the Building Services Authority. I am aware that the Office of Fair Trading has received complaints about Coral Coast Homes and also SSM Products Pty Ltd trading as Steel Smart Homes and Mr John Biles, who is the director of both of those companies. Steel Smart Homes is a retail business which supplied kit homes to consumers who could elect to have the homes constructed by Coral Coast Homes. The Queensland Building Services Authority regulates the building industry, and as a construction company Coral Coast Homes falls within its jurisdiction.

On 25 May 2009 the Building Services Authority suspended the licence of Coral Coast Homes. On 3 June 2009 Coral Coast Homes was placed into liquidation and SV Partners were appointed as liquidators. On 17 June 2009 the member for Burnett made a private member's statement in parliament alleging that the Office of Fair Trading and the Building Services Authority had known of concerns about these companies for at least 12 months. I have been assured by the Commissioner for Fair Trading that, according to its records, the Office of Fair Trading had not been aware of concerns about these companies' operations for 12 months. Fair Trading has now received 11 written complaints concerning these companies, with the first only having been received on 1 June 2009—just two days before Coral Coast Homes was placed into liquidation.

Mr STEVENS: And Steel Smart.

Mr LAWLOR: The Commissioner for Fair Trading has advised me that the first knowledge the Office of Fair Trading had of any consumers dealing with Coral Coast Homes was 27 March 2009 when a consumer, Mr Denis Seth, attended the Hervey Bay Office of Fair Trading seeking information and advice. Mr Seth has advised that it appeared the issue was one for the Building Services Authority but was given an Office of Fair Trading complaint form and advised that the Office of Fair Trading would consider the matter under fair trading legislation if the consumer completed the complaint form and provided copies of relevant documentation and contracts. A complaint was later received by Mr Seth, but not until 2 June 2009, and an investigation has commenced. For the honourable member's

information, let me outline the role of the Office of Fair Trading in relation to these types of complaints. I might add here, too, that the complaint that was made by the member for Burnett to the CMC included no allegations of misconduct by officers of Fair Trading.

Mr STEVENS: Minister, I refer you to page 2-17 of the Service Delivery Statement and your commitment to Fair Trading Queensland, and I ask: in relation to the insulation industry and the federal government's rebate, how many complaints regarding rogue insulation installers have been received by your office and how many of these companies have been prosecuted to this point in time for illegal activity when trading under false pretences?

Mr LAWLOR: From time to time the Office of Fair Trading gets complaints about door-to-door traders, and it seems that many move from one product to another. There are various complaints about things like painting roofs, recladding houses, bitumening driveways—things of that nature—and indeed installing insulation material as well. It is an ongoing process trying to track down these door-to-door salesmen who, as I said, go from not only one town to another but also one occupation to another. The Office of Fair Trading's investigators cooperate with the local police. In terms of the number of investigations and so on, I think I will pass over to Brian Bauer.

Mr Bauer: I do not have the exact number of complaints lodged about insulation providers at this stage, although I could have that by the end of this session. The issue of the Commonwealth's grant scheme around the provision of insulation was picked up pretty early by the Office of Fair Trading, particularly after the learnings of water tank subsidy rebates previously and our experience with that particular industry. So we were very proactive and got on the front foot very early in the piece and contacted the Commonwealth as soon as it had announced that rebate scheme and worked with the Commonwealth to start putting out packages of information to consumers to ensure that they were very well aware of the pitfalls of dealing with itinerant traders in that particular field. So we believe that at this stage consumers are fairly well informed. We are aware that there are rogue traders out there trying to capitalise on the rebate scheme, and we continue to issue warnings to consumers through the minister to warn them of the perils of doing that. As I said, we have had a number of complaints to date and I can have the number for the committee by the end of this session.

Mr STEVENS: Thank you.

Mr LAWLOR: If I can just add to that, I have taken various steps to publicise the issue of door-to-door tradesmen. The hours that they can operate are confined from nine till six during the week and they cannot go door to door on Sundays. But the answer to a lot of these things is that they are entitled to a cooling-off period and they are—

CHAIR: Thanks, Minister. Your time is up.

Mr STEVENS: Thank you, Minister, for Mr Bauer's commitment to those numbers by the end of this session. That would be a big help. I refer you to page 2-14 of the Service Delivery Statement and the successful implementation of amendments to the Security Providers Act 1993, and I ask: what measures has your department implemented to deter issues of bribery with security bouncers at pubs and nightclubs across the state, and does this include an international, which includes New Zealand, police check?

Mr LAWLOR: The Security Providers Act 1993 establishes a licensing and compliance regime for the private security industry. The act regulates a range of security personnel including security officers, crowd controllers, private investigators, bodyguards, security advisers and security equipment installers. The act also establishes a licence category for security firms. The government has committed to ensuring the act provides an effective framework for ensuring Queenslanders benefit from the highest standards when it comes to the protection of their personal safety and property. In November 2006 the government announced its intention to raise standards in the security industry by providing industry associations, employee organisations and other representative groups with a supplementary compliance role.

On 10 February 2009 parliament passed amendments to the act which will introduce a requirement for security firms to be members of an approved security industry association as a condition of holding a licence. The amendments will commence on a date to be set by proclamation and are dependent on a regulation being made to set out the criteria. A security industry association must meet to be eligible for approval under the act. The Office of Fair Trading is currently consulting with key stakeholders regarding the criteria for inclusion in the regulation.

With regard to the issue of New Zealand, New Zealand is covered. The process for monitoring licensees for disqualifying criminal offences or charges has been enhanced by the introduction of a new daily monitoring system for security licence holders called SCRAM. The SCRAM system—short for Suitability, Checking, Reporting and Monitoring—checks the state's 26,000 licensed security providers against the Queensland Police Service records each night. The SCRAM system went live in November 2008. It was developed at a cost of just over \$26,000. SCRAM checks show whether any licensed security provider has been charged with a disqualifying offence. For example, if the holder of a security provider licence was charged with grievous bodily harm in Townsville on Monday, Industry Licensing in

Brisbane would be alerted to this on Tuesday morning, allowing it to take immediate disciplinary action. Upon notification that a licensee has been charged, the department then issues the licensee with a show cause notice seeking the reason why their licence should not be suspended pending the outcome of court proceedings.

Mr STEVENS: Minister, are you saying that SCRAM picks up international violations as well?

Mr LAWLOR: It covers New Zealand offences or convictions.

Mr STEVENS: Thank you. I refer you to page 2-14 of the Service Delivery Statement and the successful implementation of amendments to the Security Providers Act, and I ask: how many of the 668 security companies and 3,314 entities inspected in the 20 compliance operations performed have had their licences revoked due to breaches under the act?

Mr LAWLOR: The investigation of security providers under the act is an ongoing process. The amendments were successfully implemented, as I mentioned here, on 31 March 2009. Those inspectors conducted those 20 compliance operations with checks on more than 668 security businesses and 3,314 entities throughout the state. With regard to the number of convictions, the system, together with ongoing compliance activities by Fair Trading inspectors, ensures only suitable people continue to hold a licence. Since its introduction in November 2008, SCRAM checks have been instrumental in 136 show cause notices being issued resulting in 64 suspensions and nine licence cancellations. During 2008-09 the Office of Fair Trading conducted 22 compliance operations specifically aimed at security providers resulting in 106 official warnings, 144 infringement notices and one court prosecution being initiated.

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

Ms O'NEILL: Minister, with reference to the COAG reform agenda mentioned on page 2-9 of the Service Delivery Statement, could you explain to the committee the reforms being undertaken and the benefits that will result?

Mr LAWLOR: Thank you for the question. Australia's consumer and business laws provide a strong national regulatory framework, particularly where those laws are harmonised. However, existing differences between jurisdictions result in unnecessary compliance costs for business. These differences also result in confusion for consumers. The Queensland government recognises that there is room for improvement and is proud to be part of a national response to address these differences.

At its meeting on 20 December 2007, the Council of Australian Governments—COAG—committed to a program to accelerate and broaden the regulation reduction agenda to reduce the regulatory burden on businesses. At its 3 July 2008 meeting, COAG noted that reforms proposed by the Productivity Commission to its 2008 review of Australia's consumer policy framework could alone provide a net gain to the community of between \$1.5 billion and \$4.5 billion a year. The Productivity Commission's report proposed a number of important recommendations complementary to the COAG reform agenda, including the proposal that Australia introduce a single generic national consumer law.

At its meeting held in October 2008, COAG consolidated its reform agenda and agreed to sign a national partnership agreement to deliver a seamless national economy and to implement its comprehensive regulatory reform program. The gains identified by the Productivity Commission will be realised through more effective consumer laws, better enforcement, increased productivity and innovation, reduced compliance costs for businesses and increased consumer confidence in the market.

COAG has since framed a comprehensive implementation plan, which will deliver wins for both businesses and consumers. The implementation plan has a series of agreed milestones, including Queensland applying the proposed new Australian consumer law from 1 January 2011. These are important and exciting reforms. They will simplify the rules for both businesses and consumers across financial services, product safety, the licensing of property agents, the registration of business names, trade measurement and for security service providers. These reforms will provide better and more targeted enforcement of the new and more strategic consumer laws through an enhanced compliance partnership between state agencies, the ACCC and ASIC. These reforms will deliver a single set of laws—not Victorian laws, not South Australian laws, not Queensland laws but Australian laws. The COAG reforms are a win-win for business, for consumers, for Australia and for Queensland.

Ms FARMER: Minister, I refer to page 2-14 of the SDS regarding fringe lending products, and I ask: what is the Office of Fair Trading doing to protect consumers from unscrupulous payday lending techniques?

Mr LAWLOR: The protection of vulnerable consumers and maintaining confidence in the marketplace are priorities for the Queensland government. Disadvantaged or vulnerable consumers can be very easily exploited by lenders who offer short-term loans with excessive rates of interest, fees and charges. Often credit is sought from these high-cost lenders by people experiencing difficult times financially, or by people who need to access money in an emergency situation.

In response to this, on 31 July 2008 the government introduced a 48 per cent cap on interest, fees and charges associated with consumer loans to ensure consumers' access to credit at a fair and reasonable price. In line with the government's commitment to tackle lending practices seeking to avoid compliance with the cap, four specialist compliance officers and one conciliation officer were engaged to assist with credit compliance. A policy officer was also funded to assist with credit policy issues and the expansion of the No Interest Loan Scheme in Queensland.

Compliance inspections very quickly revealed some credit providers changing their business models in an attempt to avoid the cap. In this regard, 178 compliance checks have been conducted this year, resulting in the signing of 64 conduct deeds, most of which relate to credit providers operating models that sought to avoid the cap. One compliance check on a credit provider revealed interest being charged at 486 per cent per annum. Importantly, credit compliance officers negotiated the return of more than \$1 million to consumers who were unlawfully charged excessive interest and fees by lenders and penalty payments of \$102,500 made to the Consumer Credit Fund. One credit provider alone paid back over \$680,000 to 915 vulnerable consumers.

The Queensland government recognises that compliance responses are not alone the answer to this complex matter and, accordingly, committed \$1.2 million over two years to fund the expansion of the No Interest Loan Scheme in Queensland. To ensure that vulnerable consumers have access to legal advice and representation, Legal Aid Queensland was allocated \$240,000 in recurrent funding.

As credit is being transferred from the states and territories to the Commonwealth, the Queensland government has made it clear to the Commonwealth that an interest rate cap should be maintained in the proposed national credit laws. The Commonwealth will review capped interest rate schemes such as the Queensland model during its second phase of implementation of the national credit laws. Any phase 2 amendments will commence on 2 July 2010.

Mr PITT: Page 2-14 of the SDS refers to the Get Out There interactive website and a new Fair Trading website. Can you inform the committee about these websites and what their functions are?

Mr LAWLOR: In October 2008 the Office of Fair Trading launched the new Get Out There interactive website aimed at school leavers. The website is a dynamic and flexible way to communicate important consumer messages to an audience familiar with the online environment. With young people becoming more active in the marketplace and exposed to consumer issues, helping young people develop smart financial and consumer habits will benefit them throughout their lives.

Get Out There has attracted significant national and international attention due to its creative use of animation and an interactive Queensland cityscape. The website encourages young people to explore relevant information, such as what to consider when shopping, buying a car, getting finances under control or renting a unit. The site also offers practical tools, such as a budget planner that can be downloaded to the viewer's computer. Also, as websites allow for the immediate publication of new or updated information, the Office of Fair Trading can ensure that uniform information is timely.

In addition to looking after Queensland's young consumers, early in 2009 a new-look Office of Fair Trading website was launched at www.fairtrading.qld.gov.au. The new website has been designed for easy use by both consumers and traders. Queenslanders who visit this website will be able to access a variety of information and may lodge a complaint with or ask a question of the Office of Fair Trading. Feedback from users has been very positive.

To complement the website, the Office of Fair Trading has developed a suite of four Fair Trading consumer publications. The smart guides are responsive to consumer demands, as content was modelled on the most popular sections of the new Fair Trading website, providing a snapshot of the comprehensive information that is available online. The series of four smart guides has been developed as pocket information for Queensland consumers. Mr Chairman, I seek leave to table the new brochures so as to provide copies to each of the committee members. I believe they will be most a helpful resource for their constituents.

Leave granted.

Ms O'NEILL: Minister, in your answer to a question asked by the member for Bulimba you mentioned NILS—the No Interest Loan Scheme. Could you please expand on this and inform the committee what this scheme is and the benefits to consumers?

Mr LAWLOR: The No Interest Loan Scheme—or NILS as it is widely known—is a key community based loan program which offers people on low incomes the opportunity to access credit for an essential household item without any fees, charges or interest payments. NILS was first developed in 1981 by the Victorian Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service and now operates in all states and territories.

I am pleased to advise that the Queensland NILS network continues to be expanded through a partnership between Good Shepherd, the National Australia Bank and the Queensland government. The National Australia Bank has now committed \$15 million nationally for NILS loan capital, providing approximately \$2.23 million in loan capital available through accredited Queensland NILS providers to

low-income Queensland consumers. On 16 April 2008 the Premier announced that the Queensland government would provide funding of \$1.2 million over two years to help expand the NILS service in Queensland.

The Queensland government contributed \$600,000 to Good Shepherd for the 2008-09 period. This contribution enabled a NILS state coordinator to be appointed. The state coordinator has also entered into agreements with Shelter Housing Action Cairns in North Queensland and Communities in South-East Queensland to recruit and appoint two community development workers.

The following figures are accurate as at 31 May 2009 based on Good Shepherd's performance and progress report. Eight new organisations have been accredited and four existing organisations have been reaccredited to provide NILS. This has provided access to \$830,000 of National Australia Bank capital for no-interest loans in Queensland. It is great to see the momentum building in Queensland. Fifteen eligible providers have been also been able to access \$82,500 in one-off grants from the government funding to assist with administration and set-up costs, such as the purchase of computers and customised marketing materials.

The partnership between the Queensland government and Good Shepherd was further expanded this year by an additional contribution of \$100,000 for loan capital from Mines and Energy and \$60,000 for administration costs from the Office of Fair Trading. This additional funding enables consumers to access a no-interest loan for new energy-efficient whitegoods to replace whitegoods lost or damaged by flood.

The demand for NILS loans is increasing steadily in Queensland. In the past three months an average of 40 NILS loans per month were being processed by NILS providers. We have embarked on a second year of funding, which will see the partnership between Good Shepherd, the National Australia Bank and the Queensland government continue.

CHAIR: I refer to page 2-17 of the SDS and the Office of Fair Trading fostering business and consumer confidence. I ask: what role does the Office of Fair Trading have in the inbound tourism sector?

Mr LAWLOR: The Tourism Services Act 2003 provides for the registration of inbound tourism operators as well as codes of conduct for inbound tour operators and tour guides and aims to ensure that they operate in an ethical and professional way. The object of the legislation is to promote positive experiences for overseas tourists through legislated protection from controlled shopping, misrepresentation, overcharging for goods and services and unconscionable conduct. Inbound tourism issues raised with the Office of Fair Trading centre mainly on the North Asian market, particularly visitors from China, Korea, Japan and Taiwan.

As at 30 June 2009 there were 123 inbound tour operators registered in Queensland. Compliance activities targeting inbound tour operators and duty free style stores have also led to the identification of breaches of the Fair Trading Act 1989, resulting in prosecution action for one duty free store and ongoing investigations into four other similar stores. During 2009 the Office of Fair Trading undertook 31 compliance checks on registered inbound tour operators. These focused on ensuring that inbound tour operators upheld the code of conduct. Key features of the code of conduct include that operators must have a clear dispute resolution process; operate honestly, fairly and professionally; not use high-pressure tactics or harassment; ensure that a travel package reveals the total cost; ensure that tours are not dominated by shopping unless requested by the client; and not charge for free goods and services. Eleven warning and six infringement notices were issued for failure to maintain an adequate dispute resolution policy and for failure to notify changes to registered details. Investigations continue into seven operators.

The Office of Fair Trading also maintains its involvement with other agencies to achieve broader compliance strategies to regulate the industry. This includes participation in a national multilingual online tourist complaint referral program, from which 32 complaints have been received by the Office of Fair Trading.

Unfortunately, media commentary relating to this issue was often uninformed. Accusations of control shopping and charging overseas tourists for a walk on the beach range from part truths to total myth. All complaints are followed up and there has been no evidence identified to suggest that tourists are charged for activities such as a walk on the beach. The charge for a tour will generally include coach transportation, lunch and visits to other attractions. The walk on the beach is simply one part of the day's package. The Office of Fair Trading will continue to maintain a proactive compliance program in order to identify tourism operators who do not comply with the requirements.

Mr PITT: SDS page 2-33 refers to redress to consumers. Could the Minister please advise the committee of examples of the Office of Fair Trading's successful investigations and ongoing work to assist consumers who have found themselves out of pocket due to faulty items purchased or services not delivered as promised?

Mr LAWLOR: The 2008-09 performance target for consumer redress was set at \$3.2 million and the estimated actual, as reported in the Service Delivery Statements, was \$4.1 million. I am very pleased to report that the actual figure obtained for the year was \$5.898 million. This is an outstanding

result for consumers and reflects the hard work and commitment of the staff of the Office of Fair Trading. The result builds on the Office of Fair Trading's excellent work in the field in previous years. For example, in 2006-07 Fair Trading obtained for consumers \$3.27 million in redress; in 2007-08 Fair Trading obtained for consumers \$5.51 million in redress. That is \$14.67 million in redress that consumers have obtained in the past three years as a result of the work of the Office of Fair Trading. When consumers need assistance they lodge complaints with the Office of Fair Trading and 13,757 were provided with assistance in 2008-09. Conciliation alone achieved consumer redress of \$1.77 million, which was primarily traders refunding consumers for products and services after intervention by Fair Trading conciliation staff.

One of the Office of Fair Trading's most successful compliance activities during the year was as a result of the introduction of the 48 per cent interest rate cap. Compliance inspectors quickly revealed some credit providers changed their business models in an attempt to avoid the cap. One hundred and seventy-eight compliance checks were conducted that year by the Office of Fair Trading team, which resulted in more than \$1 million being returned to consumers who were unlawfully charged excess interest and fees by lenders. Similarly, the Office of Fair Trading trade measurement branch works to save consumers' hard-earned cash by ensuring they are not short-changed purchasing underweight goods or receiving less than they paid for when purchasing items such as fuel for motor vehicles.

The Office of Fair Trading's work in 2008-09 has been substantial and has provided significant positive outcomes for Queenslanders. For example, the Fair Trading officers from the Rockhampton office received a complaint from an 86-year-old consumer suffering extreme disability as a result of service in World War II. The consumer purchased an orthopedic mattress to alleviate the pain. The mattress actually exacerbated his pain. He sought assistance from the Office of Fair Trading to obtain a refund. Negotiations by Fair Trading resulted in the consumer receiving a \$4,435 refund.

CHAIR: That concludes the time allocated for questions by government members. We have two five-minute sessions of questions. I call the member for Mermaid Beach.

Mr STEVENS: Minister, I refer you to page 2-74 of the Service Delivery Statements. What is the budgeted amount for the 2009-10 period for the policing component for Fair Trading in regards to the monitoring and removal of the fuel subsidy, and checking that petrol stations are not taking advantage of this financially?

Mr LAWLOR: I thank the member for the question. Could I clarify a previous answer. I said that SCRAM itself does cover New Zealand offences, but the annual licensing checks cover New Zealand offences. SCRAM is just a Queensland check, but when they apply for their licences they do check New Zealand offences.

Mr STEVENS: Thank you.

Mr LAWLOR: In relation to insulation providers and door-to-door sales, I think the question was how many. The answer is 13. The average time for the compilation of conciliation files that takes longer than 30 days to resolve is an average of 49 days.

Mr STEVENS: Thank you. Can we reset the clock? We have three minutes, surely?

CHAIR: You will be allowed to give an extension if you so wish.

Mr LAWLOR: As part of the 2009-10 budget strategy, the Queensland government withdrew the 8.354 cents per litre fuel subsidy attached to retail sales in Queensland. Sadly, it is possible some fuel outlets could take advantage of the government's decision to gouge additional profit by increasing their prices within the normal cycle of general price fluctuations by amounts more than the subsidy removal would warrant. Premier Anna Bligh and myself issued a joint media release on Sunday 28 June 2009 saying Fair Trading inspectors had commenced monitoring petrol prices and that the government was committed to naming retailers found to be taking advantage of consumers.

Whilst I appreciate there are a large number of factors that can influence the price of fuel, including the price of crude oil and exchange rates, service station operators need to be fair in their dealings with the public. I believe putting the industry on notice has had a positive effect on marketplace behaviour. In this we must remember that the Pincus report found that in excess of \$100 million was being used to line the pockets of oil company executives and, in fact, was not being passed on to motorists. That will no longer happen with the removal of the subsidy.

In an effort to protect consumers, the Office of Fair Trading has implemented a number of initiatives, including a media release advising consumers of how to minimise their fuel costs, a fuel consumer complaint hotline, liaison with the ACCC through sharing of consumer complaints and providing information about any abnormal fuel price trends in Queensland, enhancing the Office of Fair Trading website to include information about the elimination of the fuel subsidy, buying fuel generally—

CHAIR: Order!

Mr STEVENS: Minister, I refer you to page 2-74 of the Service Delivery Statements with reference to the discount of 40 cents per litre promoted by Coles and Woolworths. I ask: as this is a substantial discount on fuel which, for Woolworths and Coles to recoup this discount, would equate to an increase of six per cent across their grocery range, what will your Office of Fair Trading be doing regarding price checks in the supermarkets?

Mr LAWLOR: As I have said in a media statement, all consumers should not be taken in by what seems to be massive discounts on petrol supplied by Coles and Woolworths, because what they are saving on petrol they are more than likely paying for through their grocery bill. However, the monitoring of groceries is an issue for the ACCC. For instance, if there are examples of collusion that should be passed on to the ACCC or, indeed, if it is passed on to the Office of Fair Trading who can pass those complaints on to the ACCC, which will then fully investigate the accusations.

I can only repeat that if it seems too good to be true, it probably is. In the event that they are saving \$30 on petrol, they are probably paying \$40 extra for their groceries. Consumers have to be wary and do their sums.

CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by non-government members has expired. I am going to take the first question of this session. I refer to page 2-20 of the Service Delivery Statements regarding the Property Agents and Motor Dealers Act 2000. Can the Minister inform the committee of details of the Service Delivery and Performance Commission's report recommendations, whether they will be implemented and any progress to date?

Mr LAWLOR: What page?

CHAIR: Page 2-20, regarding the Property Agents and Motor Dealers Act 2000.

Mr LAWLOR: On 23 April 2009 the Premier tabled in parliament the Service Delivery and Performance Commission's report on its independent review of the Property Agents and Motor Dealers Act 2000 and the government's response to the report. The recommendations that are supported by government and that can be implemented without further detailed policy development are presently being progressed. These include removing the requirements for resident letting agents to have letting rights or body corporate approval for letting rights as part of the application process; motor dealers licence applicants to provide proof of local authority approval for the business premises under the Integrated Planning Act; employed licensees and registered employees having to notify the department about their employment details before being granted a licence; and licensees to notify the department when they intend to open a trust account. Licensees are still required to open accounts with approved financial institutions and provide notification of their trust account details after opening the account.

The department has already implemented steps to make photographic identification available to commercial agents, commonly known as debt collectors or process servers. The government will immediately amend the process for the preparation and delivery of proposed residential property contracts by simplifying the process and removing buyers' capacity to avoid contracts on merely a technical basis. Consultation committees have also been formed to review the warning statement attached to residential retail real estate contracts and forms associated with purchasing a motor vehicle.

Separation of the PAMD Act into industry-specific legislation will coincide with the Council of Australian Governments' national licensing scheme for property agents and will ensure the requirements for each industry are contained in their own specific acts, rather than the current combined act. The implementation of the accepted reforms to the Property Agents and Motor Dealers Act 2000 will provide real benefit to business, as it will reduce the regulatory burden on industry. However, consumers can rest assured that there will be no watering down of the protections already afforded to them in the current law.

Ms FARMER: Minister, I refer to page 2-17 of the SDS. I understand quite a few representations have been made to you regarding lot entitlements under the Body Corporate and Community Management Act. Could you please advise what the issues are and whether you are considering any options to address those issues?

Mr LAWLOR: Community title schemes in every form, whether high-rise apartments, town houses, villas or commercial premises, involve the collective ownership and management of common property and body corporate assets. Under the BCCM Act, every lot in a community title scheme is allocated a contribution scheme lot entitlement and an interest schedule lot entitlement. The key public policy issue centres on the merits or otherwise of: the current system of allocating lot entitlements and, therefore, the system of calculating shared costs; and whether a right to seek adjustment is justified relative to the need for certainty and equity for new purchasers and those on fixed and lower incomes.

Circumstances can arise where a recent purchaser or owner suddenly finds that an application for adjustment will cause a significant and unforeseen increase in their annual contribution to the cost of maintaining the common property. We are now seeing applications for and decisions in favour of adjustments that benefit wealthy penthouse owners at the expense of everyday owners. There is a significant argument that, in seeking equity in the allocation of lot entitlements, an unforeseen consequence has been that unit owners on fixed incomes and schemes are significantly disadvantaged. This cannot be allowed to continue.

CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by government members has expired. That concludes the examination of the estimates for the Office of Fair Trading. We will now commence our examination of the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing.

Mr STEVENS: Minister, as I realise that liquor, gaming and racing is very close to your heart—

Mr LAWLOR: And yours, I understand.

Mr STEVENS: I refer you to page 2-17 of the Service Delivery Statement and to your answer to question on notice No. 8 with regard to gaming community awareness funding. The total spend on community awareness activities for last year was \$580,786, which equates to 0.63 per cent of the \$1.86 billion worth of public expenditure on gaming machines. Does the minister agree with this spend on such an important community awareness issue?

CHAIR: Can you give us that Service Delivery Statement page again?

Mr STEVENS: Page 2-17 of the Service Delivery Statement and the minister's answer to question on notice No. 8. And the question on notice was from Mr O'Brien. It was your question, Chair.

Mr LAWLOR: In Queensland gambling revenue actuals for 2008-09 were \$921.9 million, an increase of 3.7 per cent on 2007-08 actuals of \$888.7 million. The Gambling Community Benefit Fund was established in 1994 under the Gaming Machine Act 1991. It is funded through taxes placed on Golden Casket lotteries, wagering, keno and gaming machines in clubs and hotels. The Gambling Community Benefit Fund distributed grants totalling approximately \$37.107 million to over 1,900 projects in 2008-09. Following the approval of recommended grants for June 2009, over \$414 million in grant funding has been provided to Queensland not-for-profit organisations, with more than 34,900 community based projects supported since inception.

In relation to casino community benefit funds, the Jupiters Casino Community Benefit Fund and the Breakwater Island Casino Community Benefit Fund were established in 1987 under the Casino Control Act 1982, with the Reef Hotel Casino Community Benefit Fund established in 1996 under the same act. The casino community benefit funds are generated by proceeds received from a one per cent levy on the gross gaming revenue of Queensland casinos.

The responsible gaming initiatives included in the 2008-09 budget totalled \$11.33 million, including \$3.9 million funding for social marketing campaigns, the responsible gambling community awareness campaign, the problem gambling campaign and the player information project. Subsequent approvals resulted in an increase in the budget to \$11.96 million. Responsible gambling initiatives included in the 2009-10 budget totalled \$6.19 million. A further \$4 million for responsible gambling initiatives has been approved to be deferred from 2008-09, including \$3.5 million for social marketing and community awareness and education activities. This reduction in funding is due to a number of responsible gambling products not currently being funded in 2009-10.

CHAIR: It was actually Mr Pitt who asked that question on notice, member for Mermaid Beach, not me.

Mr STEVENS: Minister, I refer you to page 2-74 of the Service Delivery Statement. Who will pay for the reconfiguration of the 460 gaming machines that were altered to accept \$50 and \$100 notes on your approval, and what community groups did the minister engage before reverting to allowing the use of \$50 and \$100 notes in gaming machines across the state?

Mr LAWLOR: As I understand it, there were 461 gaming machines which were the subject of this decision and they were in the Tabcorp casinos—Gold Coast, Brisbane and Townsville. The premium gaming areas are designated areas within a casino which are accessible by members of casino reward programs who engage in a higher amount of casino gambling or by interstate and international patrons participating in a casino premium program including high rollers. A designated premium gaming area is identified by a casino floor layout and is approved by the Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation under sections 59 and 60 of the Casino Control Act 1982. 1982, you will note, was during the time of a National Party government.

Mr STEVENS: Who introduced casinos?

CHAIR: Order!

Mr LAWLOR: It was considered that these types of decisions were more an operational issue, and the decision in the legislation was allowed to be made by the executive officer of the department. That decision was confirmed by me in my third week in the job. However, with subsequent information which detailed the ability of other people, for instance in Club Conrad, to access those higher denominations of machines, it was decided that the decision would be reversed and that further information would be sought from Tabcorp to absolutely set in concrete what was required to obtain access to those machines. The bottom line is that, as you are probably aware, machines in casinos have no limit. It was a discussion about whether they could put \$10,000 in machines in \$20 notes or whether they could use \$50 or \$100 notes.

The Responsible Gambling Advisory Committee's role is to provide high-level policy advice and comment on emerging economic issues associated with gambling and is comprised of members from community organisations, relevant government agencies and the gambling industry. The committee was not initially consulted on this change because it is basically not designed to consider operational issues and changes within casinos. But certainly I welcome the change to the policy. This is an issue which I believe should go to cabinet and in future—

CHAIR: Order! The minister's time has expired.

Mr STEVENS: I refer you to page 2-14 of the Service Delivery Statement and the reference to racing control bodies. Can the minister confirm he endorses the greyhound control board's decision to abolish the Gold Coast racing club considering that it has received \$10 million compensation for the demise of the Gold Coast racing facility at Parklands on the Gold Coast?

Mr LAWLOR: Let me correct the misconception that it was the Gold Coast greyhound club that received \$10 million. That is not the case at all.

Mr STEVENS: I never said that.

Mr LAWLOR: I misheard, sorry. The \$10 million was paid as compensation to the greyhound control board. In mid-2008 the Gold Coast Greyhound Racing Club was required to vacate the Parklands site due to the development of the Gold Coast Hospital, as you are aware. Since that time the club has been unable to race as it does not have a venue. As the club was only a tenant at Parklands, there was no legal obligation on the government to provide compensation to either the club or the greyhound control body. However, the government has committed \$10 million to Greyhounds Queensland as compensation to the greyhound code for the loss of this important TAB racing venue.

As the control body for greyhound racing, Greyhounds Queensland has a responsibility under the Racing Act 2002 to make decisions about and allocating funds for venue development and other infrastructure relevant to the code. The \$10 million compensation is conditional upon Greyhounds Queensland applying the funds to the development of a new greyhound racing facility. As is publicly known, Greyhounds Queensland has developed a proposal to develop a new stand-alone greyhound racing facility at Logan. The Logan site is crown land and the government has indicated to Greyhounds Queensland that, should its final investigation show that the Logan proposal is viable, the government is willing to consider transferring the land at no cost to the code. This provides the Logan proposal with a major advantage over any possible alternative sites that would need to be purchased.

The Gold Coast Greyhound Racing Club has identified possible alternative sites, and discussions between the club and its control body are continuing. I have met with both the Gold Coast Greyhound Racing Club and the greyhound control board to discuss these issues. Greyhounds Queensland has recently issued a show-cause notice to the Gold Coast Greyhound Racing Club as to why the club's licence should not be renewed. The club has until 7 August 2009 to provide submissions to the control body. As a show-cause notice has been issued and we must follow due process, it is inappropriate for me to comment on this matter.

The loss of the use of the Parklands site is no doubt perceived as a blow by the club. However, I believe the \$10 million compensation will provide the control body and the code an opportunity to develop a new racing facility that will help secure the code's future. It is also no secret that the greyhound code wants to leave the Albion Park facility and establish its own stand-alone racing venue. Discussions are already underway and both parties have indicated a willingness to resolve this issue. Whilst the loss of Parklands is no doubt perceived as a blow by many, I believe the government's compensation of \$10 million will provide the code with an opportunity to develop a new racing facility.

Mr STEVENS: Minister, I refer you to page 2-14 of the Service Delivery Statement and the reference to racing control bodies. Can the minister confirm that the process to identify and supply four candidates for election to the Queensland Racing board was flawed? What steps will he be taking to remedy the situation?

Mr LAWLOR: Once again, here we go with you making requests for the minister to intervene—

Mr STEVENS: No, no—the process.

CHAIR: Order! Member, you have asked your question. The minister will now answer.

Mr LAWLOR:—in the process which is in place for the selection of board members of Queensland Racing. I have said before that I have no ability to do that. The process, as I understood it, called for nominations. I think about 26 nominations were received. An independent assessment was made of those 26 nominations and they were reduced to four. There were some surprises, I think you would agree—surprises to you and surprises to me, but we were not involved in that process and nor should we have been. There will now be an election, I think in November, to select two of those four that are short-listed to go on to the board of Queensland Racing.

Starting in April this year, with public advertising calling for nominations, Queensland Racing commenced the process for the selection and appointment of two directors to the board whose positions will fall vacant at the company's next annual general meeting. I understand that this selection process, which is in accordance with the company's constitution, is on track to be finalised at the company's annual general meeting to be held in November 2009.

Decisions on the process to be followed for the selection and appointment of directors to Queensland Racing are not matters which the minister has any involvement in. These elections are conducted in accordance with the requirements of Queensland Racing's constitution and the requirements of the Corporations Act 2001. In fact, should a minister attempt to influence or interfere in the appointment of any director, they may well end up being prosecuted for official misconduct, and I am sure you would not want to see that happen to me.

Mr STEVENS: I agree with that.

Mr LAWLOR: Without mentioning names, I think that probably both you and I are concerned about one particular person.

Mr STEVENS: No.

Mr LAWLOR: Well, I was. Again, whilst I might be concerned about it, I do not have any control over it and I will not interfere in the process.

Mr STEVENS: As long as it is lawful.

Mr LAWLOR: On that point, I think you are probably alluding to the issue of people standing on committees nominating and when they are actually appointed they are not allowed to be members of the committee. My understanding is that they will not be members of the committee when they are appointed, whoever the two are. That will then satisfy the requirements of the constitution.

Mr STEVENS: I refer you to page 2-17 of the Service Delivery Statement and your answer to question on notice No. 6, where you state—

Where an application relates to a locality that has been declared an alcohol restricted area, the Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation must have regard to the health and social circumstances that led to the declaration in the first place.

Is this not the same entity that declares an alcohol restricted area in the first instance? It quite clearly is a case of Caesar judging Caesar.

CHAIR: Unfortunately, Minister, the time for this session has expired. It is now time for questions from government members. I refer you to page 2-33 of the Service Delivery Statement in relation to licensing applications. In light of these, what measures are you taking as minister to promote harm minimisation in the community?

Mr LAWLOR: Thank you for the question. Minimising harm from the misuse and abuse of alcohol, particularly by young people, remains a high priority of the Queensland government. For some years the government has been actively working to reduce alcohol abuse via a range of strategies, including a 3 am lockout, state-wide advertising bans on the availability, promotion and sale price of liquor for consumption on licensed premises, and tougher licence conditions, especially for those licensees trading during the high-risk early morning hours.

Further, on 10 September 2008 parliament passed a package of harm minimisation initiatives to encourage the responsible supply and consumption of alcohol. Queensland liquor legislation now prioritises harm minimisation as the first object of the Liquor Act and legislates proactive initiatives to minimise harm from the sale and supply of alcohol. The legislative reforms restrict the trading hours of licensed premises. Ordinary trading hours are now 10 am to midnight for all venues, with limited exceptions for facilities such as casinos and some airports. Approval to trade past midnight—which is higher risk—is still available but is subject to more stringent requirements.

On 20 July the Premier announced that a Queensland-wide parliamentary inquiry would be conducted into alcohol related violence and that the government would work with industry to replace glasses with plastic cups in higher risk venues, including hotels, by the end of the year. The responsible management of licensed venues in responsible service of alcohol training for licensees and managers and responsible service of alcohol training for most employees has encouraged responsible industry practices by increasing awareness of the liquor laws and ensuring the safety of patrons in and around licensed premises. Training for all managers and employees of licensed premises is now mandatory. To further reduce the risks associated with the sale and supply of alcohol, it is now mandatory for all licensees to complete a risk assessment management plan and a community impact statement.

All of these measures are supported by a social marketing community education campaign aimed at changing the drinking culture in Queensland. The Queensland government liquor reform has seen Queensland lead the way with the most significant alcohol reform program in Australia.

Mr PITT: Minister, I refer you to page 2-32 of the Service Delivery Statements in relation to compliance. In light of the recent spate of alcohol related violent incidents, particularly among young people, what government funded programs or initiatives have you introduced as minister to promote responsible drinking in young people and curb problem drinking?

Mr LAWLOR: I thank the member for Mulgrave for the question. The Queensland government is taking decisive steps to tackle problems associated with binge and under-age drinking which are prevalent throughout the country. Since September 2008, amendments to the Liquor Act introduced by my predecessor, the honourable the Treasurer, have made it an offence for adults, including parents, to irresponsibly supply alcohol to minors in private places, with a maximum penalty of \$8,000. Irresponsible supply of liquor provisions target adults who supply unreasonable quantities of alcohol to minors and provide alcohol without responsible supervision. It is also an offence to supply liquor to minors in public, and the supplier can face on-the-spot fines of \$800 or a maximum penalty of \$8,000. Police officers and Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation compliance officers have the power to issue a \$225 on-the-spot fine to minors for possessing or consuming liquor on licensed premises or in public spaces. The factors considered in determining an offence include the quantity of liquor supplied, supervision provided and the age of the minor. The government backed its approach to this issue with a social marketing campaign leading up to the 2008 schoolies week and will work with police and industry to enforce under-age drinking laws, including in the lead-up to schoolies week 2009.

A number of steps are being taken to address the recent prevalence of glassing incidents in Queensland venues. Some of the 'glasses' that I have here are actually the alternatives to glasses which are being trialled in eight licensed premises on the Gold Coast. On 20 July, just this week, the Premier announced a Queensland-wide parliamentary inquiry would be conducted into alcohol related violence and that the government would work with industry to replace glasses with plastic cups in high-risk venues by the end of the year.

Additionally, from 1 July this year a compliance history fee of up to \$20,000 may be imposed on licensees, in addition to the current licence fee, if glassings or other major traumas are found to have occurred in situations where the actions or inactions of licensees are found to have contributed to the serious incident. In introducing these harm minimisation measures, the Queensland government is meeting its commitment to reducing harm from the abuse and misuse of alcohol, particularly in our young people.

Ms O'NEILL: I refer to the Racing Act 2002 and page 2-8 of the Service Delivery Statements. What has your department done to ensure the Queensland racing industry remains competitive with interstate racing?

Mr LAWLOR: I appreciate the interest the member shows in the Queensland racing industry and welcome the opportunity to put on the record the true situation concerning the industry. The Queensland racing industry has never been in better shape and continues to punch well above its weight on the national scene. Turnover in the Queensland industry has increased each year since the privatisation of the Queensland TAB, except in the year of the equine influenza when the industry was decimated. As a result, the product fee earned by the industry has increased. For example, in 2003-04 the Queensland industry earned \$110.7 million; in 2007-08 this had increased to \$125.5 million. This type of increase does not happen by accident. It is a result of good race programming and the effective management of the Queensland industry by our control bodies.

It was interesting to see the headline in the Melbourne *Age* newspaper on 10 July: 'Sunshine state is making every post a winner'. I could not agree more, especially with Rob Heathcote's comment that it will only get better. I seek leave to table a copy of that article.

Leave granted.

Mr LAWLOR: Queensland's control bodies have the advantage of operating within a legislative framework that provides them maximum commercial flexibility to respond to the challenges that exist within the dynamic, ever-changing racing and wagering landscape. The government supports our industry, not with promises of free handouts of millions of dollars but by giving them the tools to get on with the business that they are experts in: managing and growing the racing industry.

We introduced amendments to the Racing Act in 2002 to allow control bodies to charge fees to those who use the Queensland racing product but contribute nothing to the industry. We have provided \$12 million to the thoroughbred code to install synthetic tracks in Queensland, so we are meeting our commitments. One has been operating at Corbould Park, Caloundra since April 2008 and I opened the second one at Clifford Park in Toowoomba earlier this month.

The Queensland thoroughbred code is moving from strength to strength, and this has been recognised by the Australian Racing Board that has shown huge faith in the Queensland industry and rewarded it for the outstanding performance it has delivered on the national stage by increasing the Queensland allocation of black type races from 62 races to 81 over the last five years. I also seek leave to table the QRL press release.

Leave granted.

Mr LAWLOR: Racing in Queensland is doing very well—a fact recognised by leading trainer Lee Freedman, who fears that Queensland may overtake Victoria in a couple of years unless they embrace restructuring of the racing program along the lines that the Queensland code has done. I also seek leave to table a copy of that report.

Leave granted.

Ms FARMER: Minister, I refer you to page 2-32 of the Service Delivery Statements in relation to gaming. What services and programs have been introduced over the past 12 months to support and rehabilitate problem gamblers in Queensland?

Mr LAWLOR: Thank you for the question. If I can go back to another question that was asked by the member for Mermaid Beach, restricted areas under the Liquor Act are done in consultation with the Department of Communities, the police and the local community and are generally enforced by the police. Does that answer your question?

Mr STEVENS: No.

Mr LAWLOR: There is no conflict of interest, anyway.

Since 2002, the Queensland government has provided a state-wide system of treatment and support services for problem gambling. In the past year we have provided \$3.8 million to the Department of Communities and Queensland Health to fund a gambling help services system that includes 13 face-to-face agencies located in approximately 30 regional and metropolitan locations across the state, a 24-hour gambling helpline and an inpatient residential treatment program through the Salvation Army's Brisbane rehabilitation centre known as Moonyah. We have also provided support and funding for a gambling help network to coordinate community education, the development of network resources and the provision of training for gambling counsellors.

During 2008-09, work commenced on a new data and performance management system for the gambling help services to improve the accountability and efficiency of funded services. Developing appropriate education awareness in gambling help responses for Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse communities will be a priority for the government in 2009-10. The adoption of a new national 1800 gambling helpline number has allowed states and territories to work together to promote telephone gambling help services and improve methods of referral. Queensland also contributed to the establishment of the national online counselling website which will become operational from August this year. The online counselling service will allow direct access to online clinical interventions, including 24/7 live counselling and email based counselling and support.

Further, our community awareness and social marketing campaigns aim to raise awareness of the gambling help services where gamblers and their friends or family can seek help. We will continue to improve the services offered through the gambling help service system, with increased funding of \$1.1 million to \$4.9 million in 2009-10 to expand service delivery coverage across the state. For example, on 1 July this year new services opened in Bundaberg and Longreach providing face-to-face counselling, community education and training services for communities in this area.

Mr PITT: I refer you to page 2-32 again in relation to compliance. Minister, can you provide figures in relation to how many liquor licensing staff are currently employed to monitor compliance in licensed venues? How many of these checks have been carried out over the past 12 months? What action has been taken against non-compliant licensees?

Mr LAWLOR: The Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation has staffing for 42 liquor compliance officers throughout the state. There are currently eight vacant positions and in the majority of these vacancies selection processes are being finalised. During the period of 1 July 2008 to 30 June 2009, compliance officers carried out 5,737 compliance investigations at licensed premises throughout Queensland and carried out 1,382 investigations into compliance matters relating to minors.

As a result of those compliance activities, the following actions were taken as a result of investigations: 1,853 warnings or cautions provided to licensees or licensee management; 1,316 infringement notices issued; 147 charges recommended for prosecution; 37 matters recommended for disciplinary action; and 151 breaches referred to other agencies such as the Office of Fair Trading and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. By continuing to monitor alcohol compliance and undertake regular compliance checks, the Queensland government is meeting its commitment to target alcohol abuse and promote harm minimisation within the community.

CHAIR: That concludes the examination of the estimates of the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing. The committee will adjourn for morning tea and the hearing will resume at 10.15 am. We will then be examining the estimates for Tourism Queensland.

Proceedings suspended from 10.00 am to 10.15 am

CHAIR: The Estimates Committee F hearing is now resumed. We will now examining the estimates for Tourism Queensland. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

The first period of questioning is allocated to non-government members. I call the member for Warrego.

Mr HOBBS: I refer to page 2-113 of the Service Delivery Statement and page 44 of the Tourism Queensland annual report. I note that compensated absences accumulated to \$1.070 million for 2008, and I ask: can you explain why it is such a significant amount and is this the result of low morale among Tourism Queensland staff?

Mr LAWLOR: Can you point to the line on that? I have the page.

Mr HOBBS: Page 2-113 and it looks like it is page 44.

Mr LAWLOR: I am sorry, I can't—

Mr HOBBS: The bottom line is that the compensated absences accumulate to over a million dollars. It is a significant amount. Is this the result of low morale among Tourism Queensland staff?

Mr LAWLOR: I cannot make much sense of the page there. I do not know if you have got the right page. If it is to do with staff morale I will hand that question over to Anthony Hayes, the CEO of Tourism Queensland.

Mr Hayes: With regard to staff morale, I am actually very proud to say that our most recent staff survey reported a staff satisfaction rate of 96 per cent which is a dramatic increase versus the year before and the year before that. We have spent a great deal of time focusing on staff morale. The number you referred to is comparable to the year before. Looking at the year before, it was \$1.007 million, so it has not actually changed. I am very pleased to say that we have spent a great deal of time focusing on the strategic direction of the organisation, the direction from the government in terms of where we are heading. We have changed fundamentally the entire nature and role of the organisation over the last two years while I have been the chief executive. As a result of that one of the key focuses has been on staff morale and staff productivity. We have actually brought the number of staff down quite a bit over that period of time and increased productivity. However, what we have been doing is refocusing the organisation on marketing and product development and as a result of that I think staff satisfaction, from the result of the last survey, highlights the fact that we have been heading in the right direction. Staff morale has probably never been higher.

Mr STEVENS: I refer you to page 2-113 and 2-116 of the Service Delivery Statement and the reference to 'other revenue' which included the sale of Sunlover Holidays, and I ask: why were tenders not called for the sale of Sunlover Holidays?

Mr LAWLOR: Sunlover Holidays originally, as you are aware, was a part of Tourism Queensland. On 5 November 2008 the Treasurer and my predecessor announced the cashing out of the long-term licence of former state wholesaler Sunlover Holidays to the existing operators, the Australian Outback Travel Group. The early sale of Sunlover Holidays was in the best interests of the Queensland tourism industry. An independent evaluation found the sale price was a good deal for Queensland. This early sale created certainty around the ending of the lease, helped increase income for Queensland tourism operators by allowing Tourism Queensland to fulfil the much needed role of leading Queensland tourism products in online distribution and bookings for greater effectiveness, allowing Tourism Queensland and the Queensland tourism industry greater creative freedom in cooperative tactical marketing activities in these challenging times. The final decision was a result of ongoing discussions between the Australian Outback Travel Group and the Queensland government, an independent evaluation of an offer made by the Australian Outback Travel Group and a dramatic change within the national tourism wholesaling environment since the Australian Outback Travel Group licence arrangements were made in 2005.

The cashing out, worth \$9.7 million, is certainly good news for the tourism industry given it will provide an important and much needed injection into tourism with the majority of the proceeds, \$9 million, directed back into the Queensland tourism industry. It will allow Tourism Queensland to enter into commercial arrangements that will generate even more money for the tourism industry. In 2009-10 \$1 million per year for three years from the proceeds of the sale will be established as central pool funds to be allocated on a contestable basis to support tourism organisations working cooperatively on whole-of-region programs, outstanding regional and subregional programs and regional tourism organisations that are merging. I am confident Tourism Queensland will continue to have a strong working relationship with the Australian Outback Travel Group into the future.

Under the terms of the licence agreement the AOT Group had an exclusive option to purchase Sunlover Holidays. Under the intellectual property agreement the AOT Group agreed to the following ongoing commitments: to use the Sunlover Holidays brand exclusively in promoting Queensland travel products and services until 30 June 2011 and to maintain the head office in Queensland until 30 June 2011.

Mr STEVENS: I appreciate that answer and the value of the sale of Sunlover Holidays. Government policy—and Tourism Queensland is a government funded organisation—is quite clearly to find out if the best price is being achieved and that there are not mates' rates being done on the side with Sunlover. It is not a good thing to do. You go out to public tender. This was not a public tender process. It is very unusual for a government funded body to go out to a direct sale to whoever and for whatever good reason. Obviously it was a good tender as per the independent advice, but was it the best tender? You cannot tell me, can you, if it was the best tender if you did not go out to the tender process? Why did they not go to a tender process?

Mr LAWLOR: As I have just explained, under the terms of the licence agreement which was held by Sunlover Holidays, the AOT Group had an exclusive option to purchase. That was part of their agreement. In addition to that, Ernst & Young independently assessed the negotiated sale price and outcomes and confirmed that the sale represented an appropriate commercial outcome. Their

independent assessment was that Sunlover Holidays was valued at between \$9.6 million and \$9.9 million. Tourism Queensland and Treasury assessed that as being a reasonable price, but remembering that a condition of their agreement was that they had first option to purchase the business of Sunlover Holidays.

Mr STEVENS: I refer you to page 2-111 of the Service Delivery Statement with reference to the New Zealand market and to your answer to question on notice No. 10, and I ask: do you agree, considering the New Zealand market is 26 per cent of the overall international tourism market for Queensland, that spending only \$520,000 of \$14.6 million of Tourism Queensland's international marketing budget, which equates to only 3.6 per cent of the overall internationally marketing spend, is appropriate?

Mr LAWLOR: The New Zealand market presents immediate ongoing opportunities for the Queensland tourism industry. It is currently Queensland's largest international source market. In the year ending 30 March 2009 Queensland received over 400,000 visitors from New Zealand. These visitors delivered \$561 million in economic benefits to the state and supported 5,500 Queensland jobs.

Queensland received 41 per cent of all New Zealand visitors to Australia, a trend that has been maintained over the past five years. The tourism forecasting committee forecast that the compound annual growth rate of New Zealand arrivals to Australia for the period 2012 to 2017 would be 1.4 per cent. Queensland will remain an extremely attractive destination for New Zealanders due to the competitive advantage associated with being a short-haul destination, increased availability in air capacity and competitive airfares. In 2009-10 an additional \$12 million is allocated to Tourism Queensland under the one year of the 2009 Protecting Tourism Jobs \$36 million election commitment which is currently subject to approval by myself, the Premier and Tourism Queensland's board. Based on this funding Tourism Queensland will aggressively target the New Zealand market in 2009-10.

Tourism Queensland has a satellite office in Auckland which maintains the Queensland brand presence throughout New Zealand and the Pacific. In 2008-09 Tourism Queensland spent a total of \$1.472 million on the promotion of Queensland to the New Zealand market, including the running costs of the Auckland office. Tourism Queensland's contribution was \$520,000 and the organisation attracted \$952,000 in cooperative investment from industry partners. The amount of cooperative investment attracted by Tourism Queensland is a testament to the work of the organisation and its drive to maximise in-market opportunities and associated partnership activities.

The New Zealand office consists of 2.5 full-time equivalent staff, a regional director for New Zealand and the Pacific, a marketing manager and a part-time administrative coordinator. These staff are responsible for developing and implementing marketing campaigns in line with Tourism Queensland strategies and objectives, developing trade and aviation partnerships, providing on-the-ground advice and maximising market opportunities. The New Zealand office reports directly to Tourism Queensland's executive director, international, and is strongly supported by Tourism Queensland head office staff including zone directors, international marketing specialists and marketing specialists. The office also operates in partnership with wholesalers, retailers and Tourism Australia to maximise on in-market opportunities and associated partnership activities. The human resources for the New Zealand office are considered sufficient and allow Tourism Queensland to focus and maximise our investment in marketing.

Mr STEVENS: Minister, I refer you to page 2-13 of the Service Delivery Statement and the Queensland Tourism Strategy 2006-2016 and the reference to a third of the 90 recommended actions completed. As outlined in the Tourism Queensland review of February 2009 conducted by Mr David Williams, the Queensland Tourism Strategy outlines 78 action items that need to be delivered during the first four years of the strategy's implementation. Why have only 30 been completed in the first three of those four years?

Mr LAWLOR: Tourism Queensland is responsible for leading 70 Queensland Tourism Strategy initiatives, representing nearly 60 per cent of all the Queensland Tourism Strategy initiatives. Other agencies have lead responsibility for the remaining 40. As at 30 June 2009, Tourism Queensland had completed 63 of the 70 initiatives. This equates to 90 per cent of the total Queensland led initiatives.

There are currently seven initiatives that are still being progressed by Tourism Queensland including, firstly, to prepare a Queensland business events development strategy. The draft plan has been completed but final revision is pending outcomes of the review of events in Queensland pursuant to the Williams report, which was only released in July of this year. Recommendations of the Williams report will impact on the future structure and funding of business events in Queensland and which agency will be responsible for progressing the Queensland business events development strategy.

The second initiative is to prepare an arts and cultural tourism strategy. The draft plan is completed. Two lead agencies—Tourism Queensland and Arts Queensland—have undergone significant restructures and major changes in focus and are revisiting the format for the strategy while still meeting the original intent.

The third initiative is development of regional ecotourism plans. The Sandstone Country Regional Ecotourism Plan and Cape York camping and national park action plan were completed on schedule. The completion of the Sunshine Coast hinterland plan has been rescheduled to September 2009 as commencement of the planning process is dependent upon delivery of the Sunshine Coast Regional Tourism Investment and Infrastructure Plan, which was completed at the end of 2008.

The fourth initiative is to prepare a Queensland digital strategy complementary to the national online strategy. The national online strategy was only finalised in October 2008. The Queensland digital strategy draft has now been completed and approval is expected in August of this year.

The fifth initiative is to undertake research to evaluate the economic contribution and effectiveness of tourism market activities. After completion of an extensive review, a position paper recommending various options to proceed was prepared for the Queensland Tourism Strategy steering committee. The position paper has not yet been considered by the steering committee.

The sixth initiative is to establish the tourism forecasting forum for Queensland growth forecasts. Due to the delayed outcomes of the national forecasting committee, the establishment date will be reviewed during the 2009-10 financial year.

The seventh initiative is to prepare a Queensland tourism research strategy. The draft plan is completed. Final approval is pending support from stakeholders during the final consultation phase. This is currently with DEEDI.

Mr STEVENS: Minister, I refer you to pages 2-113 and 2-116 of the Service Delivery Statement and the reallocation of the administration of the \$5.985 million regional tourism organisation funding grants to the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation. I note in your response to question on notice No. 4 that you are returning responsibility for administering these funds to Tourism Queensland. Does this action, just six weeks after the budget decision, indicate that you or your department have no idea which entity is best suited to look after the interests of tourism?

Mr LAWLOR: I am pleased to advise that the Queensland government has increased funding for Queensland tourism in 2009-10. In 2009-10 there is increased funding available for regional tourism organisations, local governments, chambers of commerce and similar organisations as a result of 2008-09 tourism industry reforms. The additional \$3 million over three years—that is, \$1 million per annum—is from the proceeds of the sale of Sunlover Holidays' intellectual property. This funding is available on a contestable basis for special projects which may include amalgamation.

The Queensland regional tourism organisation network has existed in various forms since Tourism Queensland's inception in 1979. The network has been supported financially by the Queensland government through Tourism Queensland since this time. Grants for regional tourism organisations include a base grant of \$3.11 million per annum for regional tourism organisations and \$1 million as part of the Queensland Tourism Strategy initiatives to assist regional tourism organisations to implement special development projects and convention and incentive bureau funding of \$1.875 million.

The process to develop the formal requirements for the regional tourism organisations' base grant funding and special grant funding is now being finalised. Current Queensland government funding for regional tourism organisations includes the \$3.11 million that I mentioned as base funding to support regional tourism organisations to build and sustain the tourism industry in their regions. During 2008-09 Brisbane Marketing, Tourism Tropical North Queensland and the Outback Queensland Tourism Authority were allocated \$300,000 or \$714 in base funding.

Mr STEVENS: Mr Chairman, the answer has no relevance to the question.

CHAIR: Order, honourable member. You have asked your question and the minister will answer it as he deems appropriate.

Mr STEVENS: It has to have relevance.

CHAIR: You heard my ruling. Do you want to go into private session to discuss it further?

Mr LAWLOR: In addition, the department will not take up the recommendation that it directly administer regional tourism funding. It was felt that Tourism Queensland had the most direct involvement with regional tourism organisations in this regard and was therefore better placed to manage these arrangements. So the administration of those funds will be returned to Tourism Queensland. Funding could also have been managed from the department—

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

Mr PITT: I understand the Tourism Queensland's Best Job in the World campaign picked up a swag of awards at this year's international advertising awards in Cannes. Can you advise what awards we have won? Have there been other wins for Tourism Queensland in the past 12 months?

Mr LAWLOR: The success of the Best Job in the World campaign, which was recognised at the 2009 Cannes Lions International Advertising Festival, was an outstanding achievement and demonstrates Tourism Queensland's ability to showcase Queensland on the global stage. These prestigious awards are the advertising industry's equivalent of the Oscars.

The Best Job in the World campaign won eight awards at the festival and an unprecedented three of the festival's 11 grand prix awards—the Cyber Grand Prix, the PR Grand Prix and the Direct Marketing Grand Prix. It achieved three gold lions: for media for travel, entertainment and leisure; direct marketing for travel, entertainment and leisure; and direct marketing for traffic building. It won two inaugural PR lions for travel, tourism and leisure and best use of the internet, digital media and social media.

The Best Job in the World campaign won more grand prix awards in a single festival than any other campaign during the festival's 55-year history. To put it in perspective, the Best Job in the World campaign was up against more than 22,000 entries from 86 countries, including major global brands with multimillion dollar budgets. So to scoop the pool was an incredible achievement. This firmly cements Tourism Queensland as the world's most creative tourism organisation.

Tourism Queensland's Best Job in the World campaign also scooped the pool at Australia prestigious Interactive Advertising Bureau Awards this month, winning the awards for brand awareness and positioning and the best of show. In June the Best Job in the World campaign took home the honour of being best of show at one awards show as well as being named winner of the 2009 Gourmet Traveller Travel Awards for the best tourism innovator.

Other awards included the Opal Award for Excellence for the best state tourism organisation at the corroboree awards, Australia's leading state tourism organisation from the Australia's Society of Travel Writers Awards, a gold award for market effectiveness for the After the Rain campaign from the International Academy of Visual Arts and an outstanding achievement award at the Interactive Media Council awards. Tourism Queensland's London office was the winner of the best Australian campaign targeted at a luxury audience at the Tourism Australia OzCARS awards and winner of the viral marketing award for the After the Rain campaign at the International Academy of the Visual Arts' 15th annual Communicator Awards. It has won a hell of a lot of awards.

The publicity and benefit of the Best Job in the World campaign continues. Ben Southall has taken up his position as the caretaker of the islands of the Great Barrier Reef and is also travelling around the rest of Australia. Unsuccessful candidates have also been engaged by Tourism Queensland including, for instance, Mieko from Japan who came down to the Gold Coast and ran in the half marathon. She visited many of the attractions available on the Gold Coast, such as Seaworld. She was very popular. In fact, she had her own TV crew following her around and filming her every move and every comment.

Ms O'NEILL: Minister, I again refer to Queensland's Best Job in the World campaign throughout 2008-09. Can you please advise what further budget allocations have been made to capitalise on the success of this campaign in 2009-10? How are these efforts supporting jobs?

Mr LAWLOR: Tourism Queensland will continue to build on the phenomenal success of the unique Best Job in the World marketing campaign through 2009-10. This campaign will really assist the government in meeting our commitments. This internationally lauded campaign has been so successful it would simply not make sense if Queensland did not move to maximise the opportunities this phenomenal success offers.

Tourism Queensland has allocated a further \$1.5 million in 2009-10 to convert the success of the Best Job in the World campaign into bottom-line results for the Queensland tourism industry. Sales based elements of the Best Job in the World campaign started in earnest from 1 July when Ben Southall started his job. To date, island caretaker Ben Southall has had more than 2,000 followers on Twitter. There have been over eight million visits to the island and reef job website.

The Best Holiday campaign will feature best job candidates Magali Heuberger from the Netherlands, George Karellas from Ireland, Mirjam Novak from Germany and our own James Hill. Tourism Queensland, in partnership with Sunlover Holidays, has launched 'Unreal Deals', a \$1 million holiday marketing campaign that promotes more than 150 deals from 130 operators across Queensland. With the tag line 'the best deals on the best Queensland holidays', the campaign is running from 19 July to 23 August on television, press, radio and online. The campaign will particularly target Sydney and Melbourne's social fun seekers as well as holidaymakers in Brisbane and other parts of Australia. We have seen the best holiday in the world, best adventure in the world, best honeymoon in the world, best sailing in the world, best diving in the world and best natural adventures in the world. Now we will build on them internationally.

Tourism Queensland is currently running an online campaign featuring candidates Greg Reynen from Singapore and Australia's James Hill which focuses on tropical North Queensland's adventure activities. Japanese candidate Mieko was also appointed as a Queensland Tourism ambassador in

Japan recently. Mieko is immensely popular in Japan. As I mentioned, she ran in the half marathon on the Gold Coast. She had a team of Japanese film crew documenting her every move. All that is great publicity for Queensland when it gets back to Japan.

Mieko performed her first official duties earlier this month escorting a group of Japanese media around the Gold Coast. Japan remains a vital international market for Queensland with 252,000 Japanese visitors spending \$458 million in Queensland in the year to 2009 which supports 3,500 tourism jobs.

Ms FARMER: I refer the minister to last year's tourism network review. What progress has been made in implementing the recommendations of this review?

Mr LAWLOR: The state response to the review's recommendations were the key tourism reforms announced last September by my colleague the Hon. Desley Boyle. These reforms were designed to better position the industry by providing support where it is most effective. These reforms included better resourced regions, a stronger and more diverse network, increased private sector investment in tourism, partnerships with industry within seven new tourism zones and refocusing of Tourism Queensland activities.

Each of the tourism zones has now been established with a Tourism Queensland director working closely with the relevant regional organisations and industry to help assist the local network to best support operators during the current economic downturn. In addition to the seven officers announced last year, a further four are being made available by my department, taking the total number of departmental tourism officers in the regions to 11. Appointments are now being finalised. These additional resources will enhance the capacity of departmental teams to effect tourism investment in the regions. I am pleased to advise that a key result of these reforms is that Tourism Queensland significantly increased its funding support for tourism in regional Queensland in 2009-10. From this year a central \$3 million pool of funds—\$1 million a year over three years—will be allocated on a contestable basis to support tourism organisations working cooperatively on whole-of-region programs, outstanding regional and subregional projects and regional tourism organisations that are merging. This is in no small part about meeting our commitment to create and protect tourism jobs.

Grants for regional tourism organisations include a base grant of \$3.11 million per annum funding for regional tourism organisations, \$1 million as part of the Queensland Tourism Strategy initiative to assist regional tourism operators or organisations to implement special development projects, and convention and incentive bureau funding of \$1.875 million. Grants are available by application. In 2008-09, grants between \$45,000 and \$145,000 were made to tourism organisations from the Gold Coast to the Far North of the state.

Mr PITT: Given the strong dependence of small business throughout regional Queensland on a healthy and viable tourism industry, can the minister please advise the committee of any indicators of the health of the relationship between Tourism Queensland and the travel industry?

Mr LAWLOR: Tourism Queensland is involved in an extensive range of industry assistance initiatives, providing business advice and online assistance as well as advice on funding programs and marketing publicity. By ensuring that these efforts are targeted and relevant, Tourism Queensland enjoys a healthy and productive relationship with the travel and tourism industry. Some key examples of this excellent working relationship include the following. The Best Job in the World campaign is a great example of Tourism Queensland producing innovative and unique marketing campaigns to stay ahead of a highly competitive market. The Best Job in the World campaign has gained significant international accolades and to date has generated more than \$330 million in global publicity—global publicity that is now being converted into bookings for our tourism operators and jobs for Queenslanders.

Conversations with Tourism Queensland forums are currently being held across the state, with recent events being held in Cairns and on the Gold Coast. These provided industry with direct access to Tourism Queensland specialists and key decision makers. Importantly, they also provide Tourism Queensland with firsthand information about the needs and issues of the tourism industry in each region. Industry feedback has been outstanding and reflects the strong relationship between the tourism industry and Tourism Queensland. The industry has also been very supportive of the deployment of the Tourism Queensland directors into zones across the state, and one of the main benefits seen by industry is the close contact with Tourism Queensland and the support available at their fingertips.

To assist the tourism industry to become market ready and get better returns from their international campaigns, Tourism Queensland has developed and delivered international-ready programs. These include basic market-ready training, mentoring and support to attend the Australian Tourism Exchange for inbound tour operators working in Sydney. Recent Tourism Queensland marketing campaigns have delivered very strong bottom line returns to operators who have participated and the success of these campaigns is demonstrated in the strong industry demand for ongoing tactical marketing opportunities. The CEO could possibly add something further to this.

Mr Hayes: One of the most important outcomes of the Tourism Network Review of last year was a very clear direction that we need to work more effectively in partnership with all of the other tourism organisations, the regional tourism organisations. We took that advice very seriously and as a result we have introduced seven zone directors who are now based throughout the state. So instead of Brisbane occasionally coming into town, we actually live in the regions now.

CHAIR: If you have more to contribute, the member might offer you an extension.

Mr PITT: I would be pleased to do that.

Mr Hayes: The zone directors' role now that they are in the regions is to work more closely with the local industry. I think one of the things we had done in the past was to quite rightly focus on the bigger operators who can work in partnership with us because they have marketing funds. One of the key strategies and one of the key directions from both our board and the minister has been that we need to engage more effectively with smaller operators so that we are providing a greater level of support to bed and breakfast owners, mum and dad operators et cetera. So we are looking very closely at how we can work more effectively in partnership with the smaller end of the tourism industry and not just the larger end.

We have established closer partnership relationships with each of the regional tourism organisations because we are now in the region with them and we meet with them almost daily to talk about opportunities where we can work closely together. We have also introduced a new worldwide marketing strategy—a global brand strategy. The key focus of that is to look at how we provide support to some of the smaller tourism areas within Queensland. Obviously we have the very strong areas such as the Gold Coast, Cairns et cetera, but how do we provide a greater level of support and a greater brand presence for some of those smaller destinations that are still growing? The way to do that is to bring them under the umbrella of Brand Queensland and to more effectively market the experiences that you can have in those places rather than necessarily the destination in itself. So by having these people in the network out there in the field, we are finding that the relationship has grown dramatically and we believe we are providing a greater end result for the tourism industry.

Mr PITT: Thank you.

Ms O'NEILL: Minister, I refer to efforts made to expand airline activity in Queensland. Can you please advise the committee how effective the government's efforts have been?

Mr LAWLOR: Tourism Queensland activities associated with airline route development are guided by the Queensland Commercial and Tourism Aviation Plan. The plan provides the strategic framework to drive future airline development opportunities for the state. Tourism Queensland looks to identify and support these opportunities through a range of activities including airline route development. Tourism Queensland develops detailed business cases to present to domestic and international airlines. These are designed to encourage airlines to increase the frequency and capacity of domestic and international services to Queensland destinations. In terms of cooperative marketing, Tourism Queensland focuses on building demand for domestic and international air services to Queensland destinations to improve the long-term viability of air services. In some cases, Tourism Queensland will enter into specific cooperative marketing arrangements with airlines.

With regard to policy and regulatory environment, the Queensland government's Aviation Steering Committee influences the development, refinement and implementation of the national air services policy and economic regulatory framework under the auspices of the Queensland government Aviation Steering Committee. Tourism Queensland provides input into aviation policy development such as the national aviation green paper and bilateral air service negotiations between Australia and other countries. To date, successes from the tourism assistance package have translated into a three-time weekly Jetstar Gold Coast to Cairns service from 3 February this year and reinstating a link between the west of Japan and Cairns. This route is expected to translate in up to \$18.9 million in estimated annual visitor expenditure. There has also been an increase from two to four flights per week on the Continental Micronesia Guam to Cairns route from March 2009, improving access for Japanese visitors travelling to Cairns via Guam. This result is expected to translate in up to \$8.5 million in estimated annual visitor expenditure.

Recent domestic successes include on 4 July Virgin Blue launched a new daily service between Sydney and Hamilton Island. In April of this year Virgin Blue launched a new daily service between Townsville and Canberra, Gold Coast, Cairns and Rockhampton. Tiger Airways launched a new daily service to the Gold Coast from its base in Adelaide. Tiger commenced the new flights on 1 March 2009 and now provides an additional 1,260 weekly domestic seats to the Gold Coast. In March 2009 QantasLink commenced 11 new services between Townsville and Mount Isa, operating the route with a 72-seat Dash 8. The new flights add approximately 792 inbound seats to Mount Isa.

CHAIR: Minister, I refer you back to Tourism Queensland's Best Job in the World campaign. Can the minister please advise the committee of costs associated with the campaign and the initial results?

Mr LAWLOR: Feedback for the Best Job in the World campaign and associated activities so far shows that the islands of the Great Barrier Reef have been positioned as a highly aspirational destination. Results received from Tourism Queensland's international offices including a direct result

from Tourism Queensland, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Nordic tactical campaigns and STA Travel that offer holidays to the youth backpacker gap year market reported that growth to Queensland during the campaign period of February to April 2009—

CHAIR: Sorry, Minister. Unfortunately the time allocated for questions by government members has expired. We will now have two blocks of questioning. I call the member for Mermaid Beach.

Mr STEVENS: Minister, I refer you to page 2-113 of the Service Delivery Statement, and I ask: in the 2008-09 budget fixed operating costs were 33 per cent of TQ's total budget. In the 2009-10 budget, that percentage will rise to 40 per cent due to non-recurrent funding programs expiring. How can you justify the seven per cent increase when the tourism industry needs more promotional activity rather than more fixed operating costs?

Mr LAWLOR: The industry will get more promotional activity as a result of the \$12 million per annum that has been allocated in the last election campaign by the government, including administered grants and the \$12 million allocated under year 1 of the 2009 Protecting Tourism Jobs, which is currently subject to final approval by the Premier, the Tourism Queensland board and myself. The total funding for Tourism Queensland from the Queensland government in 2009-10 is \$62.52 million. As a result of the election commitment, the net increase in 2009-10 is approximately \$11 million when compared to the 2008-09 budget allocation of \$51.56 million.

This total revenue of \$62.52 million is made up of the following: \$38.01 million for a base grant budget; a \$3 million special marketing grant for the proceeds of the sale of Sunlover Holidays intellectual property; special purpose funding for 2009-10 of approximately \$2.529 million consisting of \$1.629 million for the Queensland Tourism Strategy and \$0.9 million for airline agreements; and \$18.99 million in extra funding comprised of \$6.99 million in grant funding for other tourism organisations and year 1 of the \$36 million election commitment to Tourism Queensland. Both are included in the budget for the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation. I approved the transfer of the \$6.99 million to Tourism Queensland funding and I will allocate the \$12 million for year 1 of the protecting jobs strategy, the \$36 million election commitment, following final approval by the Premier, Tourism Queensland's board and myself.

The \$62.52 million in funding for 2009-10 will be applied as follows: \$3.11 million to the regional tourism organisations; \$1 million in QTS funding for regional tourism organisations; \$1.875 million for convention and incentive grants; \$1 million for the new contestable grants; \$32.45 million on marketing and development, excluding cooperative marketing income; \$15.62 million for employee expenses; and \$7.465 million for Brisbane, regional and international operations, including depreciation and amortisation. Tourism Queensland also receives income from industry partners investing in cooperative marketing programs. Based on the \$62.52 million in funding for 2009-10, Tourism Queensland's target for cooperative investment from the Queensland tourism industry is \$10.2 million.

Mr STEVENS: Minister, I have just asked you a question in relation to Tourism Queensland's budget in terms of its fixed operating costs, to which you have advised this estimates committee that your government has committed another \$12 million to Tourism Queensland as part of that \$36 million announced last year. Can you show me in the documents where the additional promised \$12 million is with Tourism Queensland?

Mr LAWLOR: It is currently in the department's budget.

Mr STEVENS: No, Tourism Queensland.

CHAIR: Order!

Mr LAWLOR: The department will provide a grant of \$42.6 million to Tourism Queensland. For information on this administered item, there is a separate section for Tourism Queensland. The Queensland government approved a \$36 million package over three years to protect tourism jobs. I will just ask Michelle to explain that.

Ms Clarke: On page 2-21 of the SDS under the heading 'Tourism Queensland', the minister has just read those words. It also says under the heading of Tourism Queensland—

The Queensland Government approved a \$36 million package over three years to Protect Tourism Jobs.

It will be administered through the department.

Mr STEVENS: Thank you, Michelle. That quite clearly tells me that Tourism Queensland does not have the \$12 million in funding if it is going through the department.

Mr LAWLOR: That is not correct.

CHAIR: That is another question. Can we give the minister another three minutes.

Mr LAWLOR: It is in the department's budget and it will be restored to Tourism Queensland. It is as simple as that. The work is being done, as we speak, to spend the \$12 million. I might again defer to Michelle Clarke.

Ms Clarke: All of Tourism Queensland's funding comes to Tourism Queensland via the department.

Mr STEVENS: Correct, but through you, Minister, to Michelle—

CHAIR: We will start the clock again on the minute, please, and give the member a minute to ask his question.

Mr STEVENS: Quite clearly, in the budgetary documents for Tourism Queensland there is no \$12 million to be found and yet this was an announcement made previously last year. Now, Michelle has just advised that it will be going to the department. Where is it going to Tourism Queensland in the budget documents?

Mr LAWLOR: And it will be released to Tourism Queensland upon completion of the three-year plan, which will be completed, I believe, in September of this year. So when that three-year plan is completed, that will go to cabinet and the \$12 million is released to Tourism Queensland. But in the meantime, Tourism Queensland is already spending that money, effectively designing campaigns, promotions and so on.

Mr STEVENS: Thank you. I refer to page 2-113 of the Service Delivery Statements under the heading 'Grants and other contributions' expected for the year 2009-10, and I ask: in relation to the launch of Tourism Queensland's landmark sustainability project, where the five pilot regions of Winton, North Stradbroke Island, Airlie Beach, Magnetic Island, the Pioneer Valley and Cape Hillsborough will be the focus, how much will Tourism Queensland outlay for the cost of this project? What is the ecotourism revenue expected as a result of this project?

Mr LAWLOR: Is that page 2-113?

Mr STEVENS: Page 2-113.

Mr Hayes: That is actually an important part of the strategic direction that Tourism Queensland and the department are heading in in partnership. We believe that there is obviously a marketing aspect to what we do, and that is very important, but equally important is to look at the longer-term future for tourism throughout the state and to identify the key opportunities that exist in some of the other regions where we have not traditionally promoted tourism the way we possibly could, provided the product is there. Looking at the opportunities provided by sustainable tourism, looking at the opportunities provided by Indigenous tourism, there are a number of key opportunities that are there. It is a matter of making sure that we deliver those products first before we start marketing them aggressively. The most important thing is to make sure that, if people are coming to Queensland, they have a satisfactory tourism experience. So from our perspective, in many ways that development work that we are now starting to do is very important and we plan to focus on that over the next five years and beyond.

Mr STEVENS: Thank you. I refer to the sale of Sunlover Holidays, which was sold for \$9.7 million. The difference between the 2008-09 actuals of \$12.755 million and the budgeted amount of \$3.85 million is \$8.896 million. Can the minister explain where the shortfall of \$804,000 is being utilised out of that AOT sale of \$9.7 million?

Mr LAWLOR: The proceeds of the sale of Sunlover Holidays are accounted for as follows: \$0.7 million retained by Tourism Queensland for costs and adjustments; DEEDI's grant payment to TQ reduced by \$6 million in 2008-09; \$3 million transferred to the consolidated fund before being returned to DEEDI as administered appropriation in 2009-10 to be paid as a grant to TQ; \$3 million converted from administered to controlled appropriation for DEEDI for 2008-09; and TQ retaining the remaining \$3 million for international marketing activity in 2008-09.

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

Mr PITT: Can you advise the committee what the government has done to ensure the ongoing viability of the tourism industry in Cairns?

Mr LAWLOR: Actually, the first trip I made as minister was to Cairns and I have been up there since. Basically, I think I have spent more time in Cairns than I have in Southport. Working strategically with Tourism Tropical North Queensland and the industry, Tourism Queensland is strengthening its offerings while building important trade relationships. Recent successes include Jetstar commencing a three-times weekly Gold Coast to Cairns service from 3 February and reinstating a link between western Japan and Cairns. This route is expected to translate to up to \$18.9 million in estimated annual visitor expenditure. In April 2009, Virgin Blue launched new daily services between Townsville and Canberra, the Gold Coast, Cairns and Rockhampton. Cairns operated six charter flights on the Hong Kong to Cairns route, while China Airlines operated five charter flights from Brisbane to Cairns during the 2005 Chinese new year period.

A Conversation with TQ forum was held recently in Cairns to engage with industry on Tourism Queensland's future direction and to ensure that Tourism Queensland's key decision makers received firsthand feedback from the Cairns industry. A Green Season cooperative campaign in October and November in 2008 targeted active explorers in Brisbane and regional Queensland during the traditional quiet wet season. The Best Job in the World campaign is continuing to present significant benefits for

regions, including Cairns and tropical North Queensland. The adventurous side of tropical North Queensland was showcased to the world recently by Best Job in the World candidates Greg Reynen from Singapore and Queenslander James Hill as part of a new online campaign. Greg and James visited the Skyrail, went mountain biking, jungle surfing and much more.

Tourism Queensland, Qantas Airways and Tourism Tropical North Queensland also worked together recently on a concerted international push known as Team Cairns for the third successive year. The \$180,000 campaign offered free a return trip from the US for \$860, with a free additional stopover in one of Australia's or New Zealand's major cities. The results from the campaign in the US drew a 34 per cent increase in flight bookings including Cairns in the itinerary.

An amount of \$2.5 million, part of the Bligh government's \$36 million commitment at the last election, will be spent in 2009-10 on ramping up activities in two strong international markets for tropical North Queensland: New Zealand and China. In 2008-09, Tourism Tropical North Queensland was allocated approximately \$760,000.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms FARMER: Can the minister advise the committee what this government has done to ensure the ongoing viability of the Gold Coast tourism industry?

Mr LAWLOR: Tourism Queensland is working strategically with the Gold Coast regional tourist organisations and industry, which is near and dear to my heart. Recent successes include Jetstar, which is now operating daily services from both Tokyo and Osaka to the Gold Coast. A Conversation with TQ forum was held recently on the Gold Coast to engage with industry on Tourism Queensland's future direction and to ensure that Tourism Queensland's key decision makers receive firsthand feedback from the Gold Coast industry.

The Queensland Hot Hits campaign, which featured the Gold Coast during April and June 2009, promoted key Gold Coast experiences under the themes of the Queensland lifestyle, islands and beaches, adventure and natural encounters. More than 80,000 visitors visited the campaign website. The Gold Coast featured strongly in Queensland Bonus Breaks. In a major retail campaign in March and April 2009, Tourism Queensland partnered with Flight Centre and Virgin Blue for a campaign that encouraged southern tourists to take a Queensland short break by promoting 158 bonus offers from participating operators, including free nights, room upgrades or breakfast. The Bonus Breaks campaign generated approximately 23,655 room nights, which translates to up to \$13.4 million in estimated visitor expenditure. The Gold Coast packages offer generated approximately 37.4 per cent of total sales from the campaign.

In 2008-09, Gold Coast tourism was allocated approximately \$1.1 million, including \$740,000 in convention and incentive funding, for its convention bureau. In 2009, the Gold Coast will continue to be promoted in the core interstate markets of Sydney and Melbourne to build on the Gold Coast's already strong consumer awareness, whilst internationally the focus will be on New Zealand, Asia and the Middle East. Tourism Queensland's focus for the Gold Coast in 2009-10 is to position the Gold Coast as Australia's holiday playground, to continue a very strong international focus on New Zealand, Asia, the Middle East and Japan, to seek opportunities to extend the Gold Coast variety of products by identifying creative new ideas, particularly in the hinterland, and to continue a strong focus on airline success.

The Queensland government provides the Queensland regional tourism organisation network funding of almost \$6 million per annum. In 2008-09, Gold Coast Tourism was allocated approximately \$1.1 million, including \$200,714 for administration and marketing, \$75,500 in regional tourism organisation special funding for a feasibility study of a bicycle exchange program and the scoping and development of walking trails in the Gold Coast hinterland and urban precincts.

Ms O'NEILL: Minister, I refer to recent campaigns such as Too Easy and Bonus Breaks. Can you advise what the multiplier effect is of allocated tourism marketing dollars?

Mr LAWLOR: In 2008 the Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre released a report showing the amount that tourism adds to Queensland's gross state product. This report found that tourism directly contributed \$8.8 billion to Queensland's gross state product. It also found that tourism indirectly contributed \$6.1 billion to Queensland's gross state product. The benefits of tourism expenditure come through the supply chain of the tourism industry. Tourism provides an indirect economic stimulus across many industry sectors and, with the movement of visitors, benefits are dispersed to communities throughout Queensland. For example, a visitor staying overnight at one of our fantastic Queensland destinations not only provides benefits to the hoteliers through the sale of bed nights but also the expenditure flows on and supports jobs in related services such as to reception staff, cleaners, wait staff and to the businesses providing products and services to the accommodation providers, such as tour operators, restaurants and retailers.

In 2008-09 Tourism Queensland delivered a number of domestic campaigns to increase visitation spending and length of stay, as well as to protect tourism jobs in Queensland. The Too Easy campaign generated the sale of an additional 16,000 bed nights, which Tourism Queensland has estimated translates up to \$9.5 million in visitor expenditure. The campaign offered three-nights-for-the-price-of-

two deals. It was launched on 27 July 2008 and ran until 23 August 2008. One million dollars was allocated from the Queensland government's tourism assistance package, with Tourism Queensland and partner Sunlover Holidays contributing \$300,000 and \$200,000 respectively.

The Bonus Breaks campaign generated approximately 23,655 room nights, which translates to up to \$13.4 million in estimated visitor expenditure in Queensland. The campaign encouraged southern tourists to take a Queensland short break by promoting 158 bonus offers from participating operators including free nights, room upgrades and free breakfast. The general gist of both of those campaigns was that for Australians there is no better time to be holidaying in Queensland.

The Queensland government's \$36 million, three-year tourism blueprint to protect jobs further supports the multiplier effect of tourism marketing dollars. Tourism Queensland estimates that in one year marketing activity will result in an additional \$80 million in incremental visitor expenditure and will help to protect the 119,000 jobs that are currently generated by the tourism industry, and it is estimated to directly and indirectly support 1,230 Queensland jobs.

CHAIR: That concludes the examination of the estimates for the portfolio of the Minister for Tourism and Fair Trading. Minister, I thank you and your advisers for your attendance at the committee here this morning.

Mr LAWLOR: Could I make a short statement, Mr Chair?

CHAIR: Very short.

Mr LAWLOR: Firstly, I would like to thank the committee, particularly Chairman Jason O'Brien and his deputy Mr Howard Hobbs, and other committee members for their cooperation. The sigh that you probably all heard was from Peter Henneken. This is his last estimates hearing. Peter is retiring.

CHAIR: I am sure that he is bitterly disappointed.

Mr Henneken: I have only had four this year.

Mr LAWLOR: He has had four this year, but he has attended many more in previous years. I would like to thank Peter for all his efforts over the years and for the suffering that he has put up with from estimates hearings and probably from people like me. Also I thank David Ford; the CEO of Tourism Queensland, Anthony Hayes; Laurie Longland, the Executive Director of Tourism, Food and Wine Industry Development; Michelle Clarke and the Tourism Queensland team; the Executive Director of the Office of Liquor, Gaming and Racing, Mike Sarquis; Mike Kelly, from the Office of Racing; and the Executive Director of the Office of Fair Trading, Brian Bauer. To my personal staff, thank you for the efforts that you have put in over the past two weeks, which have been fairly exciting and not just from the point of view of estimates hearings. Also, thank you very much to the Hansard reporters and the research director. Thank you all very much.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The transcript of this part of the hearing will be available on the Hansard website within two hours from now.

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE F—LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PARTNERSHIPS

In Attendance

Hon. D Boyle, Minister for Local Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships

Department of Communities

Ms L Apelt, Director-General

Ms P Peel, Deputy Director-General, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships

Mr I Fulton, Chief Financial Officer

Ms K Bullock, Director, Financial Services

Department of Infrastructure and Planning

Mr C Jensen, Coordinator General and Director-General

Mr M Kinnane, Associate Director-General

Ms G Sinclair, Assistant Director-General

Ms P Jamieson, Executive Director, Service Delivery

CHAIR: The hearing for Estimates Committee F is now resumed. We will now commence our examination of the estimates for the portfolio for the Minister for Local Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships. On behalf of the committee I welcome the minister, departmental officers and members of the public to the hearing. I am Jason O'Brien, the member for Cook and the chairman of the committee. Mr Howard Hobbs, the member for Warrego, is the deputy chair. The other committee members are Ms Di Farmer, the member for Bulimba; Mr Rob Messenger, the member for Burnett; Ms Mary-Anne O'Neill, the member for Kallangur; Mr Curtis Pitt, the member for Mulgrave; and Mr Ray Stevens, the member for Mermaid Beach.

The next item for consideration is the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Local Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships. The committee will suspend proceedings for lunch from 12.15 to 1.15. I remind all those participating in the hearing today that these proceedings are similar to the parliament to the extent that the public cannot participate in the proceedings. In this regard, I remind members of the public that under standing orders the public may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. The committee has resolved that the proceedings of the committee be broadcast and that photography be allowed during the chair's opening statements and introductory statement of each minister, as well as for a short period during the changeover in organisational units.

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

I ask advisers to the minister to identify themselves when they first come forward to answer a question if the minister refers a question to them so that Hansard can record their names. I also remind members, witnesses and members of the public that no food or drink is permitted to be consumed in the legislative council chamber. Before we begin, I ask that any mobile phones and pagers be switched off or switched to silent mode.

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Local Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships open for examination. The time allocated is two hours and 30 minutes. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, under standing order 177 you are able to make an opening statement that does not exceed five minutes. Would you like to make an opening statement, Minister?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you, Mr Chair, I would like to do so. In these tough economic times, the Bligh government is continuing to deliver on our commitments to local government. We are well and truly exceeding our promise of \$700 million in grants and subsidies over five years by approving \$880 million in just three years. In fact, \$437.8 million remains committed to councils to complete critical infrastructure projects. Some projects that may be of particular interest to committee members include funding for beach access at Agnes Water and a \$3.7 million WasteWise project by Western Downs Regional Council. In fact, some \$20 million is going out to 39 projects for councils right across Queensland just under the environmental infrastructure program.

We have also committed \$37.5 million for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island councils, supporting some 100 regional jobs. The Bligh government has already delivered the new Local Government Act 2009 and we will be delivering a review of the City of Brisbane Act and a new local government electoral act. We are ahead in implementing the national local government financial sustainability program. I am pleased to announce today a program specifically targeting mayors and councillors on the topics of financial management and financial sustainability. Three workshops will be held in different parts of the state. Too often elected members of local governments have delegated financial management to the CEO and officers. Too many have not taken the time to understand their council's financial position or to measure their council's performance against that of other local governments. This has to change.

I am pleased to say that positive changes are happening in my other portfolio area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships. This is evidenced in the department's latest quarterly report, key indicators in Queensland's discrete Indigenous communities, which I have tabled this morning. The quarterly report identifies the average rates of school attendance in term 1, 2009 compared to term 1, 2008 and indicates that they have increased in Aurukun, Cherbourg, Coen, Hope Vale, Mapoona, Mornington Island, Palm Island, Pormpuraaw and Wujal Wujal. In Coen the attendance rate in term 1, 2009 was 95.3 per cent, exceeding the statewide average of 91.1 per cent. Some other schools are getting close to the state average—Hope Vale, Cherbourg, Mapoona and Kowanyama—and some friendly competition is occurring, so close are many of the communities to reaching or bettering the Queensland average. There is a gap here, but it may soon be closed. In other communities such as Aurukun, where the gap will take a while to close, the increase in school attendance is remarkable.

Another significant development is the new Remote Indigenous Land and Infrastructure Program Office. With \$32.4 million committed by the Bligh government in funding over five years, this groundbreaking program will resolve protracted land use planning and administration issues once and for all. It will open the way for the building of around 1,100 houses on remote communities and will open the door to other public and private sector developments.

Around 75 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people live in urban areas of the state. If we are to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage, the issues and barriers in urban areas must also be identified and addressed. I will report further on the new urban strategy over the months ahead. This is a time of hope and positive possibilities for Aboriginal and Islander people in the state of Queensland. I am indeed privileged to be their minister in the Bligh government.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. We will commence our examination with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships followed, after lunch, by the local government group, Department of Infrastructure and Planning. The first period of questioning is allocated to non-government members. I call the member for Warrego.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, I note that you have launched the whole-of-government reconciliation action plan to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage. I refer to page 3.3, dot point 7. Torres Strait Islanders advise me that the Torres Strait is the most expensive postcode to live in Australia. The cost of freight, which is only delivered once a week, travel constraints—they had no air service for quite some time throughout the islands, although there is one there now—the cost of fuel, the lack of competition and availability of land are some of the issues. Minister, your government has been in power for nearly 20 years. Why are these Queensland citizens denied things the lack of which mainland Australians would not tolerate?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. I am pleased to say that I have been to the Torres Strait as Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships twice since I have been in the job and of course in previous representative roles I have visited the Torres Strait. What I saw in visiting again as Minister for Local Government as well as the ATSIP minister were the huge improvements that have been made right across the Torres Strait, though I can particularly attest to those on the islands I visited.

My last visit was at the request of and in company with the Torres Strait Island Regional Council. We went first to Saibai and then from there to Poruma and then to Erub for the 'Coming of the Light' celebrations. On all islands the council representatives and elders met with me and took me to show me how the islands were going. They all said to me how much improvement there has been in housing on the islands, how much improvement there has been in education on the islands and also how much improvement there has been with regard to health facilities on the islands. Some of us are old enough to remember how it was 10 to 20 years ago.

Nonetheless, I do not step aside from the real issues facing the Torres Strait and the Torres Strait Island Regional Council. They were of course very forthright in putting their issues to me. Yes, the issue of a freight subsidy is one that is high on their agenda. They are having discussions with the Commonwealth government about that. It would make things much easier for them. Yes, that bears on their stores issue, for example, and the cost of food and the importance of there being fresh fruit and vegetables—healthy food. Of course under one of the Q2 targets we are absolutely concerned for Torres Strait Islanders and their health and the importance therefore of food. That is why we are undertaking a review at this time of the retail stores to look at what we might do better than we have done already.

The other problems that were mentioned in your question are problems that the council raised with me, particularly the difficulty of transport and the cost of transport, particularly air transport and their concerns about encouraging business on the islands, particularly tourism business, and how they can possibly do so unless there are reliable and affordable transport links. I am pleased to say that several state and Commonwealth government departments are working with the regional council and the Torres Shire Council on particularly access through Horn Island. There are no immediate fixes, but I can say this to you and that is that the amalgamation of the Torres Strait islands into one council has been very successful thanks to the hard work of the elected members and the officers of the council.

Mr HOBBS: Thank you, Minister. I recognise what you are saying. There are some slight improvements in relation to housing and so forth. Yes, that is happening but the big picture stuff is not. Again, I refer to the same page 3-3, dot point 7. I refer to the lack of action to recognise and rectify numerous outstanding issues—and there are still a lot of those, as I am sure anyone who goes there would recognise—policing, high cost of living, social housing, education, health and the government owned stores, as you just mentioned. Will you, as Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, undertake a genuine coordination of these issues to improve living conditions? Minister, there has been a lot of launching of action plans but there has been little or no action on the ground in reality.

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. I argue with its premise. There has been a lot of action on the ground, and in your second question you did concede that there have been some improvements. We might argue about the extent of them, but there have definitely been improvements. Yes, some of the areas that you raised are ongoing issues about which more needs to be done. It is for the education minister and the health minister and the police minister to address the matters particularly under their portfolio.

Nonetheless, my role as the lead minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships means that the council was not at all reluctant to speak to me while I was there about issues that are relevant to all state agencies and I have not been reluctant to take up all of those issues with the responsible ministers to put the position of the Torres Strait Island Regional Council as well as to encourage those departments to then deal directly with representatives in the Torres Strait. An example of this is the follow through that I and my department have made in discussions with Police Commissioner Bob Atkinson and the police minister. They intend to visit the Torres Strait shortly. There are discussions already underway about community police and police liaison officers and how that service may be progressed in the years to come. But that is a matter further then for their portfolio.

I am pleased to let you know that part of what you are asking for has already happened. It has been put to me by the Torres Strait Island Regional Council that we do need a forum through which all of the issues associated with state government can be managed, whether that requires a number of ministers to attend at the same time or a different form of negotiation table. Because we are talking about covering such a huge area and such a large range of issues, the program that is presently running in the Aboriginal communities may need adjusting for the Torres Strait communities. I have committed to the council that we should have at least one forum in which we can discuss what better mechanism for integrated management of the ongoing issues in the Torres Strait might occur.

Mr HOBBS: I, too, have visited the Torres Strait and the Torres Strait Island Regional Council. I must have been at a different meeting from the one that you had. They wrote down quite a few things that they have some real concerns with. They advised me that they are burdened with extra costs due to travel, location and logistics and that they have less funding to support their island communities than they had before amalgamation. So the question is: will you either provide more funding or de-amalgamate that regional council?

Ms BOYLE: We have accepted that the Torres Strait Island Regional Council has some very real financial difficulties. It is really important for us to understand that those difficulties are not of the new council's making—far from it. The new council is sorting out a whole lot of financial matters that have not been well managed by the individual island councils dating back some years. In fact, the Auditor-General has expressed his concern to me, and I am sure directly to the Torres Strait Island Regional Council, that there is still financial data not available to allow the council to properly put in annual returns for all of the islands that have now become part of the amalgamated council. This reflects very poor practices and leaves the council in great difficulty in terms of knowing what money it actually has got

and what it is owed by various agencies for grants that have not been properly acquitted. I have been pleased to take up that issue and the council has been pleased to receive some extra funds as a consequence of acquitting some of those grants.

Nonetheless, the department has also spoken with the Queensland Treasury Corporation. It is really important that we do make sure that the council is sustainable. Its circumstances are very much more difficult and complex than that of other amalgamated councils in Queensland and so, while it has put in a submission under the program where we call for submissions in relation to costs of amalgamation, this council is being treated under a separate project with Queensland Treasury Corporation. Until we can have some better financial records and acquittals, then we do not know how much is owing to the council and how much in fact there may be a gap between its ability to perform and the resources available. It is an ongoing project.

I take the opportunity to say to you that the CEO of the Torres Strait Island Regional Council and his staff are absolutely energetic in pursuing this as well as they are able and giving good recognition to the considerable efforts that they are making, led by Mayor Fred Gela and the other councillors as well. It is an ongoing matter. There is no easy answer that can be given to the council or that the council can give to us this month or next. But I do undertake to report further to you as these matters become clearer.

Mr HOBBS: Thank you, Minister. I note that one of the grants that was cut to the Torres Strait Island Regional Council was for the construction of new sporting facilities on Yam Island. Maybe you might look at reinstating that grant later on. Minister, the Yalanji people are not allowed to read any part of the ILUA lease agreement before signing. They were told it was state government business and privileged. Will you, as minister responsible for Indigenous affairs, provide a copy of the lease to the committee of the Yalanji people? Surely they must have an opportunity to at least read it. They reckon it was signed by one person. Justice would indicate that they need to be given a reasonable go in this situation.

CHAIR: Member, I do not know that this is a matter that refers to the minister's portfolio. Your previous question was probably one that should have been asked after lunch given that it was a question directly related to local government. I will allow the minister to advise whether it is in fact part of her portfolio, but it sounds like a natural resources matter to me.

Ms BOYLE: The Yalanji ILUA is a matter for the natural resources people. I have no knowledge of the problem that you have raised this morning. So, yes, it should be forwarded to the appropriate minister, Minister Robertson.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, I realise that natural resources is involved in it. However, you just mentioned your whole-of-government approach. I think it is an issue that is significant. As the minister responsible for Indigenous affairs, it would be appreciated if you could get involved with that one because they are not getting much action elsewhere. I also refer to the ongoing action by the Mona Mona people to be recognised and included in the recommendations of the Forde inquiry. As the responsible minister for Indigenous affairs, can you confirm that a facilitator position has been approved by your government and will you consult with the Mona Mona people on a suitable facilitator?

Ms BOYLE: I am going to give you much more detail but the bottom line is: you bet. One of the issues that has occurred in numbers of communities in the cape, as well as in Mona Mona and with the Yalanji people as you referenced before, is the drawing up of Indigenous land use agreements. They have been problematic and that is often because there are numbers of traditional owner groups involved. There can be historical owners as well as those in Mona Mona who believe that they have claims that should be taken into account. This is a very, very difficult issue for Aboriginal people themselves to sort out let alone for those of us who, with the best of intentions, wish to help but do not actually have that cultural understanding or cultural history.

Mona Mona is one such community where there have been historical owners as well as traditional owners from families of people who were moved there many years ago. There have been many discussions over the years about what the tenure arrangements, the land designation, should be in the Mona Mona community. I do need to let the committee know first of all the good news following a commitment by the Department of Communities. Eleven houses accommodating 14 families for Mona Mona people have been provided under the Off-Community Investment Program. That is important because that is what those people wanted but it also bears on the crowding that there has been in the Mona Mona community. That election commitment is on track to be completed by April 2010.

Nonetheless, there remain uncertainties about how the Mona Mona community should be organised over the years ahead. I listened closely when I became the minister to the local member, Steve Wettenhall, who was strongly of the view that we needed to start again in terms of our consultations with the key owner groups there—with those who are living there now, with those who believe they have historical ties and with traditional owners. Accordingly, a facilitator will be appointed. I will let the director-general tell us shortly whether or not that has actually happened. The last discussion that I had with the department and with the local member was that we were keen to get the right facilitator, the right mediator, to take this through. We need to ensure that that person not only has the

proper qualifications but that person has the proper qualifications in terms of Aboriginal culture, understanding and knowledge. I would even suggest that it would be better to have two mediators rather than one who was in any way lacking in those qualifications.

Mr HOBBS: I refer to page 3-4, dot point 1. Can you advise the committee why adequate food was not ordered by your government retail store in Kowanyama before the last wet season began which resulted in frozen food being four or five hours out of the freezer during transit before being sold to customers? Can you advise why food in Kowanyama is regularly out of date?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. The Kowanyama store is one of six government retail stores which we operate on the basis of self-sustainability and, I am pleased to say, without government subsidy. The six stores are Kowanyama, Palm Island, Lockhart River, Doomadgee, Pormpuraaw and Woorabinda. The department has recognised that there needs to be better planning, particularly associated with the wet season and climate events and other service delivery blockages that can occur. The issue needs to be understood in the context that sometimes the supplies for Kowanyama or the other retail stores go through a supply chain that can be 1,000 or more kilometres long. You can understand, therefore, that there are many ways in which there can be a slip-up.

We are addressing the problem that previously occurred at Kowanyama. I am assured by the department as well as the mayor of Kowanyama that he has a watching brief and that he is presently satisfied with the plan of action and the changed arrangements that will protect against such a problem occurring in the future. I will ask the director-general if she would like to add to that answer.

Ms Apelt: In relation to the Kowanyama store, the issues that were identified there were addressed as soon as the department became aware of them. This is part of an ongoing audit program we have with each of the retail stores throughout the state. Our policy is that as soon as our Retail Stores Unit becomes aware of issues we address them as soon as practicable.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, I refer to page 3-3, dot point 7. I refer to the funding that has been paid over the last two years to the Department of Indigenous Affairs in Western Australia. What benefit has this funding generated for Queensland Indigenous people?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. I will ask the director-general if she has any information to provide on this.

Ms Apelt: The minister participates in a ministerial advisory committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues. All states and territories contribute a pro rata proportion to the cost of administering that ministerial advisory committee. From time to time, different states take responsibility for the administration, and at one point in time that was Western Australia taking their turn.

CHAIR: The time allocated for non-government member questions has expired. I will ask the first couple of questions from government members. With reference to page 3-3 of the Service Delivery Statement, would the minister please inform the committee of positive results in the latest *Quarterly report on key indicators in Queensland's discrete Indigenous communities* and in particular positive trends in school attendance? You did refer to this in your opening remarks as well.

Ms BOYLE: I thank the member for the question. The Bligh government is firmly committed to working in partnership with Indigenous communities to deliver real and lasting change that helps close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage. Education is central to our efforts to close the gap. Education outcomes have a positive flow-on effect on health and employment outcomes. That is why it is so encouraging to see large increases in school attendance in a number of communities, including Aurukun, Wujal Wujal and Hope Vale. Aurukun school attendance has climbed from 46.1 per cent in term one 2008 to 56.1 per cent in term one of this year. Over the same period, in Wujal Wujal school attendance has increased from 72.3 per cent to 80 per cent, and in Hope Vale attendance has climbed from 80.6 per cent to 88.2 per cent. Special attention must be paid to Coen which, at 95.3 per cent for term one 2009, exceeded the state average of 91.1 per cent for all schools in semester one 2008. But the government cannot take sole credit for these results. Congratulations must go to the individuals driving the Cape York welfare reform trial and the communities themselves of course who are committed to change.

Education is not the only area where the quarterly report shows positive results. The number of hospital admissions declined from 96 in the first quarter of 2008 to 74 for the same quarter in 2009. In Hope Vale, hospital admissions have fallen from 11 down to one. In Yarrabah, they have fallen from eight to two. Other improvements include a decline in the rate of reported offences against the person—down from 413 for the first quarter of 2008 to 389 in the first quarter of 2009. The number of charges for breaching alcohol carriage restrictions has dropped from 158 in the first quarter of 2008 to only 41 in the first quarter of 2009. What this report shows is that local leadership is key to closing the gap, with elders, councils and justice groups all playing critical roles in making a difference.

It has been hard for many of these communities to have their statistics reported and to deal with the statistics, particularly in relation to alcohol abuse and alcohol problems. I pay tribute to those who might not have supported the government's determination so far as alcohol reform is concerned. What we are all agreed on is that a difference must be made to the lives of children and families generally in Queensland's discrete Indigenous communities.

CHAIR: With reference to page 3-9, will the minister please explain to the committee the significance of the Remote Indigenous Land and Infrastructure Program Office and how the office will contribute to the development of Indigenous communities? I think I saw the executive director position of that office advertised in the *Cairns Post* recently.

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. The Bligh government is committed to working in partnership with Indigenous communities to deliver better outcomes, improving the quality of life and closing the gap on disadvantage. One example of this partnership is the new Remote Indigenous Land and Infrastructure Program Office—a great name, you might say—which will slice through red tape to deliver better housing and development outcomes for Indigenous communities. For too long, questions over landownership and tenure have roadblocked the building of houses and other development in Queensland's Indigenous communities. This new office will put an end to that. It will be a one-of-a-kind multiagency hub, cutting through red tape and letting us get on with the job of development and construction.

There is \$1.16 billion in federal government funding allocated for housing in Queensland's Indigenous communities. This office will help us sort out the planning, the land use and the tenure issues and ensure that this money can be put to good use as soon as possible. Not only will this improve housing outcomes in the communities, but it will be a big economic boost for all Queenslanders.

Consultation is key to closing the gap. It ensures money must be directed where it is most needed and in a way in which it can be best utilised. The people who know best the answers to those questions are the people from the Aboriginal communities themselves. They will, therefore, be an essential element of guidance in all decisions that are made relevant to their community. This is an exciting new practical strategy that will get things happening on the ground.

Last week, I discussed the new program office and outlined how the office would work in collaboration with the mayors who were present in Cairns for a meeting of the Regional Organisation of Councils of Cape York. They are excited about the project and keen to ensure that any overarching issues are managed by the ROCKY organisation, as well as keen to work through a place based approach to ensure that each of their communities takes advantage of the money available for this program office as well as the program itself to get the surveying sorted out, to get the tenure sorted out, to get a planning scheme in place to be able to start construction.

Hope Vale mayor Greg McLean has said, 'It will make a massive difference in our communities when it comes to improvement in jobs, in health and education.' He went on to say, 'This is about taking a new direction. There is direct consultation. There is a solution, something in fact that we have long been searching for.' The Bligh government is committed to closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage.

CHAIR: The member for Mulgrave has managed to wrestle one question off me during this session, so I will call on him now to ask it.

Mr PITT: I also refer to page 3-9 of the Service Delivery Statement. Minister, can you please inform the committee about the establishment of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council?

Ms BOYLE: I thank the member for the question. The proposal for the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council arose from discussion between the Premier and Indigenous delegates to the Queensland 2020 forum in early 2008. There was a consensus at this meeting that good policy can only be achieved with good research, consultation and expert input. As a result of this discussion, nominations were called to form the advisory council.

The council now comprises a talented group of people who have tremendous knowledge, experience and strong networks and are respected members of their communities. These are professional people, including a medical doctor, a barrister and an architect, and there are also people from communities who are leaders through their sheer grit, determination and hard work over many years.

Already, there have been two specific areas of success for the advisory council since its first meeting in February 2009. Firstly, the council has provided important advice on the Queensland government's Reconciliation Action Plan. I launched the Reconciliation Action Plan on 23 June 2009. In this instance, the council provided valuable input into the plan's targets, including particularly about public sector employment and public sector employment targets for Aboriginal and Islander people. They were not suggesting in fact that the targets be changed so much as that they be brought forward. I am pleased to say that the Minister for Employment and the department agreed that the targets should be changed, and that has been reflected in the Reconciliation Action Plan.

Secondly, the council has provided expert advice on the draft preamble for the Constitution of Queensland 2001 to ensure that it contains due recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders as the first people to inhabit our nation of Australia. This will ensure that their contribution over many thousands and thousands of years to the life of our country and our community

is recognised. The parliamentary committee responsible for the preamble is the Law, Justice and Safety Committee. This committee has met with the council and will table its final report on the preamble to parliament in early September 2009.

I look forward to seeing the work of the advisory council enshrined in such an important piece of legislation. All of us as members of parliament would know the importance that that day will hold for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Queensland. I look forward to continuing my work with the council. Collaboration and partnership are the best ways of achieving lasting and tangible results.

Ms FARMER: Minister, with reference to SDS 3-3, ministerial Indigenous round tables are a key mechanism for ensuring that Indigenous communities are consulted on issues that affect them. Could you please update the committee on the round tables held so far and any proposed for the remainder of 2009.

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. As the chair would be particularly aware, ministerial Indigenous round tables are a key engagement mechanism between myself as Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, other relevant state ministers, the Australian government and the mayors of discrete Indigenous communities.

To date there have been six ministerial round tables. The most recent round table was held in May 2009 and was attended by the Minister for Community Services and Housing, Karen Struthers, as well as by myself. This round table focused on a number of issues, including housing and infrastructure, coordination of land administration and tenure matters, jobs and enterprises, economic participation, including the future management of retail stores, local data requirements and resources and implementation of other state and national initiatives under the COAG agenda. A significant agreement reached at the round table was the establishment of the Remote Indigenous Land and Infrastructure Program Office to address the blockages to getting housing and infrastructure on the ground.

It was a vibrant meeting in May 2009. In fact, two members of the committee present today were present at that meeting. I give recognition to the very committed participation, of course, of the local member for many of the Aboriginal councils and that is the chair of the committee, member for Cook, Jason O'Brien. I was particularly pleased, too, that the new member for Mulgrave was present and very keen, particularly on behalf of his council of Yarrabah, to ensure that issues were dealt with.

There are two more round tables that are planned for 2009. These are being scheduled for October and November. Topics for discussion at these two round tables are yet to be finalised but will include at least two issues from the list of either education, law and order and police or health. I was pleased during my recent visit to Erub Island that I was able to announce the first dedicated Torres Strait island round table which will occur later this year. That is a matter that I mentioned in response to an opposition member's question earlier.

That round table and the other round tables are just one of the many ways in which the Bligh government is demonstrating its continued commitment to working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on matters of importance to them, matters that affect them.

Mr PITT: Minister, in response to one of my previous questions you made reference to the Reconciliation Action Plan 2009-12. Can you please outline the key goals and projects associated with the Reconciliation Action Plan?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you. As I mentioned earlier, the Queensland Government Reconciliation Action Plan 2009-12 is the first whole-of-government reconciliation action plan in Australia so Queenslanders can feel proud. It is framed around the Reconciliation Australia objectives of relationships, respect, opportunities and accountabilities. In order to strengthen relationships among the government, community organisations and Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, initiatives in the Reconciliation Action Plan will increase Indigenous people's involvement in government policy making, recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and, importantly, celebrate the achievements of Indigenous Queenslanders.

The plan has been fully endorsed by Reconciliation Australia and Reconciliation Queensland Incorporated. It contains 20 key initiatives, all of which have been assigned a lead government agency for implementation. These initiatives must be included within existing budgets. Some examples are: engaging with private sector companies and peak bodies to broker employment and business opportunities for Indigenous Queenslanders; inserting a preamble in the Constitution of Queensland 2001 that includes formal recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; and embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in schools to promote a greater understanding of the histories, cultures, values, beliefs, languages, lifestyles and roles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Another example is displaying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land and sea country names in public places throughout the state. The Reconciliation Action Plan is a practical step towards putting the sentiments expressed in the 2008 national apology into practice in Queensland. It is fundamental, of course, too, as a tool to close the gap in life outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Queenslanders.

To ensure transparency, all Queensland government agencies have a responsibility to report on their whole-of-government and agency specific Reconciliation Action Plan commitments within their annual reports. Furthermore, a public report on the progress of this first Queensland Reconciliation Action Plan will be released in 2012. I look forward to working with my cabinet colleagues in delivering on practical and meaningful outcomes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Queenslanders. I will let the committee know some breaking news: last week I met with several private sector firms who had come to ask me the question, 'How can we participate?' I look forward to announcements, in partnership with the private sector, that will support the plan.

Ms O'NEILL: Minister, with reference to page 3-3 of the Service Delivery Statement, which makes reference to the Closing the Gap initiative, could you please provide the committee with an update of the work done to date and the progress towards meeting the goals of the initiative?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. Queensland has signed five Indigenous specific national partnerships which are central to the Close the Gap initiative and will help meet its goal to overcome social and economic Indigenous disadvantage in Queensland. The five Indigenous specific national partnership agreements are: remote Indigenous housing; Indigenous early childhood development; Closing the Gap in Indigenous health outcomes; Indigenous economic participation; and remote service delivery. For each of these partnerships implementation plans have been developed. The National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing will address overcrowding and homelessness in remote Indigenous communities. The Commonwealth is providing approximately \$5.48 billion over 10 years to the states and territories for the delivery of 4,200 new accommodation units by 2018, upgrades and repairs to 4,876 accommodation units by 2014, and housing related power, water and sewerage upgrades by 2018. Importantly, Queensland will receive \$1.16 billion over 10 years for remote Indigenous housing initiatives.

Similarly, the National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development is providing \$151.89 million over six years in Queensland for three initiatives. The first of these is the rollout of nine integrated child and family centres to provide services such as child care, early learning and parent and family support services. The second is to improve teenage sexual and reproductive health services. The third is to improve access to maternal and child health services.

Under the National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health Outcomes \$1.58 billion will be spent nationally over four years to deliver key health strategies aimed at improving the outcomes of Indigenous Australians. The Queensland government is providing \$162.22 million over four years to key priority areas such as tackling smoking, healthy transition to adulthood, making Indigenous health everyone's business and primary healthcare services.

If time permitted I could continue to give examples of the huge amounts of money that are being applied by the Commonwealth government and supported by money from the state government to the Closing the Gap initiative. These moneys indicate the seriousness with which both the Commonwealth and the state government are taking our commitments to Closing the Gap. I met yesterday with Minister Jenny Macklin—

CHAIR: Unfortunately time does not permit, because the time allocated for questions by government members has expired. I now call the member for Burnett.

Mr MESSENGER: I would like to refer the minister to SDS 3-3, implementing a whole-of-government Reconciliation Action Plan. The minister earlier talked about relationships, respect and the 20 key objectives that she stated in the whole-of-government action plan and talked about the involvement of different government departments. Will the minister, of course without identifying any Indigenous child, mother or family, tell the committee how many adoptions of Queensland Indigenous children her department is aware of and how many adoptions of Queensland Indigenous children her department is aware of that have been revoked or never completed or, in other words, bungled?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question but it is not a question I have any knowledge of. It is a matter for the Minister for Child Safety.

CHAIR: Or even the Attorney-General in relation to adoption.

Ms BOYLE: I have no information to bear on that and cannot help.

Mr HOBBS: I refer to SDS 3-9 dot point five. I refer to the wellbeing centres. What are the staffing requirements and costs of these centres and what performance measures have been put in place to determine their effectiveness in applying alcohol reform initiatives?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. I am aware, as you surely are, that the wellbeing centres which are jointly funded by the Commonwealth government and the Queensland government are a key component of the Cape York Welfare Reform program. The centres themselves are modelled on health and wellbeing hubs proposed by the Cape York Institute in its policy statement From Hand Out to Hand Up. I dare say that every day, and certainly today, I talk often about the beginnings to the Cape York Welfare Reform program and the importance of the Australian and state governments' initiatives. I will speak more of the wellbeing centres in a moment, but I do want to

recognise before the committee that the Cape York Institute, led particularly by Mr Noel Pearson, has done tremendous work over a number of years on the policies that have now been incorporated into the Cape York Welfare Reform program and the funds that we have provided.

So far as the wellbeing centres are concerned, they have been established in each of the four Cape York Welfare Reform communities of Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge. The Royal Flying Doctor Service is currently operating the wellbeing centres in the four communities. They aim to provide a holistic, systemic and community based approach to treating drug and alcohol addiction and related mental health issues, family violence and gambling. The staffing for the wellbeing centres is now complete but has taken some time and led to some delay in some of the services being rolled out in some of these communities. The centres are staffed now by a coordinator, counsellor and one or more community support workers. Staff are also supported by a part-time medical practitioner and senior Indigenous health worker along with team leaders.

As at May 2009 there were approximately 157 active clients of the wellbeing centres, including clients referred by the Family Responsibilities Commission. Evaluation of the trial as a whole and of wellbeing centres and their role in the Cape York Welfare Reform Trial will be undertaken by independent experts. Three public reports will be prepared: an implementation review of the Family Responsibilities Commission by late this year; a midway progress report in 2009 covering implementation issues and early progress in achieving outcomes; and a final outcome report by early 2012 that will let us know where the system has worked, hopefully that the system has worked entirely, but certainly provide the honourable member with more detail about the progress of the family wellbeing centres over the years ahead.

CHAIR: I do not think we are going to get another question in. That concludes the examination of the estimates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships. The committee will adjourn for lunch and the hearing will resume at 1.15 pm sharp. We will then be examining the estimates for the Local Government Group, Department of Planning and Infrastructure.

Proceedings suspended from 12.13 pm to 1.15 pm

CHAIR: The Estimates Committee F hearing is now resumed. We will now examine the estimates for the Local Government group in the Department of Infrastructure and Planning. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

The first period of questioning is allocated to non-government members. I call the member for Warrego.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, I refer to page 2-119, dot point 15. I refer to the 90 approved council projects that are no longer being funded under the grants and subsidy schemes. Will you provide a list of those projects and the councils involved? What is the total amount of funds involved in those 90 projects?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. We can provide that information and will. I would like to talk for a moment about the projects that are lapsing and the circumstances in which that decision has been made. It has been common practice for councils to apply for subsidies and to receive approvals for projects and then to come back to us to claim on those projects when they are underway and are reaching certain milestones. It has also been so over the years that councils get their approvals and then the department hears nothing from them for one year or two years or three years or even more. The department has recently worked with the councils and said to them that they cannot continue to set aside funds for their council for a project that is just going on and on and not commencing—not when there are other councils knocking on the door saying that they are ready to go with projects.

This comes as no surprise to the councils. The department had been working with them to look at the projects that they already have underway and the projects that are not underway. In some cases the amounts, which we will provide to you, that are lapsing are quite modest. I encourage you to look closely at those because some of those are projects that have been completed and where the government has followed through on its commitment and provided substantial funds and where the local council deserves a pat on the back because it has brought the project in under the original budget. So the amount that is lapsing is the excess proportion of subsidy that would have been paid based on the original cost estimate for the project. Some of the lapsing in that sense does not reflect that the projects have not occurred.

Some \$36.9 million in lapsed funds will now be redirected to other councils. The great majority of these projects go back over three years since their approval. The great majority reflect projects that councils have chosen not to proceed with. The full detail and the list can be provided. I will get Associate Director-General Michael Kinnane to address that.

Mr Kinnane: The figure that the minister mentioned of \$36.9 million is the figure that has lapsed for the funding programs. That was after a stringent review of the allocations which had not been claimed or which were beyond the three years of the funding program. We would be happy to provide that information. We can table that before the end of the session.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, I must say that \$36.9 million would not be a modest amount of money. It would be a significant amount of money. Was there any communication, warning, consultation or advice to those councils between the state election and the state budget? If not, why not? Keep in the mind that under amalgamation new councils were directed to focus on establishment, industrial and staffing issues for the first 12 months. We all know that the councils were very busy focussing on amalgamation. I would have thought that you would not have expected them to get all that funding work done in the last 12 months.

Ms BOYLE: It is a substantial amount of money in total—there is no doubt about it—and a substantial amount of money, you would surely agree, to have sitting on the shelf being unused when there are councils which have projects that are ready to go and that are important to their communities. It is a bit the way at the moment that when local governments are put in a corner they are inclined, where they can, to blame amalgamation.

I again draw your attention and the attention of other members of the committee to the fact that these project approvals sometimes go back more than three years. That was long before amalgamation. To say that they have been busy since amalgamation and that that is not fair is not quite telling the full story, not when some approvals go back as far as 2000. That does not mean, of course, that there have not been many projects for that particular council that have not gone ahead and been fully completed and fully acquitted with the funds that the government had committed to.

The discussions were well ahead of the election and well ahead of the budget. In fact, we can draw the attention of local governments, if they had not noticed it, to the funding guidelines that always indicated to them that if the projects were not going to proceed on the time line that they had indicated, associated with their approval, they were obliged to let us know. Further, some councils did read those guidelines and did know that. The way we know that is because they have then written to us over the years requesting for whatever reasons—and they give us those reasons—a delay in the funding program. Almost always—I am tempted to say ‘always’—we have said, ‘Thank you for the information and those funds will be preserved. Please keep us informed.’ In the last months I have signed off on approvals for extensions for projects where councils have been able to give us good reasons.

What we come back to are projects that councils have not communicated to us about, that have been sitting on the shelf for years before any amalgamations and which have not gone ahead. I would have thought that committee members would think it responsible financial management by the department to redirect those funds to councils that do have projects that are important enough to get commencement now.

Mr HOBBS: It is now well recognised that your government has difficulty dealing with the truth. I would never put you in that category. I do, however, have some difficulty in understand why you wrote a letter in response to a *Courier-Mail* story—‘Our trust is truly trashed now’. The article points out broken promises and cutbacks to local government. Minister, you wrote—

This is not correct. I am pleased to tell you that no cuts to funding have been made.

Road and drainage grants and many others have been going on for decades. This program and others were suddenly taken out of the budget, resulting in over \$100 million being withdrawn annually in future years. How can you truthfully say that funding was not cut?

Ms BOYLE: I can say it because I was the one who originally was part, with the Treasurer of the day, of giving local government the good news that the funding programs for five years would go ahead and that the total of them would be a \$700 million commitment by the then Beattie government. I was local government minister. I was there. I was pleased at the time because I knew that local governments would be pleased. We have made some changes in that five-year funding program compared to the previous five-year funding, as governments always surely do when they review various programs.

How I can look you in the eye and say, ‘Have we done a good job or what?’ is this. You know the news. I must say, member for Warrego, that instead of standing by our commitment and spending \$700 million in grants and subsidies we have increased it to \$880 million. My point to the particular fellow to which you refer in your question is that our government, the Bligh government, should get a pat on the back for overperforming by \$180 million. That extra \$180 million dollars equates to around 1,500 jobs in projects around Queensland. That extra \$180 million forms part of the \$422 million that remains available to local governments through the three years ahead until the completion of that suite of programs.

So far as programs after that period are concerned, yes, there is disappointment for local government that we have signalled that the new program that will commence when that suite is fully complete will be for \$45 million in each of two years. We have committed and are standing by it and carrying out further consultation with local governments on how that money should best be allocated to them and spent—other than that we have already signalled that we think it is the councils that have the most financial need and the least ability to raise the finances needed for local projects that should have priority for that funding.

Mr HOBBS: I point out first of all that the reason that \$100 million from the \$700 million to \$800 million was spent was because councils were forced to put in sewerage systems under legislation. You also said on ABC Far North on 24 June 2009 that all projects approved would be honoured and in full. However, in answer to question on notice No. 4 to me you stated that funding will also not be honoured for projects that have been approved in the last three years where no claim has been made by the councils. Why are you saying one thing to the public and something else to councils?

Ms BOYLE: It has always been so; it is not a new arrangement. Might I again let the members of the committee know that if you get approval for a project and you do not carry out the project then you do not get the funds. It is really fairly simple and surely responsible financial management to keep track of the commitments you have made and to stand by every commitment where the councils have been able to deliver those projects as they committed to do when they applied to us. That we have shown the discretion and consideration to take into account local factors where there have been delays that councils chose to explain to us and ask for deferrals is further evidence of our commitment.

We have therefore outlined in great detail all of the committed projects that will occur for local governments right around Queensland over the years ahead. There is a sum of \$422.8 million for projects right across Queensland. That is the best part of half a billion dollars. They are projects that were approved and projects which councils tell us they have already commenced or are ready to proceed with.

Mr HOBBS: Basically you have taken nearly \$40 million out of grants and subsidies this year and \$100 million later on. You keep on saying they have not been cut. They certainly have been. I refer to the Public Service restructure, whereby 13 new departments were grouped under six clusters. Can you advise the committee exactly what financial gains have been made under your ministerial responsibilities?

Ms BOYLE: I will let the director-general of the Department of Infrastructure and Planning address that question. First I make the remark that, as one of two ministers that the department is responsible to, I am seeing tremendous benefits in the parallel action and coordination through the department for the minister for planning and me, the minister for local government. It is working much better that councils are able to deal with the one department and that we have coordinated and integrated action on that score.

The other good news is, as you referred to, the regionalisation program, and I must give credit to the previous minister for local government, the Hon. Warren Pitt, for seeing that regionalisation program through. In order to carry out that regionalisation program, \$1.74 million was provided in the 2008-09 budget and I am very pleased to say that we have five regional offices now—one in the Far North, one in the northern region, one in the central region, one in the south-west and one in South-East Queensland. Director-General, would you care to make some further remarks?

Mr Jensen: Sure. Certainly with the 23 government agencies coming to 13, an efficiency target was set across the whole of government as part of those machinery-of-government changes. That was \$280 million announced by the Treasurer as part of the budget process. In terms of the Local Government and the Infrastructure and Planning functions merging, our share of that \$280 million is \$2 million, and that is outlined in our budget papers. We are not permitted to actually address cuts to front-line services. They must be protected, and indeed we have done that as part of this machinery-of-government change. Where we are actually targeting the \$2 million savings comes from \$191,000 coming out of previous efficiency targets primarily through staff savings in the corporate areas and efficiencies in accommodation and fleet management. In terms of the ongoing efficiencies to be achieved, having regard to the four whole-of-government initiatives, firstly we will see \$215,000 saved through our base corporate travel, so that is our non-regional corporate travel. Largely, this will come out of the new whole-of-government travel management system which is getting better application of the best fare for the day. We will also reduce our advertising expenditure by 25 per cent to realise another \$182,000. There is also \$500,000 being saved in operating expenses such as consultancies, communications and marketing, publications, and office equipment.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, I refer to the commitment by the Deputy Premier to the Local Government Association of Queensland's 10-point plan at the last election that your government intends to maintain current levels of funding for the grants and subsidy programs. Can you explain why your government has now gone back on that commitment, or is deliberately misleading local government going to be a feature of your administration?

CHAIR: Order! Member for Warrego, you are attributing an improper motivation to the minister which is out of order. I ask you to withdraw that comment.

Mr HOBBS: I withdraw.

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the first part of the question at least to which I will respond. The background to this matter is that the LGAQ, quite properly during the election campaign, petitioned the government with a 10-point plan and asked for a reply in terms of our policy position on those 10 matters. Of the 10 matters, four of them are the responsibility of the Minister for Local Government and

it is those that I will attend to in my reply. The Deputy Premier, Paul Lucas, replied to the Local Government Association of Queensland on behalf of the Bligh team and was really quite clear on those four matters. One of them was the matter of shared services, about which the Deputy Premier wrote—

I note that Queensland local governments are empowered under the Local Government Act 1993 to establish companies in accordance with federal legislation. As you would be aware, it is proposed to continue this power under the Local Government Bill 2008.

In fact, that has since happened with the parliament passing the Local Government Act 2009. Another matter that was raised was the amalgamation costs. As members would be aware, councils were invited, in line with the Deputy Premier's commitment, to place before us submissions relevant to the impacts of amalgamations and their costs, and that program is still under consideration. The sewage plants was another matter on which the Deputy Premier wrote about, and he said—

As you would be aware, sewage treatment plants that need upgrading in the next five years have been identified through a commissioned study by Local Government Infrastructure Services. Of those plants identified, 66 were identified as being a high priority.

He then goes on to specify the funding—\$125 million in subsidies to upgrade 22 of those—and then he goes on to the fourth part of the Local Government portfolio reply, which is funding, and I quote directly from the reply and the commitment which we have honoured as a government that was made by the Deputy Premier to the LGAQ in this reply. He said—

As you are aware, the Bligh government has committed \$700 million over the period from 2006 to 2011 as part of local government infrastructure grant and subsidy programs. A review into the existing administrative arrangements of these funding programs, including the timing of subsidy payments to council, has commenced. A re-elected Bligh government will fully consider the outcomes of this review and remains committed to implementing improved arrangements to assist councils to accelerate ...

I will continue if the honourable member wishes to give me an extension of time.

Mr HOBBS: No.

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

Ms O'NEILL: Minister, page 2-120 of the Service Delivery Statement makes reference to the Local Government Act. For the benefit of the committee, could you explain the reasons why a new act was required?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. The Bligh government is committed to delivering on its Q2 targets and building a stronger Queensland. In local government, this means ensuring that Queensland has the strongest local government sector in Australia. One of the central planks of strong local governance is a legislative framework that is robust, flexible and suitable to the challenges of a changing world. That is why we undertook a comprehensive review and reform of the Local Government Act. The passing of the Local Government Act 2009 in parliament in June of this year signalled a new era for local government in this state—an era where councils are in the best possible position to deliver for their communities.

Importantly, the new Local Government Act is about a fifth of the size of the 1993 act. However, the checks and balances that communities are demanding in an age of increased transparency and openness remain intact. This has been achieved by investing in best practice and recognising the modern needs of our local government sector. The new act looks to the future, helping local governments put systems and processes in place to better anticipate and manage risks and to plan for the future. There are clearer responsibilities and standards, an improved system for performance management and misconduct, clear separation of powers between elected officials and council officers, and greater powers for the local government minister to intervene before problems escalate.

It is principles based, and this makes it less prescriptive and more flexible. This means that the legislation can meet the needs of Queensland's councils from the 250 or so ratepayers who live in the 30,000 square kilometres that comprise Croydon all the way through to the 470,000 people served by the Gold Coast City Council. Consultation on the three regulations accompanying the new act have already commenced and the new Local Government Act is planned for commencement in December 2009. A training and education package is also being developed to ensure a seamless transition. This is truly a monumental step in the reform process and another example of the Bligh government's commitment to delivering Australia's strongest local government sector for Queenslanders.

Ms O'NEILL: Again, page 2-120 of the SDS discusses the Local Government Electoral Act which it says is expected to be in operation by December 2010. Minister, could you please provide details about what the purpose of this act will be and why it is important to continue with local government reform in Queensland?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you, too, for that question. I have explained to the committee that this government is committed to delivering local government reform in terms of not only the Local Government Act we have recently spoken of but also a new Local Government Electoral Act which I expect to be operational by December 2010—another key element in our ambitious legislative reform. The new Local Government Electoral Act will use modern language, making it more accessible to the public and more useable for local councillors and other local government stakeholders. Local

government electoral provisions have not had a substantive review since 1993. Previously, they were provisions under the Local Government Act, but the new legislation will help meet requirements of a progressive and fast-growing local government system.

During the review of the Local Government Act, consultation with stakeholders consistently raised issues about the timing of a number of issues falling under the provisions of the Local Government Electoral Bill. One of these issues was divided versus undivided local governments. Another was whether a mayor should be directly elected or elected by council. Another was about disclosure of funding contributions and concern was also expressed about the residential requirements of candidates and councillors. It is important that the local government electoral system is working in line with community expectations. Consultation on the new Local Government Electoral Act will be just as important as it was for the new Local Government Act.

There will be an extensive community engagement strategy put in place to canvass community opinion on key issues such as those that I mentioned earlier. Later this year a questionnaire will be available on the Local Government website to gather community feedback. This will be supported by a targeted mail-out and newspaper advertisements inviting people for their opinions on these issues. Following on from this extensive consultation process, it is anticipated then that the new Local Government Electoral Act will be ready to commence by December 2010. Any democratic government is only as strong as the electoral processes that underpin it. That is why the Bligh government is so firmly committed to ensuring that the Local Government Electoral Act meets the needs of tomorrow's Queensland.

CHAIR: Minister, will you please example the benefits that have actually occurred to local government as a result of the state government implementing the local government reform program?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for that question. The Bligh government made a commitment to deliver a stronger local government sector for the people of Queensland, and with the reform process already showing obvious benefits we are delivering on that commitment. The Bligh government's comprehensive reform of the local government sector has ensured Queensland's councils have the strategic and financial muscle required to meet the challenges of tomorrow's Queensland. Legislative and structural reform coupled with an unprecedented \$880 million investment have made Queensland's local government sector the strongest in Australia.

This long-term structural reform is typical of the vision of this Bligh government. This is reform that will continue to bear fruit long into the future. But it is not just about the future: Queensland's new stronger councils are already delivering benefits for ratepayers today. For instance, Moreton Bay Regional Council confirmed savings of \$9.1 million just for 2008-09 in its most recent budget. It has predicted an additional \$10 million in operational savings in 2009-10. Savings over the first term of government are expected to be as high as \$34 million for the Moreton Bay Regional Council. Cairns Regional Council has identified \$7.3 million in cost savings over its first five years. Townsville mayor, Les Tyrell, said yesterday that since amalgamation Townsville has been able to reduce its operating loss from \$58 million down to \$14.7 million. There is still a way to go, but this is financial management that is demonstrating future strength. Cost savings like these have prompted the West Australian Liberal government to study Queensland's local government reform process.

But I have to say that cost savings are not the only benefits that accrue to ratepayers. Somerset Regional Council's library users are benefiting from an increased selection of books and services after four separate library administrations were amalgamated into one. In Gladstone the Gladstone Regional Council's plant utilisation is up by 88 per cent, with heavy-duty equipment such as graders, loaders and trucks now being utilised seven days a week—a huge win for productivity. Only a year on from amalgamation, these are impressive results. But it is just the beginning. Cost savings will continue to accrue year on year and service delivery will continue to improve as councils continue to identify efficiencies.

Ms FARMER: Minister, will you inform the committee of the consultation that was carried out with the development of the Local Government Act 2009?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. Comprehensive consultation is essential to the development of a piece of legislation that must meet the needs of 72 of Queensland's 73 councils. As I have previously illustrated, the new Local Government Act 2009 is a legislative tool that will assist the sparsely populated councils of Queensland's outback and the growing metropolises up and down the coast. Consultation began in early 2007 with a series of meetings with peak bodies, government departments and statutory agencies, all with the key oversight of local government operations. These included, of course, the Local Government Association of Queensland, the Local Government Managers Australia, Queensland Division, the Brisbane City Council, the Auditor-General, the Electoral Commissioner, the Ombudsman and the chairperson of the Crime and Misconduct Commission.

Next, 16 workshops and meetings took place with local governments throughout Queensland. The current legislation and options for improvement were discussed. Following from that, eight issues papers were written and released for public comment. One hundred and nineteen submissions were received between July and October 2007. Consultation was then extended to 30 June 2008 to ensure that councils elected in March 2008 had an opportunity to make submissions.

Additionally, a Local Government Act review reference group was formed to advise on key issues, drawing membership from councils, the LGAQ, the LGMA, the Queensland Council of Social Service and the community and university sectors. Following the introduction of the Local Government Bill 2008 into parliament in October of 2008, 42 information sessions were conducted around the state with over 700 stakeholders.

There were over 50 submissions received at that stage. These were analysed to determine if amendments to the bill were required. As a result of this thorough and wide-ranging consultation process, the new Local Government Act has been welcomed by all key stakeholders, councils, the LGAQ and the Local Government Managers Australia, Queensland Division, and I recognise the support that was provided in parliament by the members of the opposition.

The new act is the product of 2½ years of hard work and collaboration between the Bligh Labor government and key industry stakeholders. The consultation process was indeed an example of best practice community engagement. I take the opportunity to publicly thank everybody involved for their important contributions.

Ms FARMER: Minister, I note that page 2-120 of the SDS discusses the City of Brisbane Act. Could you provide details of the purpose of the review of this act, why it is important to continuing local government reform in Queensland and the process from here?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. A review of the City of Brisbane Act is another important plank in the Bligh government's commitment to strengthening local government. I expect to introduce this new bill into parliament in November this year. Just as the Local Government Act 2009 streamlined the old act and slashed administrative red tape, the City of Brisbane Act will be developed with the same objectives. Redundant provisions will be deleted, duplication will be eliminated and key provisions will be simplified. This legislative reform is essential to delivering comprehensive local government reform for Queensland. The current act has been in place since 1924, without any substantive review since then. It is no longer, of course, appropriate for the progressive and rapidly growing metropolis that Brisbane is today.

As part of this review, my department has been consulting with the Brisbane City Council on a range of issues. This consultation process will continue through the rest of the development of the act. During September and October 2009, consultation with the Lord Mayor is expected to occur on an exposure draft of the new City of Brisbane Bill. Importantly, the other key stakeholders will also be included in the review of the City of Brisbane Act. All councillors of the Brisbane City Council, including those members of the opposition, and the various staff through the various sections will communicate, I am sure, via the CEO.

When the new Local Government Act 2009 commences in December this year, it will also apply to Brisbane City Council in areas where the City of Brisbane Act is silent. The new City of Brisbane Act will position Brisbane City Council's governance arrangements with all other local governments as far as possible. It is likely that there will be some matters of contention that may draw some particular attention from the public, so a detailed community consultation program will also be undertaken. I reassure the residents of Brisbane in particular, but all Queenslanders for that matter, that they, too, will have their chance to make any suggestions on how the new City of Brisbane Act could surpass its predecessor. The new City of Brisbane Act is an important piece of legislation that will provide a legislative platform for a world-class capital city. It is yet another example of the Bligh government's commitment to building Australia's strongest local government sector.

Mr Chair, further to an earlier question, I have some information that was requested. Is now an appropriate time to provide that information?

CHAIR: Are you going to table it?

Ms BOYLE: It is in relation to the lapsing criteria and to the request that we table the details of the funding, council by council, and the list of projects that will lapse, and I do so now.

CHAIR: If you could seek leave, please, to table.

Ms BOYLE: I seek leave to table that detailed information on the lapsing projects.

Leave granted.

CHAIR: I call the member for Kallangur.

Ms O'NEILL: Minister, I draw your attention to page 2-153 of the SDS, which makes reference to the animal management act. There has been some attention in the media of late about the animal management act. I would like to take this opportunity to ask you how the act is working so far.

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. The purpose of the act is to deliver stronger animal management for Queensland's councils. It provides for the identification and registration of cats and dogs, the effective management of regulated dogs and the promotion of responsible ownership of cats and dogs.

As the member might be aware, the act came into effect only on 1 July 2009 and it will be rolled out gradually across the state. We are only a few weeks into the commencement of the act, but already I can report that the implementation of the animal management act by councils in relation to cat registration is working extremely well. One of the main issues for many cat owners is the level of registration fee set by councils. In this regard I am happy to report that councils have been very responsible, setting registration fees at extremely reasonable levels or, in some cases, nominal amounts and have not attempted to use the registration fees as a revenue-raising exercise. On the contrary, some councils, such as the Sunshine Coast and the Moreton Bay regional councils, have provided for free registration or a fee amnesty in the first year. In the case of the Sunshine Coast Regional Council, the normal registration fee after the amnesty will be only \$10 for a desexed and microchipped cat.

Other councils have been extremely innovative with the incentives that they are offering to cat owners to encourage both microchipping and desexing. These incentives include issuing microchip or desexing vouchers to owners of non-microchipped animals, offering discounted registration fees for animals which are microchipped and/or desexed, or by offering a further discount for early registration. Councils are to be congratulated on their positive and responsible implementation of this important piece of legislation. I take the opportunity also to thank the many stakeholders, including the Veterinary Association, for its enthusiastic participation in this legislation and the programs that follow.

CHAIR: Minister, with reference to pages 2-120 and 2-121 of the Service Delivery Statements and the new provision titled 'Local government's responsibility for local government areas' under the new Local Government Act 2009, meaningful community engagement is crucial to councillors represent the current and future interests of the residents of the local government area. Can you outline to the committee any innovative community engagement methods used by local governments in Queensland?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. I am sure that, as elected members, all of the committee members understand how important it is to engage with our communities. Local councils are well placed to embrace different forms of community engagement. One of the strengths of the new Local Government Act 2009 is that it gives councils the opportunity to make choices to suit their particular size, location and administrative circumstances. Coupled with effective community engagement, councils are in an excellent position to enact best practice service delivery for their communities.

The new Local Government Act is principles based. One of the five principles in the act is democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement. Councils are using a number of strategies to engage with their ratepayers, such as council websites to publish plans and documents; questionnaires inviting community response; community forums; social occasions, such as community barbecues and meet-and-greet functions; online surveys; mail-outs requesting feedback; open office times and meetings; inviting people to SMS even on a community problem. Of course, traditional methods of community engagement such as telephone, personal appointments, public meetings, surveys and newspaper advertisements are still important.

While developing the new local government electoral bill, I plan to use community engagement to gauge public opinion on how council elections should be conducted in the future. Later this year people will be invited to submit their opinions through a questionnaire posted on the department's website to help comment on and shape the new legislation. It is critical that all aspects of the local government system work in line with community expectations of grassroots democracy. So contemporary community engagement strategies must be in place by all councils in Queensland.

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

Mr HOBBS: Minister, I refer again to the Deputy Premier's commitment to the subsidy programs. This is the bit that you did not read out—

We intend to maintain current levels of funding for the program.

You also said—

I am pleased to tell you that no cuts to funding have been made.

We all know that \$30 million was cut back with no notice in the 2009-10 budget. The councils were doing their budgets and they had no idea. They had to go back and redo their budgets because you cut the subsidies. A further \$100 million after 2011 will be cut. Minister, my question is: when did you become aware that the commitment given by the Deputy Premier to local government that the subsidies for water, sewerage and others were not going to be honoured?

Ms BOYLE: The commitment by the Deputy Premier in the letter to the LGAQ has indeed been honoured. In fact, he understated the situation. He stated in his reply that there would be the honouring of the commitment of \$700 million as had been made previously for the five-year period for this suite of funding programs. There is a good reason that they have been in five-year periods this time and previously, and that is to give the councils some chance to plan, under the different subsidy programs, which projects should be their priorities and which ones they will submit for some state support.

He made it plain that we were committed to that program, and we are still committed to that program. I have the details today to present to all members of the committee and to any local government our commitments, the amounts paid so far for projects that have been approved and the amounts that will be paid as those projects are completed over the three years ahead. The remainder of the approved projects and the funding for them that will be spent over these three years is some \$422 million. It is a really simple addition. I suspect that schoolchildren in year 1 could get it. You said 700. You are going to spend 880. Is that good? That is good. That is the five-year funding program.

The news that the local governments have not liked is what is going to happen after that in terms of the new program for the following two years and our commitment of \$45 million. Councils that have in any way suggested that that change—which is some three years away—has affected this year's budget are talking nonsense. Councils that have planned, approved projects and that have been in touch with the department are having all of those commitments honoured. I am pleased indeed to ensure that they have a hotline to me if they are in any doubt about those approved projects continuing. In fact, the amount is detailed here for all of these approved projects over the three years ahead: an amount of \$199 million and some is expected just in this year, 2009-10; another \$216 million in 2011; and \$22 million in 2011-12.

I have to say that, according to some media reports, there have been some councils saying things like, 'We had budgeted for projects that we thought we would get a state subsidy on if we ever applied, but we hadn't actually applied.' That seems a fairly silly way of going about budgeting, I would have to say. What I can assure all councils is that all committed projects will be funded.

Mr HOBBS: Roads and drainage grants were an annual funding allocation, but I guess that Gordon Nuttall was in denial and the jury found otherwise. I refer to the Premier's commitment to councils to make submissions on forced amalgamation costs, which were to be submitted by 30 March 2009. These are detailed and important submissions from councils. Can you advise when those councils can expect to receive a response?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for that question. I know that is a matter that the councils are keeping a close eye on. Premier Beattie received petitions from councils to say that they believed there would be amalgamation costs surplus to the \$27.1 million that we already provided to councils to meet the cost of local government amalgamations. A number of councils claim that the net cost of amalgamations will exceed that funding. Therefore, it is in that context that the government invited councils to submit claims for special consideration where costs exceed savings. It is not as simple as looking at one side of the ledger—simply what the costs are—but at the balance of savings and whether, in fact, those costs exceed the savings.

During the July 2008 estimates process, it was indicated that council submissions would need to be lodged by March 2009. That was plenty of warning for those councils that believed they needed to put in a submission. Yet some councils did not manage it by March 2009. We received four late submissions, which I am pleased to assure members we nonetheless took on board and are including in the submissions that are under examination. In total we have received 25 submissions. The Queensland Treasury Corporation, obviously independent of the department and with the kind of financial expertise that is required, is now completing the assessments of each of those council submissions, one by one. It is not appropriate for each one to be dealt with by me separately, so I have asked the director-general and associate director-general to make sure that the Queensland Treasury Corporation's work is proceeding apace and to present to me the reports from the QTC when the total number of submissions has been reviewed.

There are various amounts claimed by the councils. However, one of the concerning bits of information that has come to me through the director-general from Queensland Treasury Corporation is that some of the councils—only some of them—in their submissions have made claims that, when the QTC went back to ask for the paperwork to demonstrate their claim, have no detail able to be provided. Members need to be aware that councils cannot pick figures out of the air. They are being assessed against the real costs as well as the real savings. I am told that it should only be one to two months before this is complete.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, can you advise why your department advised councils that wage equalisation caused by amalgamation was not a relevant amalgamation cost when in fact those were some of the most expensive costs to councils from the forced amalgamations?

Ms BOYLE: This is not a matter that I have any knowledge of and I am not sure it even applies in my portfolio. Associate Director-General, are you able to assist with this?

Mr Kinnane: The reason wage equalisation occurred in most of the councils was because of their enterprise bargaining agreements coming up for renewal. In the case of Townsville, they confirmed their EB agreement before the amalgamation election on 15 March last year. So it is determined—and QTC is applying this formula—that the wage equalisation is a discretionary cost for local governments. It was still a choice for local governments as to whether they would apply a wage equalisation formula or not. It was a determination by each one of those local governments to negotiate in good faith with the unions through the EB agreement process.

Mr HOBBS: I refer to the amalgamation of Queensland Transport and Main Roads. It was identified that Main Roads has a higher pay rate, and crown law advised that Queensland Transport employees should be lifted to Main Roads levels. I ask: why is it okay for crown law and the state government to recognise wage equalisation as a relevant cost in amalgamation but not local government?

Ms BOYLE: I will ask the director-general to respond to that.

Mr Jensen: Obviously it is not something that the Department of Infrastructure and Planning has any detailed knowledge of in terms of the Transport and Main Roads EBA process. I do know that both of those EBAs, for the former departments of transport and main roads, were separate and, indeed, they are both due for negotiation at the moment. I cannot comment on the crown law advice that you say you have seen; I have not. It is in that context that they would be doing it in their current EBA.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, a while ago your director-general mentioned that it was a normal process of council to do an EB arrangement. That would be right, and it may be lucky if two councils that amalgamated were doing it at the same time. It may be the case that up to eight councils with different wage structures have come together. In some instances there was no need to do EBAs. Some may have been done and, in fact, I believe some were done. But they had to be done again for equalisation. They would not have had to do that had it not been for amalgamation. My point is: why shouldn't that be a legitimate amalgamation cost?

Ms BOYLE: I will ask the director-general to respond.

Mr Jensen: I note that there is no requirement for you not to continue under the previous EBs. Enterprise bargaining agreements remain in force under law. You can continue to employ under those arrangements, despite there being disparity between the former councils. Those arrangements can continue legally until council comes to a new EB negotiation timetable. There is in fact no legal requirement to actually take that decision to cancel the previous agreements and renegotiate. You could continue under the former agreements until they naturally conclude. In that case, my understanding is that that is the reason QTC decided it is a discretionary expenditure—because you have the choice whether or not to continue under the former or negotiate anew.

Mr HOBBS: Was that information relayed to councils? If they knew that, they probably would not have done it.

CHAIR: We will give you three minutes to answer that question, thank you.

Mr Kinnane: Mr Hobbs, the best example is the Townsville City Council. They made a decision, quite independently of the amalgamation process, to have wage equalisation in their workplace agreement. Certainly having chaired the State Transition Committee during the lead-up to the amalgamation election on 15 March last year, I believe there was a high level of awareness amongst councils and the various local transition committees of the real-world industrial relations pressures that they were under. We had an industrial relations subcommittee that we used as a negotiating point as well, working with local governments and including the LGAQ. Certainly there was a high awareness of the industrial relations implications of the merger process as well.

Mr HOBBS: I refer to the new CAP subsidy scheme for councils. Can you provide the committee with an assessment criteria that will demonstrate a limited financial capacity to pay, as described in your answer to question on notice No. 2? For example, would the Western Downs Regional Council be eligible for a sewage water subsidy?

Ms BOYLE: I am not able to provide you with that information because it is not decided yet. The information is not available. We have signalled that the new CAP grant will apply to councils that are most in need. We have not yet worked out exactly what the wording of the guidelines will be that will let us determine which councils are the most needy. However, we have expressed publicly that we are particularly concerned about water and sewage projects that can be a huge cost sometimes to quite small councils with limited resources, particularly where those projects are high-priority ones that, for example, may have outfalls into the Barrier Reef lagoon.

Mayor Bill Shannon from the Cassowary Coast Regional Council has discussed with me his concern in relation to this. While he accepts and admits that the Cassowary Coast Regional Council, much of which is in the electorate of Mulgrave, has received a number of beneficial and sizeable grants over the years from the department of local government under our Local Government Grants and Subsidies Program, there are a number of projects that they are not immediately in a position to fund but which they aspire to fund in the years ahead, particularly related to water and sewage. They would count themselves amongst the councils that are financially limited in the present circumstances. Therefore, his request is that his council be most definitely put on the list for consideration under that program, or sooner should money become available.

The Cassowary Coast already has 11 projects with ongoing funding. The local member will be very pleased to know that those 11 projects, which are for approval since 1 July 2006, total 16 million and some hundreds of thousands of dollars, to be paid under all programs to the Cassowary Coast

Regional Council over the next three years totalling—hold on to your seat—\$22,811,943. So the Cassowary Coast Regional Council has been well looked after under the Local Government Grants and Subsidies Program, but I do accept that they example the kinds of councils that already have their eyes on the CAP program and will be hoping that they meet the guidelines. My department was keen to get to work on the guidelines. I was more keen to get to work on getting out the \$424 million we have available right now. Of course I will keep honourable members in the loop in terms of the development of the guidelines for that program when it does occur.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, a while ago you mentioned the reform process. You spoke glowingly about some councils that had done well. The two that come to mind are Moreton Bay and Cairns councils, which you said made significant savings. I would also point out that they are two councils that have significant deficit budgets this year, with significant rates increases as well. Minister, can you advise the committee how many councils are likely to bring down deficit budgets this year? Will the massive debts that have been racked up by this government also be allowed under the new criteria for local governments?

Ms BOYLE: I will ask the associate director-general to say some things about financial sustainability and local government debt in a moment. I do understand that, at a lower level, in a sense, because their finances are smaller than the state government resources, the local government sector is feeling the global economic crisis as much as is the state and Commonwealth governments. We know—

Mr HOBBS: They still have big debts.

CHAIR: Order, honourable member! You have asked the question. The Minister will be given an opportunity to answer it.

Ms BOYLE: We know that there have been significant rates increases, but we also know that those rates increases have been kept under control as much as possible. We know that some councils have chosen to take on debt funding in order to keep projects running in their council areas that are particularly important for jobs in their council and jobs in the community more broadly through other firms that may participate in those projects. I commend them. There is nothing in itself wrong with debt. I personally have some and I dare say other members of the panel may be in that position. It is the extent of it and how it is managed in the context of the broader resources and assets of the council that is important.

Financial sustainability in local government is an issue of such importance that the national government has set some national benchmarks. We are in the first stage of rolling out a national Financial Sustainability Program that will include consideration of levels of council debt. Associate Director-General?

Mr Kinnane: The Local Government Reform Program has delivered a new state-wide performance measurement and reporting framework, the first stage of which consists of four key components. These are aspects where the department is working with local governments on improving their financial sustainability. They are long-term asset management, financial management, integrated planning including budgeting, and community engagement and participation. Of the 73 councils in Queensland, I am pleased to advise the committee that 58 councils are involved in the first stage, focusing on sustainability. That is all non-Indigenous councils and the Torres Strait Island Regional Council.

As the minister just mentioned, asset management planning in local government has been recognised as a critical topic for the implementation of the national frameworks for local government sustainability. The state is supporting Queensland councils to identify performance gaps. In December 2008 the annual return of the status of asset management was released to the 58 participating councils. The annual return is a guide to councils about good asset management practices and provides data and information on the current state of asset management practices within councils. I think it is also prudent to note that Alan Morton, who is well regarded in local government fields—and, Mr Hobbs, you know him very well—and is used as a consultant to the LGAQ—

CHAIR: Sorry, Associate Director-General. The time allocated for questions by non-government members has expired. I call the member for Mulgrave.

Mr PITT: Minister, I refer to pages 2-119 and 2-121 of the Service Delivery Statement. Can you outline to the committee any Q150 initiatives that have been undertaken by your department in Far North Queensland?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. The Bligh government is delivering on its commitment to create jobs across Queensland by funding 14 Q150 capital projects. These are either underway or have already been completed in the Far North Queensland region. The projects are occurring throughout the region and are located in remote Indigenous communities, small rural communities and in the larger regional centres. The estimated total cost of the 14 capital projects will be over \$20 million. The number of jobs that have either been created or protected by these projects is estimated to be approximately 150. This is responsible spending for these tough economic times.

The Queensland government's contribution to these 14 projects under the Queensland Legacy Infrastructure Program will be approximately \$9.5 million. The range of projects includes a new regional art gallery in Atherton, the restoration of the powder magazine in the Cook shire, the restoration of the community church at Hope Vale, the development of the Cattana Wetlands in Cairns and a new medical centre in Einasleigh. In Cardwell a new library and museum complex is being built. The Majestic Theatre is being preserved in Malanda and will be officially opened to coincide with its 80th anniversary, and in Aurukun the old store is being renovated to become a new business and government centre. Victoria Parade on Thursday Island is being beautified, and a new art and cultural centre is being constructed in Kowanyama. In Wujal Wujal a new arts and craft workshop is being constructed.

One hundred and fifty is a significant anniversary and the Bligh government is honouring that anniversary with projects that not only recognise the great history of our wonderful state but also keep Queensland's economy strong. These and all of the other creative projects underway in the Far North and the rest of Queensland will provide valuable infrastructure that will support the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of these communities both now and into the future. The government is committed to delivering jobs across Queensland, and what better way to celebrate our 150th anniversary than with 150 jobs for Q150 projects.

Ms FARMER: Minister, how much has the state government provided to local governments under the current suite of grants and subsidies? Could you please provide examples program by program?

Ms BOYLE: I am pleased to do that. Thank you for the question. The Bligh government is serious about a strong and prosperous Queensland. We understand that by providing funding to local government we are supporting the delivery of essential services to Queensland. In 2006-07 we outlined a suite of grants and subsidies to help build essential infrastructure and the needs of future population growth—\$700 million was committed over five years toward building these projects. We have exceeded our original allocation. Since then the Bligh government has allocated more than \$880 million to Queensland councils, more than \$180 million over and above our original commitment. To date we have paid out \$422 million, with the remaining \$460 million to be paid out in the coming years. That represents an additional 1,407 jobs over the funding cycle and the 1,407 jobs apply only to the additional funding on top of the \$700 million.

The amount of \$623 million has been committed to the Water and Sewerage Program to help councils strengthen their water infrastructure. This includes \$66 million for Townsville City Council, \$44 million for Cairns Regional Council and \$16.5 million for the Brisbane City Council's Brisbane Aquifer Project. This commitment alone supports almost 5,000 jobs.

Under the Smaller Communities Assistance Program more than \$71 million has been allocated. We have committed \$23.7 million under the Regional Centres Program to help build infrastructure in our rural communities. This includes \$3.1 million for the Central Highlands Regional Council to help fund the Emerald town centre revitalisation and \$400,000 for the Bundaberg Regional Council to fund the Mon Repos Turtle Trail Link.

Under the Rural Living Infrastructure Program more than \$26.4 million has been committed. This is just a snapshot. The government has committed \$75 million to the subsidised local government bodies roads program, more than \$22 million to the Environmental Infrastructure Program and \$3.7 million to the Security Improvement Program.

Mr PITT: Substantial state government funds have been provided to the Cairns, Tablelands and Cassowary Coast regional councils in the past three years. You touched on this in a previous response, Minister. With reference to pages 2-119 and 2-121 of the SDS, for the benefit of the committee can you outline the funding provided to these councils for water and sewerage upgrades?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. Over the next three years over \$47 million will be paid to Cairns, Tablelands and Cassowary Coast regional councils. This includes \$22.6 million for four Cairns Regional Council waste water treatment plants, \$15.2 million to Cassowary Coast Regional Council for the construction of a sewerage scheme for Cardwell and Port Hinchinbrook and \$9.5 million for Tablelands Regional Council for the Malanda sewerage scheme. This is responsible spending in these tough economic times, protecting our priceless natural assets like the Great Barrier Reef as well as supporting more than 360 jobs.

The Cairns Regional Council's Cleaner Seas Project is all about protecting the reef through the development and upgrade of four waste water treatment plants. The total cost of the overall project is expected to be in excess of \$188 million. The Bligh government has approved a \$75.4 million contribution towards this project. Cairns Regional Council is also working on a project that will reduce demand on the city's water supply as well as reducing the amount of potable water lost from leaks and failures in pipes and mains. The Bligh government is contributing \$1.3 million towards this project. \$10.5 million in funding for the Tablelands Regional Council will contribute to current water and sewerage projects expected to cost \$15.9 million.

The Cassowary Coast Regional Council has \$15.2 million committed for the Cardwell and Port Hinchinbrook sewerage schemes. This project involves the construction of a sewerage system for a community which currently relies primarily on private septic systems. The replacement of these septic systems with a council operated scheme is expected to prevent harmful run-offs to the Great Barrier Reef. The Department of Environment and Resource Management rates the completion of these works as a high priority. The Great Barrier Reef is a huge asset to the people of Queensland both as a symbol and as economic engine-driving tourism. The Bligh government is committed to preserving the reef and ensuring that the future of Queensland is green. That is why we are investing over \$47 million in these important projects that will protect our environment, our natural tourism assets and provide jobs for over 360 Queenslanders.

CHAIR: Minister, how does the Major Infrastructure Program contribute to achieving better environmental outcomes in the Torres Strait?

Ms BOYLE: The Queensland government is ensuring that communities in the Torres Strait region have safe and adequate water supplies, sewerage systems and roads as part of our commitment to closing the gap in Indigenous communities. One of the ways we are delivering on our commitment is through the \$152 million Major Infrastructure Program, which we are jointly funding with the Rudd government.

An additional \$56 million in joint funding for environmental health infrastructure projects in the 2009-10 and 2010-11 financial years has been allocated for the Torres Strait region. For many years Torres Strait communities lacked infrastructure that most Australians take for granted such as access to clean water supplies and safe sewerage systems. Roads and drainage were also limited. Following the commencement of the Major Infrastructure Program in 1998, the program has delivered major benefits to every Torres Strait community.

More than 60 environmental health infrastructure projects have been delivered, including upgrades to sewerage schemes on Horn, Mabuiag, Masig, Moa and Warraber islands; new housing subdivisions on Bamaga and Mer Island; upgrades to water supplies on Badu, Hammond and Mer islands; and upgrades to roads and drainage on Hammond and Mabuiag islands. Since the program began I am advised that every household now has access to a flushing toilet and an adequate potable water supply. Furthermore, fully reticulated sewerage systems have been constructed and are now operational on seven islands. Drainage and flood mitigation has been undertaken in a number of communities.

The Major Infrastructure Program is also funding phase 2 of a sustainable land use project that is currently underway in the Torres Strait region. This project is providing valuable information on land use planning for each of the 15 populated island communities within the Torres Strait Island Regional Council as well as valuable information to inform decisions associated with climate change and sea inundation in the region. This program represents all levels of government working in partnership to deliver real and positive outcomes in some of the most remote communities in Queensland.

CHAIR: Minister, with reference to pages 2-119 and 2-121 of the Service Delivery Statement, the Cassowary Coast Regional Council has received significant financial support from the state government to undertake a variety of projects. Can you outline to the committee the types of projects undertaken by the council in this regard over the last few years?

Ms BOYLE: It would certainly seem that the council that is starring in the estimates proceedings today is the Cassowary Coast Regional Council. Please pass on my regards to the mayor and the CEO. Thank you for the question. Since 1998 the Queensland government has been protecting and creating jobs by meeting its commitments to the Cassowary Coast Regional Council and Far North Queensland by approving more than \$113 million in funding, which includes \$56 million just since 1 July 2006. In addition, the council has received \$37.04 million under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements for the repair and replacement of infrastructure that was damaged as a result of both cyclones Larry and Monica. This money has been provided to the council to restore council infrastructure such as flood damaged roads and bridges, electrical damage to pumping equipment, council buildings, community facilities, park infrastructure and sport and recreation grounds and buildings.

The beautifully refurbished heritage listed hall in Innisfail was reopened on 4 July 2009 after \$3 million was provided by the state government for this worthy restoration project—an event, I understand, the member for Mulgrave attended, so he would have seen the Bligh government's commitment to the Cassowary Coast Regional Council firsthand. Funding of more than \$15 million has been approved for the construction of the sewerage scheme for Cardwell and Port Hinchinbrook which has been identified by council as one of five key infrastructure priorities. Further, as part of the 2009 election, the state government committed \$12 million towards the upgrade of the Jubilee Bridge—another of council's key infrastructure priorities.

Other current funded projects include the development of a shoreline erosion management plan from Tully Heads to Hull Heads, surveillance equipment and public lighting at Rotary Park and Wongaling Beach, and animal management infrastructure and equipment. An estimated \$16.8 million is allocated to council under all programs over the next three years. So, as you can see, through this massive commitment to infrastructure and grants provided to the Cassowary Coast Regional Council, the Bligh government has been doing everything it can for the Far North by actively protecting and creating jobs and by meeting its commitments to the Cassowary Coast Regional Council.

CHAIR: Given that the member for Mulgrave's electorate is so well supported by this government, he should ask the next question.

Mr PITT: Minister, I note with reference to page 2-119 of the SDS that show societies are funded by your department. Can you outline for the benefit of the committee what this funding program involves, particularly for rural and regional communities?

Ms BOYLE: Members will be pleased to hear that the answer to this question will demonstrate benefit to all electorates in Queensland, not just the electorate of Mulgrave. I do thank you for the question.

The Queensland government is meeting its commitments by continuing its valuable Show Societies Grant program. This ongoing financial contribution demonstrates the Bligh government's commitment to towns and cities throughout the state, ensuring they receive the economic, social and cultural benefits that shows bring to their local communities. The investment also demonstrates how the Queensland government is actively protecting those jobs created by the staging of these annual shows. It acknowledges the hard work of volunteers and community groups every year in ensuring a wide range of exhibits, events and attractions are available to local residents and visitors. Annual shows bring people together in a way that very few other community events can achieve.

My department is working closely with the Queensland Chamber of Agricultural Societies regarding the funding that will be available to local show societies over the next two years. Under the Show Societies Grant program, which totals \$2 million per year, 131 show societies receive funding ranging up to \$150,000 per year. This ranges from small shows such as Comet River, Kenilworth, Eumundi and Marburg shows, right through to Brisbane's Royal National Agricultural and Industrial Association, the RNA show, better known as the Ekka.

The individual society allocations have been based on societies receiving a minimum base funding of \$5,000 per year with additional funding based on annual show attendance. Grants are capped at a maximum of \$150,000. Some show societies, like the Samford and District Show Society and the Redcliffe Agricultural, Horticultural and Industrial Society Inc, are totally reliant on the department's financial assistance. This grant ensures the continuation of agricultural shows, which are an integral part of Queensland's cultural heritage, particularly in rural and regional areas. Communities are able to showcase their local area, enlist the help of volunteers and bring together the wider community in a spirit of celebration.

I congratulate the Cairns Show Association for the show in Cairns held last week in which all of those things—partnerships with local communities, the tremendous volunteering commitment and the tremendous benefit to charitable organisations and community based organisations—were well demonstrated. Many of us, some half the population of the Cairns urban area, attended the Cairns show last week. I am pleased with the subsidy by the Queensland government.

CHAIR: Minister, can you please detail funding provided to Indigenous councils, in particular the State Government Financial Aid fund program, the environmental health worker program and the revenue replacement program?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. I am pleased to announce more than \$37.52 million in funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Queensland to help support jobs and boost services and quality of life in these communities. There is \$31.68 million being provided under the State Government Financial Aid fund program, \$2.32 million being provided under the environmental health worker program and \$3.52 million being provided through the revenue replacement program.

The Bligh government is delivering on its commitment to work in collaboration with Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils to build stronger, more sustainable communities. This funding will help ensure residents have access to better services, more jobs and essential infrastructure. It is also responsible spending in the current economic climate, supporting almost 300 jobs across Queensland but particularly of course in the Aboriginal and Islander communities of Queensland.

The environmental health worker funding will help fund environmental health workers who can perform a variety of tasks that contribute towards closing the gap in health outcomes, including water testing, refuse management and pest control. The revenue replacement program supports councils which no longer generate revenue through canteens. Aurukun, Mornington, Kowanyama, Lockhart River, Palm Island, Pormpuraaw, Yarrabah, the Torres Strait Island Regional Council and the Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council are all receiving revenue replacement program funding. For too long, some councils have been dependent on canteens for revenue. This funding helps break that cruel cycle.

CHAIR: Minister, the time allocated for questions by government members has expired. I now call the member for Warrego.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, you said that no cuts have been made to local government funding. I table your extraordinary statement. Minister, can you provide the committee with the documentation that must have gone out, therefore, before the election that advised councils that the \$25 million road and drainage subsidy scheme that was to be distributed on a formula basis each year was to be discontinued?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. The Road and Drainage Grant was part of the suite of grants and subsidies that had been committed to local government and funds that had been provided.

Mr HOBBS: When was it—

CHAIR: Order! Member for Warrego, you know the rules. You ask the question; the minister answers.

Ms BOYLE: There was no announcement to local government prior to the 2009 state budget of what was in the 2009 state budget. In fact, the Treasurer announced the completion of the 2006 suite of local government grants and subsidies. This included completion of the Road and Drainage Grant to councils, which the government has committed a total of \$75 million to since 2006. This funding provided councils the opportunity to support 195 jobs since 2006. The Road and Drainage Grant was an allocation to all 73 councils that did not require councils to apply for funding. The allocation of the grant was based on data collected annually from councils by the grants commission.

Funding under the Road and Drainage Grant was in addition to road funding made available to councils through programs such as the Department of Main Roads's Transport Infrastructure Development Scheme. This is an allocation of \$63 million which is continuing this year and has been welcomed by councils and by the Local Government Association of Queensland. The Transport Infrastructure Development Scheme is a good program and a proper program through which road related funding can be successfully received by councils. TIDS, as it is known, has increased by 10 per cent since 2007-08, and 68 per cent of councils have enjoyed an increase in funding since 2005.

Councils need now to maximise the use of existing funding, such as TIDS, in these times of increasing financial pressure. Their role is to continue to stimulate jobs and ensure vital works in the field of roads and transport are completed. They have the opportunity of using not only funding from TIDS but also of course the considerable funds provided by the Commonwealth government to the local government for road issues. That is surely the appropriate place for them to receive those subsidies.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, you said there was no announcement before the election. Therefore you would agree, I am sure, that councils who had included it in their budgets would have been caught by surprise. How on earth are they supposed to know that an ongoing, annual commitment—it has been going for years, and particularly under this formula for the last three years—was going to be stopped, when they had no word about that? How on earth can you say there were no cuts? It is just not possible to say that with a straight face. Please answer the question.

Ms BOYLE: The councils had been told that our government was committed to \$700 million—

Mr HOBBS: No, they weren't. They were told of—

CHAIR: Order! Member for Warrego, you will cease interjecting.

Mr HOBBS: They were told it would continue on, and you know they were told it would continue on.

CHAIR: Member for Warrego!

Mr HOBBS: Right from the Deputy Premier.

CHAIR: I warn the member for Warrego.

Ms BOYLE: They were told there was \$700 million in a variety of grants and subsidy programs, and we have done better than that. There were some councils which took their eye off the ball, I suppose, which assumed somehow—

Mr HOBBS: Cairns was one. They did it.

CHAIR: This is my final warning, member for Warrego. I know this is your last block of questions and you probably do not care if you are excluded from the proceedings of this committee given that fact, but I ask you for the final time to cease interjecting.

Ms BOYLE: Some councils may have assumed that the five-year commitment would go on beyond those five years. I say again to the councils: we promised you \$700 million; we are delivering \$880 million. If you had assumed in your forward budgeting that the programs would remain the same and be unchanged in the following years, that was an error. The announcements that have been made by our government are that we will stick to all of our committed programs. No local government has been promised money that it will not receive for a project which they have proceeded with within the time for their project.

CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by non-government members has expired. Minister, can you please outline the funds for the Tablelands Regional Council which are supporting tourism infrastructure? The reference is page 2-123.

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. The Bligh government introduced the Kuranda Infrastructure Levy in the Local Government Act 1993 and signed the first Kuranda infrastructure agreement with the former Mareeba Shire Council in 1994 to establish the process for distributing the levy funds. The levy was introduced in response to the need to develop tourist infrastructure and is a great example of the state and local government working together.

Since the introduction of the agreement in 1994, the state government has delivered \$10.46 million for infrastructure works in the Kuranda area. This funding has supported infrastructure improvements and amenities for tourists to Kuranda and the Tablelands and, perhaps most importantly, it has protected jobs in the area. The current Kuranda infrastructure agreement requires the Tablelands Regional Council to consult with the Kuranda community regarding any variation to previously approved works for the expenditure of the levy funds. The council also consults with the community through public meetings, surveys, fact sheets, media releases and web based information.

In July 2008, the management of the Kuranda infrastructure agreement was reviewed. This review confirmed that significant improvements to Kuranda tourist facilities and amenities had been achieved from the use of the levy funds. Following a meeting then between the council and the former minister for main roads and local government, it was decided to commence negotiations for a new agreement, which is currently underway. I have to say that the local member for Barron River, Steve Wettenhall, is a very enthusiastic supporter of the need for the business community as well as the council to meet and consult on the best way for these funds to be directed. I thank him on behalf of the Kuranda community for his participation on the committee to ensure that the moneys are most wisely used in the years ahead.

Ms FARMER: Minister, with reference to pages 2-119 and 2-121 of the SDS and to your opening remarks regarding the inaugural financial management and sustainability workshops to be held later this year, can you outline for the benefit of the committee what these entail?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. It is really important that elected members look at financial management standards of today and understand them well—not only for their own local council but also so they have a perspective on the standards expected of all councils in Queensland. The inaugural financial management and sustainability workshops are part of the Bligh government's commitment to keeping local government in Queensland strong. The state has implemented a process to evaluate the ongoing sustainability of all councils in Queensland. It is important that mayors and councillors, particularly those councils which are chairs of finance committees or chairs of planning and development committees, understand the results of this process and the information that we have received about the councils that are performing well financially and those unfortunately many councils which need to improve their asset management standards.

These workshops—the financial management and sustainability workshops—will promote best practice financial management and sustainability. They will be undertaken by the department but in conjunction with the Queensland Treasury Corporation. The workshops will cover a number of topics including the new Local Government Act 2009, the importance of integrated planning by councils, community engagement and community planning, asset management planning, the use of debt by local councils and long-term financial plans. In order to keep organisational costs to a minimum, it is intended that the workshops will be held for one day and held in each of the south-east, central and northern regions with a council from each region hosting a workshop by providing a venue. It is envisaged that these workshops will be scheduled from mid-September to mid-October 2009.

I have to say thank you to the member for Bulimba for the question and hope that all of us as members of parliament may encourage our councillors to engage in this. This is not a conference at which they can attend and listen to wise papers, but sit back, nonetheless; it is for their participation.

CHAIR: That concludes the examination of the estimates for the portfolio of the Minister for Local Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships. Thank you, Minister, and all of your advisers for your attendance here today.

Ms BOYLE: Thank you to you and members of the committee but particularly to the support staff, who have ensured that this hearing has proceeded so smoothly.

CHAIR: The transcript of this part of the hearing will be available on the Hansard website within two hours from now. The committee will adjourn for a short break and will resume at 3 pm continuing with the estimates for the portfolio of the Minister for Transport.

Proceedings suspended from 2.46 pm to 3.00 pm

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE F—TRANSPORT

In Attendance

Hon. RG Nolan, Minister for Transport

Mr D Cheverton, Principal Advisor

Department of Transport and Main Roads

Mr D Stewart, Director-General

Ms M Smith, Assistant Director

Mr P Low, Deputy Director-General, Policy and Planning

Mr P Smith, Deputy Director-General, Investment and Program Development

Queensland Rail

Mr L Hockridge, Chief Executive Officer

Mr P Scurrah, Executive General Manager, QR Passenger Pty Ltd

CHAIR: Good afternoon. The hearing of Estimates Committee F is now resumed. We will commence our examination of the estimates of the portfolio for the Minister for Transport. On behalf of the committee, I welcome the minister, departmental officers and members of the public to the hearing. I am Jason O'Brien, the member for Cook and chair of the committee. Mr Howard Hobbs is the deputy chair. The other committee members are Ms Di Farmer, the member for Bulimba; Mr Rob Messenger, the member for Burnett; Ms Mary-Anne O'Neill, the member for Kallangur; Mr Curtis Pitt, the member for Mulgrave; and Mr Ray Stevens, the member for Mermaid Beach whom I think I can hear outside. The next item for consideration is the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Transport. I remind all those participating in the hearing today that these proceedings are similar to parliament to the extent that the public cannot participate in the proceedings. In this regard I remind members of the public that under standing orders the public may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee.

The committee has resolved that the proceedings of the committee be broadcast and that photography be allowed during the chair's opening statement, the introductory statement of each minister as well as for a short period during each changeover in organisational units. I remind members of the committee, guests and the minister that the time limit for questions is one minute. Answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a double chime will sound at the end of each of these time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will sound two minutes after an extension of time has been given.

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

The committee has given leave for non-committee members to ask the minister questions. In this regard, Ms Fiona Simpson, the member for Maroochydore, will be participating in the hearing on this basis. I ask advisers to the minister to identify themselves when they first come forward to answer a question if the minister refers a question to them so that Hansard can record their name.

We also remind members, witnesses and members of the public that no food or drink is permitted to be consumed in the Legislative Council chamber. Before we begin, I ask that any mobile phones or pagers be switched off or switched to silent mode.

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Transport open for examination. The time allocated is two hours, 30 minutes. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, under standing order 177 you are able to make an opening statement that does not exceed five minutes. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms NOLAN: Thanks, Chair, I would. It is my pleasure to present to you the budget for the transport elements of the Department of Transport and Main Roads. Public transport is sustainable transport, and this budget reflects the Bligh Labor government's philosophical and practical commitment to building the world-class public transport system we said we would. In 2009-10, \$6.3 billion is set aside for the transport infrastructure and operations we promised, comprising \$3.6 billion in capital funding to build new transport infrastructure, more than \$1½ billion in recurrent expenditure to operate

public buses, trains, ferries and planes across the state, more than \$500 million for other subsidies such as funding for Queensland Rail to maintain non-commercial track infrastructure and \$635 million for the department's direct functions such as licensing, road safety and maritime safety.

This year TransLink, the south-east's massive integrated public transport network, will receive record funding of almost \$1.2 billion. Since the Labor government started TransLink in 2004 public transport patronage has grown by nearly 50 per cent from 123.8 million trips per year to 180 million. That rate of growth is well above population growth, meaning that the share of trips taken by private car is decreasing.

The expansion of the TransLink network is continuing apace, with rail being extended right now to Varsity Lakes and Richlands and a major track upgrade just having been completed on the Sunshine Coast. In the inner city, Labor's hugely popular busways are growing, too, with the next stage of the Northern Busway opening this weekend, the \$366 million Boggo Road Busway and first stage of the Eastern Busway opening in just over a week and work about to start on the second stage of the Eastern Busway from Main Avenue at Coorparoo. Furthermore, the Bligh government continues to plan for our future growth with the cross-river rail study now underway. May I take this opportunity to commend the Rudd Labor government for recognising the national significance of this project and allocating \$20 million from the federal budget towards the study, which may ultimately lead to greater rail capacity and a subway network through the CBD.

On the Gold Coast, the face of the city is about to be transformed, with early works set to start on the Gold Coast Rapid Transit project, a project conceived by a Labor government, planned by a Labor government and now being delivered by a Labor government. Through this building program, the Bligh government is meeting our commitment to create jobs and build the infrastructure that our growing state needs.

Last year Queensland's regional cities got their own version of TransLink with the regional bus services being re-invigorated as qconnect, a better funded series of services with common pricing and more frequent bus runs. Since qconnect urban bus services were launched, bus patronage in the regional cities has grown on average by six per cent with the fastest growth occurring in Cairns. An amount of \$36 million is provided for qconnect urban bus and ferry services this year.

The budget provides \$159 million for school travel, mainly to benefit remote and regional students, and it funds long distance travel, providing \$145 million for Traveltrain, \$3 million for long distance buses and more than \$10 million for remote air services.

The Labor government's record in the provision of public transport is strong. The challenge is to build on that patronage growth, to continue to build a sustainable transport system that people will choose to use and now to do so in a deteriorating global fiscal environment. I am extremely confident that this can be done.

In the year ahead, I as transport minister will lead the continuing expansion of our public transport network. The Bligh government will roll out the successful TravelSmart behaviour change program to new locations after it reduced car trips by 13 per cent when it was first trialled in Brisbane's north. We will establish an office of sustainable transport in my department to identify and meet the challenges of the future. Further, as transport minister, I will see through the next steps towards the sale of the commercial coal and possibly some freight operations at Queensland Rail. As member for Ipswich and granddaughter of a railway worker, I appreciate that this, for many, is a big step to take, but I am also firm in my conviction that after 20 years of commercial reform in the organisation this is now absolutely the right decision to make.

Politics is about choices, in this case a choice between directing limited capital funds to public goods like public transport, hospitals or schools or directing them to a commercial operation hauling coal from privately owned mines to privately run and sometimes owned ports. For me this is not a difficult choice, but then it is not my side of politics that is conflicted on this one.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We will commence our examination with Queensland Rail followed by Queensland Transport. The first period of questioning is allocated to non-government members.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, in regard to the Service Delivery Statement page 2-178 and the departmental output of rail, ports and aviation systems, your leader, Premier Anna Bligh, claimed last week that she had warned voters before the last election about the possible sale of state assets such as Queensland Rail. Minister, you claimed in parliament that you did not know about the sale until 25 May this year. Who is telling the truth—the Premier or you? Were voters warned before the election of a sale of key parts of QR or were they not?

Ms NOLAN: Mr Chair, I thank the honourable member for the question.

CHAIR: You can refer to the member directly. You do not have to refer your answers through the chair during estimates.

Ms NOLAN: The simple answer to that question is both. The Premier did, during the campaign in response to a question, indicate that everything was on the table, and that matter was accurately reported in the *Australian Financial Review* as the Premier has subsequently advised the parliament and she has, indeed, tabled the document. In relation to the first element, you should be clearly aware of the answer in that regard.

The second part of your proposition I guess is also true in that I, as I have explained to the parliament, genuinely did not think that the course of action in relation to Queensland Rail would be undertaken. This is a really big decision for a Labor government to take. It is one which I have thought about a great deal and reflected upon very deeply. As I have said to the parliament and as I have said to my own constituents, branch members and others, I believe very firmly indeed with absolute conviction that this is an appropriate course of action to take. We have been reforming Queensland Rail to bring it from what was essentially a government department to a fully commercial and efficiently run operation, particularly in relation to coal, over a period of 20 years. This is now an organisation as a result of reforms that is well able to stand up and make its way in the private sector and, indeed, which will benefit from private investment.

The choice that the government faces is one between investing limited capital funds in public transport, schools and hospitals or investing it in a commercial rail network for the benefit of coal companies. I have to say to you that that is not for me a difficult decision to make. This is an organisation that can stand on its feet in the private sector while government can deliver those public goods which are absolutely core to what we need to do. I find it, frankly, bizarre that it is your side of politics, member for Maroochydore, that cannot make up its mind on this matter and that is arguing essentially for a nationalisation or a continuing in public hands of this kind of process. That is not what most observers of politics would expect. But I have to say to you that I am utterly firm in my conviction that this is an organisation that can make its way in the private world and that this is the right thing to do.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, I remind you that on 21 May in parliament you said that Queensland Rail is not for sale. On 2 June you backflipped, saying you fully and wholeheartedly supported the decision announced that day to sell Queensland Rail. On 17 July you went further in *The Queensland Times* saying that the sale of Queensland Rail's coal division would create jobs. Minister, given your changing position on this rail sale, why should workers and the Queensland public have any confidence in your guarantee of no job losses and job increases instead?

Ms NOLAN: I have answered that question in the parliament and I answered it about 30 seconds ago. Do you have another?

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, you have backflipped on this. How can the public ever trust you if you were not part of the decision making that has led to this process of selling Queensland Rail? You are on the public record now saying that no jobs will be lost; in fact, they will be created. Are you going to stand by that statement and put your own job on the line?

Ms NOLAN: As I have explained a number of times now, this is, I believe, an appropriate course for this enterprise to now take. What Queensland Rail's coal and in some cases commercial freight operations do—but coal is the simpler one on which to focus—is transport commodities from privately owned coalmines to privately run and, in some cases, privately owned ports.

It cannot be argued—and as far as I am aware your side of the parliament is not arguing—that that coal haulage is in some way the provision of a public good. It is appropriate that those kinds of market operations should be undertaken in the private sector just as it is appropriate that government should focus its efforts on the delivery of public goods like public transport, schools and hospitals. The proposition that your side of politics is trying to present is the classic magic pudding. You are saying to the people of Queensland that we can do everything. It is a proposition that is fundamentally dishonest and one which ultimately—

Ms SIMPSON: Are you being honest by saying that no jobs will be lost, Minister?

CHAIR: Order! Member for Maroochydore, you will come to order. I will not cop continual interjecting. You have asked your question. The minister is entitled to answer it without your interjections.

Ms NOLAN: In response to the interjection, Mr Chairman and member for Maroochydore, the answer is yes. The answer is absolutely yes.

Ms SIMPSON: You are going to create more jobs—

CHAIR: Order! Member for Maroochydore.

Ms SIMPSON: by privatising Queensland—

CHAIR: I warn the member for Maroochydore.

Ms NOLAN: As I have said to you, this is a very big step for a Labor government to take. This is a real sacred cow for us. So it is one for which a great deal of consideration has been given and on which I have, I have to say, reflected very deeply. My family live in Ipswich because my grandfather came there with the railway. That is why we are Ipswich people.

There is a real sense of connection to the railway. But this is a commercial operation. It hauls coal for private companies to ports. That is not something that, for some reason, needs to be undertaken by the public sector. I am utterly confident in those workers that they entirely have the capacity to compete in a private environment. They are good enough; of course they are.

Further, the government has given two guarantees. One that this sale will not take place for three to five years. Second, that jobs will be guaranteed for at least two years beyond the point of sale. I think that they are entirely reasonable.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, will you put your own job on the line by your public statement that no jobs will be lost and in fact jobs will be created by this privatisation?

Ms NOLAN: Member for Maroochydore, I have answered this question.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, the question does not really involve a specific budget line item. It is not really—

Ms SIMPSON: Well if the minister has any role to play, it does, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: Excuse me, member for Maroochydore. I am entitled to speak also without your constant interruption. I will remind you that you are here with the leave of the committee. As such, that leave may be withdrawn at any stage. Please ask your questions and allow the minister to respond or me to make a ruling without interruption. I will not warn you again.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr Chairman. My question is to the minister who is responsible for Queensland Rail and who is overseeing the future sale that this government did not tell the people about before the election. Minister, will you put your job on the line if any jobs are lost and you fail to create more jobs by this privatisation of Queensland Rail as you have claimed that you would do?

Ms NOLAN: I want to be really clear about this. The aim of the privatisation is not to cut jobs. At Qantas, for instance, employment massively expanded once the business was opened up to private investment. In any event, this is a sale that is three to five years away with jobs, pay and conditions guaranteed for two years after that. The Queensland government's expectation is that our coal industry will continue to expand as it has done in the years past. I will grab you some figures on that.

Ms SIMPSON: This is bigger than just coal, though, Minister.

Ms NOLAN: Off the top of my head—

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, I have asked you now on three occasions to cease interjecting. Under standing order 184, I now ask the member to withdraw immediately—

Ms SIMPSON: Mr Chairman—

CHAIR: To withdraw immediately from the hearing.

Ms SIMPSON: Mr Chairman—

CHAIR: No, member for Maroochydore—

Ms SIMPSON: There was no warning about that. That is censorship, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: You will withdraw immediately—

Ms SIMPSON: I dissent from your ruling.

CHAIR:—for a period of 20 minutes. You are not entitled to dissent from the ruling. You will withdraw immediately.

Mr HOBBS: I move that the committee meet.

CHAIR: We will put that motion. Those in favour; those against. The motion is lost. The time for non-government questions has now expired.

Mr HOBBS: You can't do that. Mr Chairman, you can't do that. The committee can meet; it is going to meet and we'll meet now.

CHAIR: Sure. Let's meet. Let's withdraw then—no problem.

Proceedings suspended from 3.19 pm to 3.25 pm

CHAIR: The time allocated to questions from non-government members had expired. The question that the committee considered in private was dissent against my ruling. That motion was lost. The member for Maroochydore is suspended for a period of 20 minutes. She will be allowed back in the chamber in 10 minutes given that 10 of those minutes have already elapsed. We will move to government questions. I call the member for Bulimba.

Mr HOBBS: Mr Chairman—

CHAIR: The member for Bulimba has the call.

Mr HOBBS: One of the things—

Ms FARMER: Minister, I refer to page—

CHAIR: Order! The member for Warrego!

Mr HOBBS: What this committee is not—

CHAIR: Order! Please member for Warrego.

Mr HOBBS: Not running in accordance with the conditions of the House—

Ms FARMER: Minister, I refer to page 117 of Budget Paper No. 3 and the 102 new three-carriage passenger trains that QR is building. How many of these new trains have been delivered? How are services being improved and how many jobs are being generated from this work?

Ms NOLAN: I thank the honourable member for the question. We made a promise at the last election to invest in infrastructure to keep Queensland strong and to protect jobs and we are delivering on our commitment. Orders for 64 three-car sets have been placed, of which 29 have been delivered. The balance of 35 sets will be delivered progressively by late 2011.

In total, 1½ billion dollars has been identified for 102 sets of rolling stock inclusive of stabling. Today the main Citytrain fleet comprises 172 three-car sets. That is excluding the 20 intercity express, or ICE, cars, including 29 sets from the order for 64. The benefits of the new carriages include some carriages having toilets for long distance journeys—they are generally the ones that we put on the Gold Coast line—advanced closed-circuit television, better lighting than the older trains had, electronic passenger information systems and improved visibility between carriages which obviously increases passenger safety.

The 64 new three-carriage sets are being built now in Maryborough, securing approximately 100 jobs in the local region. The TransLink Transit Authority has used this rolling stock to implement rail timetable improvements to address growing passenger demand.

A major rail timetable restructure was implemented in March 2008 which focused on the Gold Coast and airport, Beenleigh, Ferny Grove and Cleveland lines. The March 2008 timetable introduced nine three-car sets into regular service across the network. This improved service frequency, particularly on the Gold Coast railway line, by providing departing services almost every 15 minutes in the morning peak period.

In July 2008, following community feedback, additional timetable improvements were delivered on the Cleveland line. Changes were also implemented on the Gold Coast line following track duplication works between Nerang and Robina. In October 2008, TransLink and QR introduced an additional early morning service on both the Caboolture and Ipswich lines. In February 2009, TransLink and QR launched two additional morning peak services—the six-car sets—on the Caboolture line and three additional and one extended service on the Ipswich line to provide additional rail capacity.

On 29 June 2009, QR Ltd and TransLink made minor adjustments to the Sunshine Coast timetable as a result of completion of the Caboolture to Beerburrum duplication. Further timetable improvements will be progressively delivered as additional rolling stock becomes available and rail infrastructure projects are completed.

CHAIR: That concludes the examination of the estimates for Queensland Rail. We will now examine the estimates for Queensland Transport.

Ms NOLAN: Thank you QR for your efforts.

CHAIR: We will now examine the estimates for Queensland Transport. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

The first period of questioning is allocated to non-government members. I call the member for Warrego.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, I refer to the SDS at page 2-178 relating to the departmental output on marine safety. On 30 April the Australian Maritime Safety Authority launched an independent review of the response to the *Pacific Adventurer* spill and is due to report on 31 July. The report will also 'review the effectiveness of Australia's current liability regime pertaining to ship-sourced marine pollution incidents and related matters', with special reference to the adequacy of the limitation of liability of the marine claim convention in relation to significant bunker oil spills and the new bunkers convention regime and its implementation in Australia. Minister, will you table the Queensland government's Marine Queensland submission to this review? Did your government become aware that its liabilities would exceed the legal liability under marine law?

Ms NOLAN: I thank the honourable member for the question. My understanding of this matter is that there was never any confusion about the fact that if Swire, the shipping company involved, had opted to take an essentially legalistic view of its liability the international convention provided for that. The issue at hand was that Swire very quickly made statements on the public record which indicated that it would accept full responsibility, and so the Queensland government proceeded in good faith having been very directly led to believe that it was Swire's intention when it said that it would meet its full liability—not just its full liability but to meet the full cost—that it would indeed meet the full cost. That was exactly what we took that to mean.

Swire made a number of statements in that regard. It made public statements which were reported in the *Courier-Mail* and it put in writing an indication—my recollection is in a letter to the Governor and another to the Premier—that it would meet the full cost of this recovery. So having been directly and indeed deliberately led to understand that it would meet the cost, that is the basis on which

we proceeded. Obviously we were going to clean it up, but that was certainly our understanding. So I do not think there was ever any misunderstanding in that regard. There was a liability and there was a commitment to meet the full cost regardless of the liability, and that commitment was publicly and privately made.

Indeed, it was really some time down the track that Swire began to indicate that when it said it would meet the full cost it did not really mean the full cost, and I have to say that I think that is incredibly disappointing. It is worse than that. It is shocking. It is really frankly quite outrageous. The Queensland government did not spill this oil. We did not sail a ship into a cyclone. We did not cause 60 kilometres of beach to be polluted, but we did very quickly mobilise 2,500 people in a remote place—do you mind if I continue; I will be quick—to clean up this mess. We acted both promptly and responsibly. So it came as a rude shock for Swire to then backtrack on very clear commitments that were made. I consider that to be not just disappointing but grossly unacceptable. I think it is a very clear breach of a moral obligation and a proper corporate obligation. I reiterate that the Queensland government's absolute expectation is that Swire, which created this environmental disaster, will now pay the full cost of recovery.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister—

CHAIR: I welcome the member for Maroochydhore back to the committee hearing. Member for Maroochydhore, I am actually a rugby referee. Whenever I give a player a yellow card in rugby, I am obliged when they come back on the field 10 minutes later to remind them that if I am forced to give them another yellow card they will be suspended from the game for the rest of its duration. The same principles will apply to this hearing as well. I call on you to direct your question to the minister.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, with regard to the cleaning up of the *Pacific Adventurer* spill, it has been estimated to be at a cost of \$34 million. Could you please provide a breakdown of these costs, including detailed costs for departmental staff? I would be happy to take this one on notice.

Ms NOLAN: That information is being grabbed, but I will make some points in the meantime. I became minister a couple of weeks after this incident had taken place and when the clean-up was really in full swing. One of the first things that I did after I was sworn in on the Thursday was on the Saturday I flew over to Moreton Island and met with workers who were working on the spill and with those people who were coordinating the effort. I was enormously impressed by the passion which those people showed, the commitment that they demonstrated and also the cooperative nature of the clean-up effort.

I make these introductory statements because what you will find in these costs is that some of them are state government agencies; some of them are local government. There were contributions made by many volunteers, so the costs are spread over a number of organisations, obviously with the state having taken the lead being the body that bore the most substantial cost. I think people really put their shoulder to the wheel and this was a really positive effort. In contrast, it was disappointing I think that the opposition through it made a series of, frankly, absurd statements which were later proven to be false.

Mr HOBBS: Like what?

Ms NOLAN: Thank you. I recall that the—

CHAIR: Is that another question? Do we get another three minutes?

Ms NOLAN: I think it should be. I think it is definitely another question, Mr Chair.

Mr HOBBS: You already had a free one before.

CHAIR: If you could continue please, Minister, we will let it go through this time.

Ms NOLAN: Perhaps someone else will ask me a question later. First the Lord Mayor of Brisbane claimed that we could have used dispersants to break up the oil—notwithstanding that there was a cyclone on at the time and it might not have been a great idea to put out a low-flying helicopter or plane or indeed notwithstanding that the independent ecological expert Steve Raaymakers later vindicated the decision not to do that. Then you will remember that the Leader of the Opposition claimed that it was some kind of dangerous oil that was carcinogenic and was likely to melt people's boots. Indeed, the Leader of the Opposition in a particular effort claimed that a 60-kilometre long oil spill on Queensland's beaches was somehow a massive cover-up. They were the crackers for me.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Member for Maroochydhore.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, I refer to the Service Delivery Statement at page 2-222 relating to the TransLink Transit Authority. Minister, is the transport network plan fully funded for 2009-10?

Ms NOLAN: This budget allows for \$1.2 billion for expenditure for the TransLink Transit Authority. That is obviously a record level of expenditure and it reflects the fact that this government has made a clear, a strong and indeed an unprecedented commitment to public transport in the south-east. That commitment covers bus, rail and ferry services—in all of which I think it needs to be acknowledged that the state government is by far the lead agency. Brisbane people will think of Brisbane Transport buses

and some people operate under the misapprehension that they are primarily funded by the Brisbane City Council. In fact, the Brisbane City Council is a contracted TransLink operator, just like Westside Buses are in Ipswich for instance.

The Brisbane City Council, since TransLink was started in 2004, has reduced its contribution to public transport subsidies from 45 per cent of the total subsidised cost down to 39 per cent today. Brisbane argues that it does more than do other local governments, and that is not, I think, an unreasonable point. That is true. It is because a Labor government gave Brisbane the benefits of an amalgamated local government back in 1925 that it has the critical mass to do that. But most recently other local governments, to their credit, have really started stepping into the field of making a contribution to TransLink services. Just this year the Ipswich City Council has agreed to put a small amount of money into a study for a transit network in Ipswich. The Gold Coast City Council is putting \$120 million—which is a very substantial contribution—into Gold Coast Rapid Transit. In the member for Maroochydore's part of the world, the Sunshine Coast Regional Council has just commenced a public transport levy which it expects to raise \$3 million which it will contribute to the TransLink network, and we will talk to it about how best to do that. The Moreton council is also putting some money towards a study for the Petrie to Kippa-Ring rail. Obviously, TransLink is fully funded, primarily by the state with, unfortunately, a declining contribution to subsidy from the BCC. But the good news is that some of the other local governments are now starting to play in that field.

Ms SIMPSON: Mr Chairman, the minister did not answer my question, which was: is the transport network plan fully funded? I ask the minister to answer that question and make it clear whether the commitments in the transport network plan for 2009-10 are fully on track.

CHAIR: The minister is allowed to answer the question any way she deems appropriate. So she did answer your question. I will allow her to respond if she so chooses, but usually you would not be allowed to repeat your question, either.

Ms NOLAN: The next generation of the TransLink Network Plan is still being considered by the government. It has not yet been released, quite appropriately. But the bottom line is that, as I said earlier, TransLink is fully funded and it is fully funded by the state. We plan for future services and some of those future services are services that we are currently rolling out. We are a few days away from opening a major extension to the busway on the north side, with the Northern Busway about to open around the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital and again we are days away from opening the first stage of the Eastern Busway and the Boggo Road Busway.

When the National Party was last in government in Queensland, this state had no busways and no particular plan for the extension of public transport services. Now, as a result of this Labor government's commitment to public transport, there is a busway all the way down to Eight Mile Plains and very soon, as in a week or so, it will be possible to get on the busway at Eight Mile Plains and to catch a bus all the way to the University of Queensland—just as you now can to the city—without ever travelling on a public road or being caught in any kind of traffic. That is a really major innovation.

We have a major plan for public transport in the south-east and that plan has seen public patronage grow and as a result drive the percentage of trips that are taken by private vehicles decrease. So it is a plan that is being implemented, that is successful, that is sustainable and it is a plan that is fully funded. I would have to say we make no apology about that. The only LNP administration in this state is cutting its subsidies to public transport. The last time there was an LNP government—or a National Party government—here there were no busways, there was no fundamental plan or delivered commitment to public transport and that is what we are now seeing the LNP delivering in Brisbane. We are absolutely the party of public transport and the LNP, frankly, is not.

Ms SIMPSON: My question to the minister refers to page 2-222, the TransLink Transit Authority. I refer to reports that there is currently a stand-off between TransLink and Queensland Rail regarding the service agreement because of a gap in the amount of money required to run existing services and to expand them. Can you advise whether the new service agreement with Queensland Rail has been signed, whether this issue has been resolved and what actions have been taken?

Ms NOLAN: Sure. The way this system works is that the TransLink Transit Authority is obviously a statutory authority funded by the government to purchase public transport services for the south-east. So they do that through more than a dozen bus operators, of which the BCC is one, through one ferry operator, the Brisbane City Council, and also by purchasing passenger rail services from Queensland Rail. That is their job. There are quite routine contract negotiations between the TTA and the contracted service providers and one of them is currently underway. While that contract is being negotiated, the previous contract is being rolled over and services are being delivered. Commuters would notice, obviously, no change at all.

But in the meantime, TTA is doing its job, as is QR, and a contract negotiation is going on between those two parties. That is, of course, exactly how it would be and how it should be. If you are going to argue that there should not be a negotiation, then you have to by extension make the argument that no questions should be asked about price, quality of service, or anything else. Previous contract negotiations have led to provisions being added into contracts that have allowed TransLink to penalise

operators, both in bus and rail, for things like trains and buses being late. That has directly led to a better quality of service for the people who catch public transport. Through these negotiations, we get two things: one is a better outcome for passengers, for instance, by putting in place penalty provisions for late services; and the other, of course, is the best price for people who pay their fares and for taxpayers who pay their taxes.

There is a negotiation that is currently underway. There is no reason a person who catches a bus or a train would have noticed that, because the quality of service has absolutely been maintained. But to argue somehow that it should not go on is to argue that either we should not put in place better quality standards or that we should not seek to get the best price and that is a proposition which, of course, would be absurd.

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

Ms FARMER: Minister, I refer to page 2-187 of the Service Delivery Statements in relation to taxis. Can you outline what reforms you are implementing in response to community concerns about standards in the taxi industry?

Ms NOLAN: I thank the member for Bulimba for her question. I am currently looking at a range of reforms that are designed to improve safety and service standards for the taxi industry in Queensland. The package of reforms was developed, giving due consideration to the feedback received from the travelling public through the taxi complaints hotline, submissions from industry and drivers, the results of targeted compliance and mystery shopper campaigns and a comparison of interstate standards. The feedback that has been received is that the industry and public alike think that there has been a drop in standards in recent times and that the government needs to act to ensure that suitably high standards are maintained in the industry.

The main areas of concern have been around inexperienced and young drivers having a lack of sufficient local knowledge and poor English communication standards. I intend to introduce a prerequisite requirement for all applicants for a taxidriver authorisation to have held a licence issued in Australia for at least 12 months. This is in addition to the existing requirement that a person hold an open Australian licence. I will also be introducing a minimum age for taxidrivers of 20. This is consistent with the minimum age at which a person who first obtains their licence in Australia would be eligible to apply for a taxidriver authorisation. I am also looking to introduce more stringent English assessments for all applicants, which will involve all applicants being assessed by accredited English assessors. I am committing Queensland to the speedy introduction of the national taxidriver training package, once finalised. The national taxidriver training package is due to be completed by the end of this year and I have asked the department to ready itself for the implementation of these enhanced driver training standards by mid-2010.

I am also committing the department to work with other jurisdictions in the taxi industry to develop a refresher training program for taxi drivers. At present, drivers are required to complete a training course before being eligible for a taxidriver authorisation, but once they get their licence, that is the end of their training at present. I believe taxidrivers need to go through retraining every few years to make sure that they remain up to date with changes in the industry, in legislation and to make sure that they are able to provide a high level of service to the community.

On top of these reforms, I have asked the department to establish a taxi advisory committee, comprising representatives across the industry and community. The key priority for the strategic committee will be to help shape the development of a strategic plan for the taxi industry. I am also proposing that the Department of Transport and Main Roads establish a taxi compliance unit, which will be focused on raising standards of compliance within the taxi industry through targeted enforcement campaigns. I believe that these reforms will maintain Queensland's good reputation for having a professional and service-focused taxi service across the state.

Ms O'NEILL: I refer to page 2-222 of the Service Delivery Statements regarding park and ride expansions across the public transport network. Can the minister provide an update on the delivery of the government's commitment to build 1,350 new commuter car parks across the South-East Queensland public transport network?

Ms NOLAN: I thank the member for Kallangur for her question. As announced in March 2009, the Queensland government, through the TransLink Transit Authority, is spending \$123 million over the next three years to provide more than 1,300 extra car parking spaces at public transport stations across the South-East Queensland TransLink network. A three-year program of works has been developed and a number of key projects scheduled for implementation this year and beyond and are now well advanced. This includes the completion of preliminary concept designs for extra parking facilities at the following railway stations. Birkdale will get an extra 50 spaces and Bray Park an extra 50. There will be 100 new parking spaces for Sandgate, for Morayfield and for Burpengary. At major bus stops there will be an addition of approximately 122 new spaces at Bribie Island, 200 at Park Ridge and 70 spaces at

Enoggera Reservoir at The Gap. Just recently I also visited Kenmore, where I turned the first sod on a new park and ride to go with quite a major bus stop there. I note and appreciate the member for Moggill's positive comments about that development in his local paper.

Stakeholder consultation and detailed design will be completed this year for the projects that are scheduled for construction to start in 2010. They are the projects at Bribie Island, Park Ridge and Birkdale. This is, I think, a quite positive development for people who live in those parts of the world. As I said, there is a really tremendous story of success around public transport in South-East Queensland. Since 2004, when we integrated the network through TransLink, public transport patronage has absolutely exploded in the south-east—going from 123 million trips a year to 180 million. What that means in practical terms is that we are taking cars off the road and getting people into a cheaper, in many cases an easier and more efficient, and a genuinely green form of transport. So that is an enormous social good. But we can continue to encourage people, if we can make that as convenient for them as possible, and we are doing that by creating these new car parks. We are in the process also, obviously, of creating jobs, as we committed to in the run-up to the most recent state election.

Mr PITT: Minister, I draw your attention to page 1-24 of Budget Paper No. 3 and the government's commitment to providing boating infrastructure. Can you detail the government's commitment to build new boat ramps, pontoons and floating walkways over the next three years to support recreational fishing?

Ms NOLAN: I thank the member for Mulgrave for his question. At the last election we went to the people of Queensland with a rock-solid commitment to invest in infrastructure projects, to protect jobs and to keep Queensland strong during the current period of global financial uncertainty. Queensland voters were given a very stark choice: a vote for Labor and our commitment to building projects and jobs or a vote for the National Party and its commitment to job cuts and reduced services. Our government is keeping Queensland strong and we are meeting our \$24 million commitment to upgrade and construct 15 boat ramps throughout Queensland over the next three years. We will also provide funding of around \$10 million over three years to Queensland councils to support the construction of more than 24 new pontoons or floating walkways to improve safety and access for boaties. Walkways or pontoons beside ramps can ensure safer access to trailer boats and improve efficiency of access for boats to enter and leave the water. We are right on track to meet our commitments.

New pontoons have been completed at Sinbad Street, Shorncliffe and Gilbert Street, Karumba. Boat ramp reconstructions have also been completed at Manly boat harbour, Saunders Beach, Buddina, Shorncliffe and Pelican Waters. An additional 10 projects are expected to be planned or completed in 2009-10. Those projects include \$150,000 for the Bowen Street, St George boat ramp widening. If you are wondering about St George and boat ramps—the member for Warrego has gone—it is located at the Jack Taylor weir; \$60,000 for the Walkers Point boat ramp reconstruction; \$240,000 for the River Heads boat ramp reconstruction; \$355,000 for the Riverview, Bundaberg, boat ramp reconstruction and upgrade—member for Burnett, that was for you.

Mr MESSENGER: I know.

Ms NOLAN: A sum of \$691,000 for the Scarborough boat harbour boat ramp reconstruction; \$268,000 for a new pontoon at the Scarborough boat harbour; \$252,000 for the Murlong Crescent, Tallebudgera Creek, new floating walkway; \$252,000 for the new floating walkway at Donald Avenue, Paradise Point; \$409,000 at Wynnum Creek in the Redland shire for a new boat ramp pontoon; and \$115,000 at Meiers Road, Indooroopilly, for the replacement of an existing pontoon. I understand that people who go recreational boating and fishing enjoy it very much. It should be noted that in Queensland we spend more on boating infrastructure than we collect in boat registration. This year we are spending \$30.5 million; this year we will collect \$24.7 million in expected revenue from boat registration.

Mr PITT: Thank you for that, Minister. My next question refers to page 2-187 of the Service Delivery Statements regarding regional public transport services. I note that patronage on regional services continues to increase. Minister, what support does the government provide for these services and what has the government done to make the services more attractive?

Ms NOLAN: For many years the Queensland government has provided subsidies for the regional bus networks that you see in the city that you represent and other such cities around the state. However, there has been a really substantial reform over the course of the last year which has I think quite dramatically improved the quality, efficiency and reliability of those services. As I said, this Labor government has an absolutely fundamental commitment to public transport as sustainable transport and as accessible transport that is affordable for people from all backgrounds.

In 2009-10 the government has budgeted about \$36.5 million to provide urban bus and ferry services in regional Queensland towns and cities. Patronage on urban bus services in regional Queensland has increased by about one million passenger journeys for each of the past three years. In 2009-10 patronage is expected to top 12 million. This ongoing growth continues to be encouraged through the introduction of the government's qconnect initiatives. Qconnect is a \$10.4 million investment

in public transport services in regional Queensland. Specifically, when qconnect came in about a year ago, it introduced standardised fare zones, fare levels, ticket types and fare discounts across each of the regional cities. Previously you might have paid a different fare for a different service in Cairns, Townsville and Toowoomba. The majority of fares decreased by an average of 20 to 25 per cent across the state. In some areas, fares decreased further. For example, on the Capricorn Coast fares dropped by as much as 30 per cent and I am advised that in Cairns the drop was 20 to 25 per cent.

The Queensland government is also investing heavily in helping operators to upgrade their bus fleets to include low-floor, air-conditioned, wheelchair-accessible buses into the networks. In 2008-09 the government provided about \$5.9 million under the Accessible Bus Program to help operators introduce new buses into their fleets. In total, government funds provided up to around 45 per cent of the total cost of purchasing a new low-floor accessible bus. This year we are rolling out those new buses in regional Queensland.

Recently we have agreed to replace 54 buses across the Sunbus network through 2009-10. They will be delivered as 24 new buses going to Cairns, 19 to Townsville and 11 brand-new low-floor, disability-accessible, air-conditioned buses for Rockhampton. That is a really major improvement in regional city public transport. As a result of it, we have seen a six per cent growth in regional public transport patronage since qconnect was introduced. I expect that regional Queenslanders will continue to benefit from those new and very much improved services.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I refer to page 2-187 of the Service Delivery Statements and the public transport services output. Will the Minister please outline the public transport services available between the Atherton Tablelands and Cairns?

Ms NOLAN: I will. The Queensland government provides financial and/or regulatory support for an extensive network of passenger transport services throughout the state. The Atherton Tablelands currently receives both long-distance coach and urban-style bus services. Those services support local economies and industries in the Atherton Tablelands and create local employment opportunities. In 2008-09 the Queensland government provided an estimated \$293,000 in funding support for services operating in the Atherton Tablelands. Trans North Bus and Coach operate regular urban-style services between Cairns and the Atherton Tablelands. The Queensland government provided about \$143,000 in pensioner concession reimbursement for those services in 2008-09. Those services operate three times a day, five days a week. Limited services are also provided on weekends. In 2008-09 those services carried over 54,000 passengers. Through a service contract with Trans North Bus and Coach, the government also provided about \$150,000 in funding last year for regular long-distance passenger and light-freight services from Cairns to Karumba. Those services provided key links to Cairns for a number of Atherton Tablelands communities, including Kuranda, Mareeba, Atherton, Herberton, Ravenshoe and Mount Garnet. The Cairns to Karumba long-distance service operates three return services per week and carried over 3,800 passengers over the past year.

The Queensland government recognises that accessible passenger transport is essential for regional communities. The Accessible Taxis for Queensland program has funded wheelchair-accessible taxis in the Atherton Tablelands at a cost of about \$93,000. That means that we have made a real effort across the regional towns to roll out at least one accessible taxi in those communities so that people in wheelchairs have some form of transport to get around. The Accessible Taxis for Queensland program assists taxi operators in regional Queensland to purchase wheelchair-accessible taxis in areas that currently have a taxi service but not a wheelchair-accessible one. The combination of those services provides residents of Cairns, Atherton and the surrounding communities with essential access to employment, medical, educational, cultural and business services.

Ms FARMER: Minister, I refer to the answer you provided to government question on notice No. 4 regarding urban congestion. Would you please provide some more information about the flexible workplace trial and its potential future benefits?

Ms NOLAN: The Labor government is planning for the future and investing in the biggest building program in Australia to keep Queensland strong and to support jobs. Around 2,000 people move to Queensland each and every week, so managing the population boom is an enormous but welcome challenge and I think it is fair to say that we are up to the task. We are investing heavily in improved train services and world-class busways. This is all about getting people out of their cars.

The government's approach to urban congestion management is focused on five core themes. These are: land use planning, which focuses on building well-planned cities to reduce the need for travel, and obviously we have done the regional plan here and in Cairns to that end; travel demand management and pricing, which is changing behaviour through incentives to encourage less private vehicle travel; travel options to provide choices about the movement of both passengers and goods; efficiency, which focuses on maximising the efficiency of existing infrastructure; and increasing capacity of the road and public transport networks.

This strategy has resulted in a number of practical initiatives being rolled out, one being the Flexible Workplace Program. The DTMR's Flexible Workplace Program's Brisbane Central pilot aims to promote flexible hours, telecommuting and a compressed work week as a means of making a direct

contribution to addressing congestion while providing benefits to organisations and staff. Further, it aims to discourage both road based and public transport travel between the weekday peak congestion periods of 7 to 9 in the morning and 4 to 6 in the afternoon. Flexible workplaces can make an important contribution to the urban congestion challenge by enabling employees to reduce travel during those key peak periods.

I launched this program not long after becoming minister. I went along to a function that the department had organised for both private and public sector employers. I have to say there was a tremendous feeling in the room. There was a real optimism that, with good workplace practices and with employers supporting their staff, people could both make their lives better—perhaps by fitting their work week better around their hobbies, picking up their kids or whatever it might be—and it was also possible to allow some people to travel outside peak periods. I have sensed a real willingness to get involved in this. As I said, the department has just run a successful trial that has looked at things like raising awareness of flexible work options, understanding how commuters currently travel, and identifying barriers and incentives to the uptake of flexible work policy. This is something that we will do more work around in the future.

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

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, I refer you to employer expenses in the Service Delivery Statements on page 2-194. I notice a substantial cut in employer expenses for the newly merged department, yet the total number of employees for the department remains largely stable. How is this possible without massive pay cuts across sections of the department? What is the explanation for this variation?

Ms NOLAN: I thank the honourable member for the question. As I recall, it was a question that was also asked of the roads minister last week and, again as I recall it, he answered at the time. It is a matter of public record that there is certainly no intention to cut wages in the public sector or, more specifically, in these departments. Indeed, as I recall, the EB was finalised not long ago. The main roads EBA covers employees from the former department of main roads. It commenced on 1 July 2008 and has an expiry date of 30 June 2011. It provides for a 12.5 per cent wage increase over the life of the agreement in accordance with the prescribed government wage policy. That is four and a half per cent in the first year and then four and four. The agreement also included a range of initiatives that provide for greater workplace flexibility and operating effectiveness. These are being implemented.

Staff from the former Queensland Transport are covered by the core public sector agreement. This is the same agreement that covers the bulk of other Queensland government agencies. Rates of pay and other conditions are generally less advantageous than those in Main Roads. Again, this is an EB that has just recently been signed. It was hard to miss as it was very well publicised at the time as it provided for pay rises of 4½ per cent in the first year and four and four in the remaining years.

There is no suggestion of public sector pay cuts. An agreement has been signed. The Treasurer has recently made public comments underlining that that is the deal that has been done and that is that. There is certainly no issue in that regard. We have just been to an election during which this was an issue that received a great deal of public airplay. I think all Queenslanders will recall that there was indeed a side of politics that was proposing cuts in public sector employment, but I can again confirm for the people of Queensland that it was not this side of politics that was proposing those cuts.

Ms SIMPSON: I now have two ministers who have not answered this question. I will ask the question again. There is a variation in the combined accounts for Main Roads and Transport which show a substantial reduction in the amount for employee expenses. Employee expenses amount to about \$56 million less this year. Minister, your Main Roads minister did not answer the question about the variation and you have not answered it. I put it to you again: why is the amount for employee expenses \$56 million less this year?

Ms NOLAN: Can you tell us specifically where this is in the SDS?

Ms SIMPSON: Last year Main Roads was budgeted to spend \$279,980 on employee expenses, with reference to Service Delivery Statement page 2-169, and for Transport it was \$289,164. The combined figure was \$569,144. This year the combined figure is listed, with reference to SDS page 2-194, at \$512,355.

Ms NOLAN: I have not got the figures in front of me, but I can say a couple of things. The first is that I have earlier answered the question by indicating that clear commitments have been made around public sector wages. I think most people know that the deal was 4½ per cent and then four and four. That was what was signed up to. There is no secret about that. And most people know that if it had not been a Labor government that was returned we were looking at cuts of 12,000 public sector employees, which of course in Transport, for which I am responsible, would have meant fewer school crossing supervisors, fewer transport inspectors, fewer buses and fewer trains. I think there are matters here that are clearly on the public record.

It is the case in this portfolio—and I will get the director-general to elaborate in a moment—primarily on the roads side, that, as a result of the major construction effort that is being undertaken, you do get a little bit of bouncing around in the number of people who are employed from year to year. For

instance, if it rains a lot then some of the contracted construction work tends to slow down a little bit, as you would expect. I make those introductory comments and ask the director-general, Dave Stewart, to elaborate.

Mr Stewart: I think there are a couple of points. The first is that we do need the specific references so that we can crosscheck. We will certainly give you an answer but we need last year's SDS. We have made a very clear commitment to our workforce. We are focused, as I said in the Main Roads estimates, on delivering front-line services. We have a huge customer service centre group of people who deliver fantastic services. But we also have a significant infrastructure program and we are continually focused on delivering that program.

Along with other parts of the Public Service, we have been asked to make efficiency savings and we will work towards those efficiency savings. For example, we will look at saving around 20 per cent on travel. So we will make sure that our people focus on travel. We will work very closely on procurement. We believe we can save around \$2.6 million by smarter procurement. We will also look at publications and how we can put more publications on the internet and really reduce our printing costs. Similarly, with advertising and marketing communications—

CHAIR: Thank you, Director-General.

Ms SIMPSON: My question is to the minister—

CHAIR: You can ask your question directly to the minister.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, with reference to page 2-184, thanks to your government's mismanagement Queensland is now the most expensive state in which to be a motorist, with motorists hit by an extra \$800 million in government costs. Over 105,000 Queenslanders have now signed the parliamentary e-petition protesting the increase in vehicle registration costs. There have been 130,000 sign the RACQ's petition protesting the new tax hike on petrol, which will add another \$600 million. Minister, what advice has your department given you about the impact these extra costs will have upon the cost of goods and services transported in Queensland and the multiplier effect in the broader community?

Ms NOLAN: There are a number of points to make in relation to that. Vehicle registration goes into building roads. In Queensland we are spending \$2.4 billion this year on roads and that is more than twice as much as is being collected in registration fees. When this change was announced quite some time ago now, the Treasurer made it clear that in difficult economic circumstances there were some really hard decisions that had to be made. This government went public in December last year indicating that change would be made in order to support our Capital Works Program, and that is indeed what is being done.

The fundamental question that has been before us as participants in the political process in Queensland is that, in light of the global financial crisis, which obviously Queenslanders did not bring upon themselves, we basically had to choose what it was that we could do. Politics is about choices. It is just dishonest to say to people, 'Don't worry. There is something special about us and we can do everything.' This was one of those hard choices. It was a choice that was very clearly and publicly taken. I quote from the Treasurer's press release at the time in which he said—

An increase in car registrations from 1 July 2009 will raise \$194 million and will keep the roads building program on track.

...

Without this increase we would have faced cutting back on our roads program. That's not the right thing to do as we face an economic downturn. We need to keep the program moving and that's why we have taken this decision.

It was clear. It was black and white. But politics is about making choices. It is dishonest to go out and tell people that you can somehow do everything. That is the approach, however, that the LNP seems to want to take. I am happy to run through some of the commitments made, but I think the suggestion that anyone in politics does not have to make choices, and in an environment like this does not have to make hard choices, is fundamentally dishonest.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, I refer to page 2-187. I refer to the recent crackdown on taxidivers for trivial offences such as not having their long socks pulled up. In a situation where the recent Queensland Public Transport Customer Satisfaction Research Program found taxi users rated the service on average less than four out of 10, with common complaints including taxidivers who do not know where prominent hotels and addresses are and allegations of customers being charged for non-existent tariffs and tolls, do you believe that this has been an effective use of enforcers' time?

Ms NOLAN: I refer you to my earlier statement in which I just announced quite a major package of reform to the taxi industry in this state. When I became transport minister, concerns about quality of service in the taxi industry were some of the first issues that were raised with me. So I have done a few things. The first was to institute quite a major compliance blitz, which has contributed I think already to an improvement in standards. In the last month we took 85 taxis off the road just because they were not clean. So I think taxidivers will be out there making a greater effort now as a direct result of that action

which I, through my department, took. I have announced today further changes around minimum age and minimum driving experience for taxidriver, and we will now look very quickly to implement a national package of reforms that will further raise the bar.

It is worth noting that, in public opinion, services provided by the state—that is, public bus, train and ferry services—are rated at a higher standard of quality by passengers than those provided in the taxi industry. So to Queensland Transport and TransLink and Queensland Rail, I think that is a real pat on the back that there is an appreciation of the quality services that this Labor government directly provides.

In relation to the specific issue about one fine delivered to one taxidriver in the course of that blitz, that is not a matter for me. It is obviously a matter for police, and I understand that the matter is being looked at right now. But the big picture here of course is not one bloke and his short socks; the big picture here is a massive raft of reform that is raising taxi standards right across Queensland and on which, member for Maroochydore, as shadow minister you frankly have been nowhere.

Ms SIMPSON: My question, Minister, is with regard to the Port of Brisbane, with reference to Service Delivery Statement page 2-178. I refer to services provided to the public by the Port of Brisbane that are not core business, such as berths for privately owned boats and other groups. What guarantee will you as minister provide that such services will be maintained following the sell-off of the Port of Brisbane without unreasonable cost or lease hikes for users?

Ms NOLAN: That matter will be considered as one of the issues to be considered through the asset sales process. I have a friend who berths her boat just off the botanical gardens, so it is an issue that has been raised with me. I can absolutely give an assurance to those people that we will give some consideration to how best to manage people with private moorings in publicly owned places—people with yachts et cetera. It is something that we are open to considering in this process. In this case the city reach moorings are managed through the Port of Brisbane, which is essentially a commercial entity. But we do of course manage harbours right across the state. So it could not be argued that this is not within our realm of experience and expertise. We will work out the right way to do it through this process.

Ms SIMPSON: I refer to Service Delivery Statement 2-178 in regard to integrated transport planning. In 2005, Premier Beattie announced a study into another river city crossing, noting the Merivale Bridge was due to reach capacity in the network by 2016. However, a pre feasibility study did not start until 2007 and another study—the full feasibility—is only just about to begin and will not be finished until 2011. Isn't this six-year delay in finalising the inner city rail plans the reason your government failed to receive Queensland's fair share of federal funding recently for a very important project?

Ms NOLAN: Well, we did get 20 million bucks for this one. I do not think anyone should underestimate what a substantial project and substantial undertaking this is. Until 1978, Brisbane's rail network was not joined up. You could not catch a train from the Gold Coast, unfortunately, in 1978 because the National Party had ripped up the line, but if you were coming in on the train from, say, Beenleigh you had to get off at South Brisbane. That is why South Brisbane has such a big railway station—because, until the construction of the Merivale Bridge, there were two unconnected rail networks. It is almost hard to imagine just 30 years later. The extent to which we take that for granted is quite a good representation of why it is important to continue the planning effort that we have underway.

There are a couple of issues here. The Merivale Bridge will, before too long, reach its capacity. We have recently completed the first stage and have just secured \$20 million in funding from the federal government to undertake the next planning phase for cross-river rail. The fundamental purpose of this project is to address rail capacity, given that the CBD will continue to be the heart of our urban passenger rail system. The benefit is that this has the capacity to create a subway system for the Brisbane CBD by bringing through a second railway line, so this is a really major project that has the potential to fundamentally change the nature of our urban centre.

The project is being undertaken by this Labor government and is being funded by the Rudd Labor government, so we are doing this in partnership. I really welcome a federal government—unlike the last conservative government—that is actually willing to contribute to better cities for Australians.

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

Ms O'NEILL: I refer to page 124 of budget paper 3 and the funding provided for busways. Could you please outline the benefits of these projects, including the reduction in greenhouse gases?

Ms NOLAN: I thank the member for Kallangur for the question. The Bligh government is delivering on its commitment to invest in long-term infrastructure projects to improve services and support jobs. We are building a world-class bus network to reduce urban congestion, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and make it easier and quicker for people to get to their destinations. Despite Queensland's strong population growth, there was not a single designated busway when the Nationals and Liberals were last in power. That is not a side of politics that has a vision for the future. Indeed given what the only LNP administration is doing—that is, cutting its contribution to public transport subsidies—it would seem that the conservatives really prefer people to keep using their cars.

The Boggo Road Busway is a \$226 million project between the Eleanor Schonell Bridge and the Princess Alexandra Hospital and is on schedule to be opened in early August 2009. It will create 1,660 jobs. The Eastern Busway is a \$140.8 million project from the Princess Alexandra Hospital to the South East Busway and will be opened in conjunction with the opening of the Boggo Road Busway. The project will create 970 jobs. The first section of the \$198 million Northern Busway project extends from the Royal Children's Hospital to Windsor and is on schedule to be opened early in August 2009, creating a total of 1,500 jobs.

These busways will cut up to 10 minutes on some trips and will take up to 600 buses off urban roads every day. It is delivering on our commitment to create jobs, increase passenger services and reduce urban congestion on our roads. By 2016, it is tipped that the three busways will transport around 13,000 passengers each and every single day.

Queensland's population is booming by about 2,000 new residents every week so it is important to plan for a public transport future. We are delivering busways that take an enormous strain off our roads, that dramatically reduce car emissions, that support over 4,100 jobs and that make it simpler, more convenient and more efficient for people to get from A to B.

Ms FARMER: Minister, I refer to page 2-222 of the Service Delivery Statement in relation to TransLink. Fare evasion is a significant problem on the public transport network. Can you advise of any new statistics on fare evasion and what the government is doing to stamp out this practice?

Ms NOLAN: I thank the member for Bulimba for her question. I am really serious about tackling fare evasion. I think public transport is a really great deal. For every dollar that you pay in your fare, the taxpayer through the government pays a contribution of \$3. So paying your buck is not really too much to ask. With that in mind, the government is implementing a range of measures, such as securing fare gate access at CBD train stations and new powers and legislation for specially trained TransLink transit officers. As I said, public transport is already really very heavily subsidised so I think it does represent quite good value for money.

Those people who choose not to pay are doing a couple of things. The first is that they are sponging off the commuter next to them, which I think is fundamentally a pretty bad way to behave. The other thing is that people who use public transport are committed to it. They are generally pretty positive about it but they want it to be better, and those people who are not paying their fares are holding it back and making it hard for the government and those involved to create a better public transport system. Fare evasion on rail, bus and ferries costs Queensland taxpayers around \$16 million every year. That \$16 million could otherwise be used to put on an additional 1,200 bus services. That is equivalent to the cost of all bus enhancement packages delivered across Brisbane since October 2008. People who do not pay risk an on-the-spot fine of \$200, so they are not paying a little bit in their fare and, in so doing, are risking a pretty fair whack with the fine.

There are a number of reasons why contributing to public transport by paying your fare is the right thing to do. I just released some figures this morning showing who is doing the fare evasion. The bad news—not that it affects just about anybody in this room—is that 83 per cent of all the people who were caught fare evading in the last year were under 30, my crowd of 30- to 50-year-olds made up 16 per cent, and only one per cent were the baby boomers, Ray,

Mr STEVENS: I wouldn't do that.

Ms NOLAN: I make the point that I think there is a bit of an attitude amongst some people that you do not need to contribute. I would say this to those people. Firstly, if you do not pay your way, you are sponging off your fellow travellers. Secondly, paying your way contributes to making the system better, which is fundamentally something that we all want to see.

Ms FARMER: Minister, I refer again to page 2-222 of the Service Delivery Statement in relation to TransLink. Can you please advise how many more buses and trains are on the network since the introduction of TransLink in July 2004 and how these services are funded?

Ms NOLAN: Since the Labor government started TransLink in July 2004, we have provided more than 680 buses on the TransLink network. In spite of what the BCC would have you believe, the Bligh government has funded nearly every new bus on South-East Queensland's roads and its busways. These buses are modern, air-conditioned, low floor, CCTV equipped and environmentally friendly and meet disability discrimination act standards. They have been put to work on South-East Queensland roads and on our world-class busway network which, as I said earlier, will be expanded soon with the opening of the northern and eastern busways. As at June, TransLink's bus fleet totalled 2,177 buses.

The Bligh government has also invested in new trains and associated services and infrastructure to meet passenger demand. We are rolling out one train each and every month. There have been 29 three-carriage trains deployed on the TransLink network since 2004. That is part of an initial order for 44 new train sets. These Australian built trains feature electronic passenger information systems, advanced closed-circuit TV, improved lighting, improved visibility between carriages, which increases passenger safety, and toilets for long distance journeys on some trains. These trains have been put to work across the TransLink train network on busy corridors, such as the Ipswich, Gold Coast and Caboolture lines.

In June 2008, we allocated \$923 million for an additional 58 three-carriage trains and further stabling facilities to be delivered after 2010. An order has been placed for an initial 20 three-carriage trains for delivery by 2012, and planning for the balance of the 58 trains is underway. Full delivery of 102 three-carriage train sets will increase the size of the train fleet by almost 70 per cent, or an additional 23,000 seats.

Mr PITT: Page 2-175 of the Service Delivery Statements made reference to the work that has been undertaken on the national transport agenda. I understand that all transport ministers signed off on new vehicle emission standards earlier this year. What are the standards and what impact will they have?

Ms NOLAN: We did, and I think this is something that is really important. Australia needs to do better in terms of vehicle emissions basically for two reasons. We obviously need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but it is also important that if the Australian car industry is going to survive—in contrast to the American car industry—it needs to get the message that it needs to do much more work around building sustainable and fuel-efficient cars.

The Bligh government is delivering on its commitment to ensure that tomorrow's Queensland is green. We want to protect our lifestyle and environment and, as part of that effort, we are working towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions in this state. I am pleased to report that at the last Australian Transport Council meeting, which was held in Cairns in May this year, Queensland joined other jurisdictions in endorsing the Vehicle Fuel Efficiency Report. A key recommendation of the report relates to vehicle standards for carbon dioxide emissions for new light vehicles, and mandatory carbon dioxide emission standards would become a national initiative. The emission standards are part of the national strategy for energy efficiency which the Bligh government proudly supports. My department will be an active participant in the national working group which will take this important initiative to the next stage of developing a regulatory impact assessment.

The Labor government is working in collaboration with Australia's transport and environment agencies to deliver its commitment of greenhouse gas emission reduction. Unlike the National and Liberal parties—and I heard Wilson Tuckey on this subject on *AM* this morning—we fundamentally understand that climate change is real and that there is a practical and moral obligation to do something about it. We take this issue seriously, and we are taking steps towards protecting our environment for the future benefit of generations of Queenslanders.

Mr MESSENGER: Of course climate change is real.

Ms NOLAN: No, you just think it is caused by volcanos. Approaches that influence the whole vehicle fleet, like carbon dioxide emission standards, are aligned with the ClimateSmart 2050 initiative to reduce Queensland's greenhouse gas emissions—a commitment the Bligh government is delivering.

The proposal to consider carbon dioxide emission standards is also aligned with global trends. Barack Obama recently announced a commitment to pursue a national fuel economy and greenhouse gas standard. You have a Democrat government and all of a sudden they took it seriously?

By 2016 car companies in the USA will be expected to achieve 30 per cent better fuel efficiency, the equivalent of 6.6 per 100 kilometres in Australian terms. My department advises that Australia's vehicle industry has set itself a voluntary target, which is great news, and we will do more work in this regard.

Ms O'NEILL: I refer to page 124 of Budget Paper No. 3 and the funding for the Gold Coast Rapid Transit system. I know that this will be the first light rail in Queensland. Minister, what are the benefits of this project, and has it received support from all levels of government and all sides of politics?

Ms NOLAN: I thank the honourable member for the question. Gold Coast Rapid Transit is a key priority.

Mr STEVENS: I rise to a point of order. What page and how does that relate to the budget documents? It is a matter of opinion.

Ms NOLAN: Page 124 of BP 3.

CHAIR: The member did refer to that item in her question. Minister, could you continue please?

Ms NOLAN: Sure. The member for Mermaid Beach does not oppose it, does he?

Mr STEVENS: Is it my question time?

Ms NOLAN: No. I know about your position, though. The Gold Coast Rapid Transit project is a key priority for me and for this government. It will revolutionise public transport on the Gold Coast and create an iconic piece of infrastructure. It will be a boost for the construction industry in the short term and for the tourism industry in the long term.

I am pleased to say that the planning phase is over and we are now getting on with the job of building. This will fundamentally change the nature of the Gold Coast and it will do so by creating sustainable transport for the better. The Queensland government is contributing \$464 million; the Australian government, \$365 million, and the Gold Coast City Council, \$120 million. I note the interest of the member for Mermaid Beach in the matter. I think we would probably get more debate on that side of the committee than we would on the Labor bench.

During the last election campaign the LNP had five different positions on this absolutely key and very clearly articulated project. First, the member for Maroochydore wanted to start from scratch and review the whole project. She was supported by the candidate for Southport who had 'spoken to engineers'—I do that every day—and decided it needed to be changed. Then the member for Maroochydore said she was 100 per cent in favour of the project. Then the member for Robina, now Mermaid Beach, waded in, writing to his constituents telling them to 'forget it'. Then the candidate, now the member for Gaven, wrote to all of his constituents describing the project as 'madness' because it was not in his electorate. Then in a final triumph, fresh from his efforts on the oil spill, the member for Southern Downs said he would cancel the Traveston Crossing Dam and pay for the project. Unfortunately, however, he had already committed those funds to something else.

You cannot have five positions in five weeks and expect to be taken seriously on this or any other issue. The only person who has been consistent in their support is the member for Surfers Paradise, but then he became Leader of the Opposition at which point he said, 'There are lots of areas on this project that have not been resolved', and, 'I'll be taking a parochial and protectionist view.' This is utterly all over the place on a pure, black and white, clearly articulated project which a Labor government conceived, planned and is now delivering.

Ms FARMER: I refer again to page 2-222 of the Service Delivery Statement, this time regarding the TransLink Transit Authority and, specifically, funding for Brisbane Transport. Would you please explain the funding arrangements for Brisbane Transport and the trends in funding?

Ms NOLAN: I thank the member for Bulimba for her question. The Bligh government is meeting our commitment to deliver a better public transport system for South-East Queensland. This year's budget delivers a record \$1.2 billion for rail, bus and ferry services. These services will carry an estimated 191 million passengers. That is a six per cent increase in patronage. Our record public transport funding has delivered a 50 per cent increase in patronage since TransLink was set up. That is a really massive shift in behaviour made possible by our investment in integrated ticketing, the go card, new trains, new railway lines, new buses and new busways.

In relation to Brisbane Transport, this service is funded as a partnership between the state government and the Brisbane City Council. What many people would not know is that the state provides the majority of the funding. In 2004 when TransLink was introduced, the state provided \$47 million for BT services and the council provided \$40 million. Since that time the state's contribution has grown by a massive 57 per cent to \$74 million in 2007-08. By contrast, council's contribution has grown by only 17 per cent, from \$40 million to just \$47 million in that same year I just mentioned.

So the state government took leadership; we established the TransLink system; we massively increased our funding to the Brisbane City Council for Brisbane Transport services—57 per cent since it was set up—while the council dawdled along at a fairly paltry 17 per cent. The truth is that if council had increased its contribution by the same percentage as the state, there would be an extra \$16 million worth of services across the city. I think people should understand that this is the only National Party administration in this state going around. What they have done is dawdled in relation to public transport. They do not have a fundamental commitment to it and so their funding has not kept up with growth. Fortunately for the people of Brisbane, they have a Labor state government which is committed and which has picked up that slack. I think that next time—

Mr Messenger interjected.

CHAIR: Order please!

Ms NOLAN:—you see a Brisbane City Council bus driving down the road you should understand that there are more buses, better buses, new services all the time as a result of the fundamental commitment of this Labor government.

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

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, I refer to SDS 2-172, and I ask you: what will the loss of the AAA rating add to the cost of servicing the liabilities of the GOCs and business units of QT?

Ms NOLAN: This government went to an election having opened its books and having had that decision by the credit ratings agencies made. We went to an election with everyone understanding that that was the case. So that was broadly understood at the time. Different GOCs have different capital programs but it is the case, broadly speaking, that they borrow through the QTC. This is a decision that was made in the full light of day. Everybody understood that the credit rating had been downgraded and everyone understood that the government was really committed to maintaining its capital program. Both that part of it, which was delivered directly through government and that part of it which was delivered through the GOCs—that was the only way that it could be. The books were open, the election was gone to. Choices have to be made.

I think in pretty stark contrast is, member for Maroochydore, your own approach of simply suggesting that everything can be done as if there is no budget at all. In recent months the commitments that you have made have included—and I will run through them—an overpass at Telegraph Road, which we think would probably cost about \$100 million, and automatic train protection on the train system, which I am advised would be \$300 million to \$500 million. She went to the election promising Redcliffe

rail with a dodgy document—you went out and promised it, but when we looked at the fine print it turned out there was a little asterisk with a note that said ‘subject to global financial crisis’. You have said that you would not sell Queensland Rail, \$7 billion; start subsidising air services in the Torres Strait, \$40 million; retain the fuel subsidy, \$600 million; sign the TransLink agreement with QR with no questions asked at all—

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The member for Maroochydore has the call.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, I note you did not answer my question, which was: what will the loss of the AAA rating add to the cost of servicing the liabilities of the GOCs and business units of Queensland Transport? I take from your nonanswer that you have no idea. Minister, I move on to my next question, which is in relation to the departmental output integrated transport planning. I refer you to a question on notice where I asked you to list all current planning projects. I note that the document that you have tabled as an answer to the question on notice does not, in fact, include all planning documents. It does not include, for example, the findings of the WBTNI or the Caloundra replacement aerodrome study as just two of these. Minister, is your answer deliberately incomplete or is this another example of the Auditor-General’s finding that your department’s planning is immature and poorly coordinated?

Ms NOLAN: We provided quite a fulsome answer in this regard. The department obviously does a great deal of planning work primarily around preserving corridors for the future, given the extent of growth that we are experiencing and that we expect to experience into the future. It is obviously important to preserve corridors before they are built up—and that is essentially the main body of our planning work.

Again, with those corridors and those plans for future public transport, we are called upon to take a position and to make choices. Again, in regard to those planning studies, the general course of events is that the LNP is found wanting. Let me give you a couple of examples.

We are planning a corridor called the southern freight rail corridor, which will provide essentially a freight bypass on the rail network so that freight does not have to run across the Merivale Street bridge that we were talking about before and through the centre of the city. There are, of course, some affected landowners, as there always are when you seek to protect and preserve corridors for the future. You either plan it or you do not. If you do not, you clearly have a problem on your hands. There the local LNP member is very actively opposing the planning work that is being undertaken. He is arguing that it is wrong to disrupt people even in this case, which is clearly massively in the public interest both now and into the future.

Similarly, the department has undertaken a substantial body of planning work around a public transport corridor up through Maroochydore to allow for bus priority lanes in order for there to be better public transport going into the future. There, member for Maroochydore, as you know, you have actively sought to disrupt that work by taking the position of every person who is opposed to change. You can either be on the side of the future, of what is right for all of our futures, or you can be on the side of the people who adamantly say ‘not in my backyard’. I think it is clear what is in the public interest in that regard and I think I have given you a fulsome answer to this question.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, it is noted that you have not explained why you did not, in fact, answer the question on notice and outline all of the planning documents. It is clear you do not know what is or is not happening in your department. I refer to the fact that it states on the WBTNI website that the public consultation finished last year but no decision has been made 12 months later. When will you make a decision about the options presented by this study?

Ms NOLAN: I missed in your question that one of the things you had referred to a second go—or perhaps it was in the question on notice—was the aerodrome study. I point out—although obviously it is on public record—that it is actually the Department of Infrastructure and Planning that is doing that. You are obviously sufficiently across your local issue to not be aware of who is actually doing the study.

Ms SIMPSON: Mr Chairman, am I able to correct the record because the other minister said it was your responsibility and that I should ask you the question.

CHAIR: Yes, you will be able to correct the record when you do your report or when we speak to this motion in parliament.

Ms SIMPSON: Thanks, Mr Chairman, because the Minister for Main Roads said it was this minister’s responsibility.

CHAIR: You will be given an opportunity. Member for Maroochydore, you have been very good for the last three sessions. You have shown that you can in fact sit here without interrupting. I ask you to continue to do that. The minister has the call.

Ms NOLAN: I think it is probably on the website, Mr Chairman. The major purpose of the Western Brisbane Transport Network Investigation was to decide once and for all whether there would ultimately be a western bypass of Brisbane that would link probably the Ipswich Motorway with somewhere up towards Pine Rivers or the north coast. That was something that had been floating around for many, many years as a question and one that I guess to some extent hung over the heads of the people in those affected parts of the world.

The major purpose of the study was to get to the bottom of that question so that there could be some certainty provided both for the people affected and for the transport future in that part of the world. Very clear announcements were made about the outcome of that some time ago. That is, there would not be a western Brisbane bypass.

The study then continued, quite rightly, to work out exactly what would be the best way to deal with passenger and freight movements in that part of the world. It was a really major undertaking and one which I, as an incoming minister, wanted to have a good look at. This is a really important study for the future of a very major part of South-East Queensland. I am nearly finished doing that. That is a study that will be released shortly. One of the major findings will be to support the Brisbane City Council, which has identified the northern link.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, I refer to the recent Auditor-General's report which found transport planning for urban congestion to be poorly coordinated and immature. After listening to your last answer, where you now realise you are responsible for WBTNI and not the infrastructure minister, as you said, and in light of the fact that your colleague the main roads minister said that you are responsible, I ask: who is actually in charge of coordinating the planning—you, your colleague Minister Wallace or Minister Hinchliffe?

Ms NOLAN: No, no. As a direct result of not listening you have misunderstood. It is the aerodrome study on the Sunshine Coast that we are doing. WBTNI was undertaken by what was the department of transport and is now essentially my responsibility within the Department of Transport and Main Roads. That is why I just gave you quite a detailed answer to the question.

Ms SIMPSON: Who is responsible for planning—you, your colleague Minister Wallace or Minister Hinchliffe?

Ms NOLAN: How many times do you want me to say it?

CHAIR: The minister has answered that question. Can you please move on to your next question.

Ms SIMPSON: It is clear as mud. Currently there is the three-headed monster in charge of the planning for transport services across Queensland where the ministers do not know who is responsible for what. In relation to employee expenses, I go back to the point I raised before with regard to the variation. Perhaps the department can now address this variation. I also ask you: is there a hiring freeze on in your department?

Ms NOLAN: The straight answer is no, but I will pass the question to the director-general in order to elaborate. He has also got some information in response to an earlier question which we can cut to now.

Mr Stewart: Thank you again, Minister. The answer to the question was that we have done some research around the combined employee expenses for the DTMR budget. For 2008-09 it was \$548 million. The combined department budget for 2009-10 is \$512 million. There is a reduction of \$36 million. The reduction is explained in the respective income statements for Main Roads and for Queensland Transport. That is page 2-208 for Main Roads and page 2-200 for Queensland Transport.

For Queensland Transport the variance reflects the impacts of EBA increases that have been offset by the impact of the Trade Queensland machinery-of-government transfer. As you probably appreciate, the former Queensland Transport also had Trade Queensland as part of its machinery of government. That explains that movement. For the Main Roads impact there is actually a note on page 2-214 that explains it. Note 4 explains those changes. I am happy if the minister would like that tabled.

In relation to your latter question, we have a very significant workforce. Our workforce, as I have said on numerous occasions, is very focused on delivering front-line services through our customer service centres, through all our operations and also our infrastructure program. We do not have a freeze policy. We are looking very closely at our establishment, as are most businesses in this time. We will continue to do that.

With the merger of the department we have actually got some surplus people. We will certainly be looking after those. The government has made a very clear statement around employment security. We will continue down that path. We will go through recruitment and selection processes as required. We will take account of what we call 'priority employees', who have been moved or displaced as part of the reform process. If they fit the skill requirements we need then we will certainly use those people as priority employees.

Ms NOLAN: I am going to cut the director-general off to say that the real point is (a) we do not have a freeze and (b) we certainly do not have a policy to cut. That was you, not us.

Ms SIMPSON: I would also put it to you that there is still a variation in those costs. I am happy to look at the detail of what you have tabled. There is still a variation based upon last year's combined statements and this year's combined statements. How many surplus staff are there in the department after the merger that you are now trying to place?

Ms NOLAN: None.

Ms SIMPSON: I do not want to misquote the words of the director-general, but you have some staff who are still not placed and you are waiting to place them. How many staff are there that you are waiting to place in positions post the merger?

Ms NOLAN: We are working through that process. It was your side of the fence that was proposing to get rid of public servants, not ours. We are meeting our commitment by placing those staff.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, your director-general has just advised that there are staff who still are yet to be placed post the merger. I am asking how many staff are there still to be placed post the merger who are currently surplus to certain positions or who do not have a reallocated position.

Ms NOLAN: Do you know off the top of your head how many, Mr Stewart?

Mr Stewart: I do not know. We have some administrative staff that we are moving as part of our corporate area. They are being moved quite quickly into front-line areas. There are very small numbers.

Ms NOLAN: As I said, the big picture here is that we are paying people at four and four. There has been a really major departmental restructure. It has been a really serious undertaking to bring these two departments together in order to provide a better service to Queenslanders. But we are committed to the professional people who work in government in this really important field. Those people understand that we will work with them at an individual and personal level to find the best job for them.

I think this restructure has been very professionally undertaken, with very legitimate concern for individual people's professional paths. I commend Paul Low, my deputy director-general, who has led that process. I think it has been really well done. It is still not quite finalised, but it has been undertaken quite speedily and respectfully with genuine concern for the best professional pathway for people. I think that our staff, like all Queenslanders, understand that there was only one side that went to the last election proposing to sack 12,000 of them. It was not the side of politics that I am on.

Ms SIMPSON: My question is with regard to public transport, but you are actually misleading the House because there was no proposal to sack staff. That is a deliberate misleading of the estimates committee.

CHAIR: Order! Member for Maroochydore, come to order, please. You are implying an improper motivation. That is outside of the standing orders and I ask you to withdraw.

Ms SIMPSON: Whatever offends you I withdraw.

CHAIR: You will withdraw unconditionally.

Ms SIMPSON: The committee is being misled.

CHAIR: You will withdraw unconditionally.

Ms SIMPSON: There was no plan to sack staff.

CHAIR: You will withdraw unconditionally.

Ms SIMPSON: Under what standing order, Mr Chairman?

CHAIR: Okay.

Ms SIMPSON: I withdraw. There is no standing order but I withdraw. My question was with regard to public transport. What is the subsidy that the state government is paying for public transport outside of South-East Queensland and what is the subsidy the state government is paying within South-East Queensland, given that these figures are not clearly delineated in the annual report?

Ms NOLAN: I think they are in the annual report, to be honest, and we subsidise—

Ms SIMPSON: They are not split.

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

Ms FARMER: I refer to an answer you have provided previously and to page 2-222 of the Service Delivery Statement. I note that the Liberal-National administration in Brisbane City is reducing its contribution to public transport. Can you tell the committee what other South-East Queensland local governments are doing?

Ms NOLAN: Thanks to the member for Bulimba for the question. I can. I am a fundamental believer in public transport. I think it is sustainable transport. It is the transport of the future. It is the transport of modern urban environments. I think it brings real environmental benefits. I think it also plays a real social role in bringing people together. Communities in which lots of people travel on the subway or on buses are places in which it is harder to live in your isolated world, without real cause to intersect with your fellow citizens. I think public transport is vitally important.

I think it is so important that all levels of government should contribute to it. I entirely appreciate the central role of the state in delivering this core public service, as we do with most others. The federal government has a role to play in public transport. Now that there is a federal Labor government we are, for the first time in more than a decade, seeing that. Local government also has a key role to play.

It is disappointing that the LNP at the Brisbane City Council are cutting their contribution to public transport subsidies. It is important to acknowledge, quite fairly, that they do more than other local governments do. As said earlier, primarily because a Labor state government gave them the benefits—

Mr Messenger interjected.

Ms NOLAN: With our money. As I said, primarily because a Labor state government gave it the benefit of council amalgamation many years ago. I think it was 1925. The Gold Coast City Council is putting \$120 million into Gold Coast Rapid Transit. That is a serious contribution and we really welcome it. Moreton is actively putting money into planning for a future rail corridor. The Sunshine Coast Regional Council has just instituted a public transport levy and is really beginning to contribute in this field. Ipswich has also just recently commenced a partnership with the state through TransLink to plan a future transit network for my part of the world. So I think it is a real positive that, while BCC is going backwards—it is still there—other local governments are now contributing to play in this field.

Mr PITT: Minister, I refer to Budget Paper No. 3 at page 125 which notes the government's commitment to cycleways. As a keen cyclist myself, what investment is the government making into new cycling infrastructure, particularly in Cairns?

Ms NOLAN: Me too, and this is a great project. This actually came out of the Cairns parliament. There was an initiative developed to build a cycleway for Cairns and it was an initiative with which we went to the last election. We gave some really rock-solid commitments at that election about building infrastructure and specifically about building cycle infrastructure. The Bligh government is continuing to invest in more than \$89 million worth of cycle infrastructure projects throughout the state. Of the \$89 million cycle infrastructure program, work is about to begin on a \$6.1 million dedicated cycleway extending from Aeroglen to the Cairns CBD. We are also investing \$16 million in intersection upgrades, bicycle lanes and signage along major intersections on Mulgrave Road in Cairns, and this work is on track to be completed next month.

We are delivering high-quality sustainable travel options to Queenslanders and encouraging them to get out of their cars and on to their bikes, which is also, as you well know, good fun. Other cycle projects throughout the state include the recently completed Toowong Cycle and Pedestrian Overpass which gives those people who want to ride up Mount Coot-tha the opportunity to do so without getting hit by a car on the way there. There is also the \$12.4 million PA Hospital cycleway. The \$8 million Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital cycle centre is currently being built and it will be much like the fantastic King George Square cycle centre, which is really like a gym. You can ride your bike to work. You can have a shower there. You can get your laundry done and you can then go on to work. It is more convenient than driving in and parking the car.

Planning for the Windsor cycleway upgrade is also underway and will deliver a critical section of a northern high-capacity cycle link from the city's northern suburbs. The way Brisbane is set up now is essentially that there are quite good cycle links in from some parts of town—the west is probably the best of them with the cycleway along the Western Freeway, and all of our new roads have cycleways built with them at the same time. However, the cycle connections on the north side are not great and so we have really prioritised improving that and we are doing some work around that right now.

Mr PITT: Thank you.

CHAIR: Minister, I refer to page 125 of Budget Paper No. 3 and the funding provided for rural and remote airstrips, and I ask: what is the government's commitment to improve the Horn Island airstrip and are there any commitments from other levels of government?

Ms NOLAN: The Bligh government is meeting its commitment to provide better services to regional and remote Queenslanders. Responsibility for the maintenance of the runway at Horn Island Airport rests with the owner of the asset—in this case, the Torres Shire Council. Horn Island Airport is a key transport hub for communities in the Torres Strait and Cape York and ensures essential services are available to the outer islands and provides a vital link to Cairns for medical and educational facilities. The runway at Horn Island is in need of an upgrade. The cost for resealing and extension works alone is tipped to be around \$8 million.

Although responsibility for the maintenance of the Horn Island runway rests with the council, the Bligh government is meeting its commitment to the people of North Queensland and has put \$2 million on the table to support the upgrade works, and I think it is fair to say that that is in large part due to your advocacy in this regard. The contribution made by the state government towards this project is the most significant to date. The Torres Shire Council and the Torres Strait Regional Authority have committed a total of \$1.66 million to the project. The Commonwealth has contributed \$440,000, although I understand the Torres Shire Council has approached the Commonwealth for additional assistance.

Given that the federal government sold these and other regional airports to local governments, the Queensland government urges the Commonwealth to get on board with this. The council owns it. The federal government is responsible for air safety and previously owned it. So it is ironic that the state which, I think by any fair measure, probably holds the least direct responsibility is the party with the most cash on the table. Having stumped up our bit, we do really very actively urge the federal government to now make a more active contribution.

QantasLink currently operates 50-seat Q300 aircraft at a reduced capacity of 38 seats on the route. Previously, 74-seat Q400 aircraft at a capacity of 68 seats were using the runway but, due to damage being incurred, Qantas has had to revert to the smaller planes. Having been up there with you and talked to people about this, I am aware that that has a really direct impact on those communities. There are not as many cheap flights as a result of the smaller planes having to run. So we have put some skin in the game. We have \$2 million on the table and we hope that the other, frankly, more responsible parties will now step up their contributions.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

Ms O'NEILL: Minister, I refer to page 2-179 of the Service Delivery Statement regarding public transport services. The Petrie to Kippa-Ring rail line is a very important project for the region. What is the government doing to progress this project and are there any other alternative approaches?

Ms NOLAN: I thank the honourable member for her question. This certainly is a project with a long history. Too often I think the community has been given false hope and fake promises for short-term political gain. That is not the approach of this government, and it will not be. During the recent election campaign there was a lot of pressure on the government to promise to build this railway line. But there is no point in making a promise if you cannot pay for it. That is why we took a deliberately responsible approach, even at a time when, as I said, there was real political pressure and perhaps a political cost to be paid in doing so.

We committed to the community not to sell the corridor. We have not, and we will not. Secondly, we committed to remove all doubt and clarify its description in the South East Queensland Infrastructure Program as a rail project. The 2009 SEQIP delivers on this. Thirdly, we committed to maintain the project in our future infrastructure program. SEQIP does this with a commitment of \$550 million. We have met our commitments. This government has a track record of delivering for Redcliffe. Right now we are building the \$315 million duplicate bridge to be named in honour of Ted Smout. This is the most significant infrastructure project for the peninsula in 30 years, generating hundreds of jobs.

We also delivered new T2 lanes and better bus stops along Anzac Avenue. When these lanes were opened, we added 74 new services to the trunk routes between Kippa-Ring and Petrie which has led to a 65 per cent patronage increase on those local buses. We have the runs on the board for Redcliffe. After the election I was approached by the Mayor of Moreton Bay, Allan Sutherland, with a sensible proposal for the rail line. The mayor suggested we each put in \$2 million to get the project shovel ready. That would make it eligible for any future federal stimulus funding. We agreed and that work will start shortly. This is a practical idea to move the project forward. It goes from a line on a map to a proven up infrastructure project.

The honourable member asked if there are any alternative approaches, and I think that if anyone will she will remember that there are. During the election campaign the shadow minister went out there and held a press conference with all of the local candidates and announced 'LNP commits to Redcliffe rail'. What she did not say was that you had better check the fine print. Over on page 3 under 'Proposed Delivery Timetable' it says in brackets 'subject to financial constraints and the GFC'. This is the same GFC the member for Southern Downs was very busy denying at the time and the member for Maroochydore was using as her get-out-of-jail-free card. As became clear in the days that followed, it was a multimillion-dollar plan she had forgotten to mention to her leader. When the member for Southern—

Mr Messenger interjected.

CHAIR: Sorry, but the time has—

Ms NOLAN: I thought that at the discretion of the member I could—

Mr Messenger interjected.

CHAIR: Order!

Ms NOLAN: Can I request the discretion of the member to finish?

CHAIR: Order! Honourable members, please. Please, member for Burnett; we are but seven minutes away from conclusion. I call the member for Mulgrave.

Mr PITT: Minister, I refer to page 2-175 of the Service Delivery Statement and the new road safety campaign called Share My Story. How is this campaign going and what messages do you have for motorists as the road toll continues to rise?

Ms NOLAN: I thank the member for Mulgrave for the question. The Labor government is really genuinely committed to reducing the road toll in Queensland and we continue to invest in road safety campaigns which aim to remind people of the potentially devastating consequences of failing to take care when driving. The Share My Story campaign launched earlier this year is one such campaign. Share My Story is a social networking website which illustrates the emotional and physical impact of crashes through the voice of everyday Queenslanders. This website provides a portal for road users to share their personal stories, showing that the impact of a road crash has profound ongoing effects on the families and friends of those involved.

I am pleased to report that Queenslanders have embraced the Share My Story concept. Some 6,309 people have officially registered their support on the website, with 44,872 visits to the site and 322 stories shared. With our road toll currently standing at 200—that was a day ago and it is now 201, which is 21 more than the road toll at the same time last year—I urge all Queenslanders not to take dangerous risks on the road and to stop being complacent. I especially want to remind our young drivers of the dangers of partaking in unsafe driving practices. Road toll statistics reveal that fatalities among the youngest drivers—that is 17- to 24-year-olds—are the highest and are in fact more than twice the road toll for the average population.

The Labor government is committed to reducing our road toll and we invested more than \$7.3 million in 2008-09 alone in road safety campaigns such as Share My Story. Share My Story has been integrated into a new Queensland road safety brand, Here for Life, which I launched in May. The contributions that Queenslanders submit on the Here for Life website and the Share My Story pages are true. They are thought provoking and they really are narratives that remind Queenslanders of the reasons for driving safely each day. If those members on the committee have not seen this website, it is really worth seeing. This is an issue about which government puts messages out all of the time and there is an extent to which some people take that on board and others take it as background noise. This Share My Story website is really compelling stuff about the real human impact of accidents on our roads. It has been a very successful campaign undertaken by this department. The people involved have done very good work, and I highly commend it to you.

Ms FARMER: Minister, I refer to page 2-222 of the Service Delivery Statement and in particular the rollout of the go card ticketing system. Last year Minister Mickel provided the committee with an outline of its use at that time. Can you please advise how it has developed since then?

Ms NOLAN: I thank the member for Bulimba for the question. We made a promise at the last election to improve public services, and we are delivering on our commitment. More and more Queenslanders are using the go card to get around South-East Queensland, and why wouldn't they? It is world class. This integrated ticketing smart card system is a world-class system and is one of the first to be implemented in Australia. It allows people to travel on trains, buses and ferries by merely just swiping a card.

I am pleased to report that, since its implementation, go card has been and continues to be really very successful. Since January 2008, over 37½ million trips have been taken on TransLink services using go cards. As at 15 July, over 382,000 go cards had been issued and customers have loaded over \$93 million on to their go cards. This is in comparison to the figure that was reported to last year's estimates committee—that is, there were then 84,488 go cards out there. It is now 382,000. Last year \$9.7 million had been loaded on to go cards. As I said, it is now \$93 million.

Go card sales have consistently exceeded projections. The June 2009 target of 250,000 go cards in circulation was reached in December 2008. In its early days when people were not familiar with it, go card frankly got some bad press. But this has been a hugely successful rollout and in the last year since this estimates committee last met it has really very genuinely taken off. The fact that there are 382,000 go cards out there is the ultimate measure of success. We need to get more people on it as time progresses because it is really easy to buy one and to load up more money on it. It is really efficient to use. It also provides information to transport planners or network planners about where people are going, and that will give us information to design a better public transport system in time.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. That concludes the examination of the estimates for the portfolio of the Minister for Transport. Thank you, Minister, and your advisers for your attendance.

Ms NOLAN: I very sincerely want to thank the officers of the Transport section of the department of main roads. I think people do not realise what an enormous effort the Public Service puts into this—that is, getting all of the information ready and, in our case, it happened in the midst of a restructure. So people really put their souls into this and I commend them for their very good work. I particularly want to thank the director-general, Dave Stewart. I also want to thank my personal staff, particularly my principal adviser, Daniel Cheverton. People have worked very hard in recent times and I sincerely thank them for their work.

CHAIR: This concludes the committee's consideration of the matters referred to it by the parliament. The transcript of this part of the hearing will be available on the Hansard website within two hours from now. Before I conclude, on behalf of the committee I want to thank Hansard, the timekeepers and the attendants for their assistance today. I particularly want to thank Miss Margaret Telford, the research assistant, for her assistance and especially thank the research director, Rachelle Stacey, for her tireless work to progress the work of this committee. Thank you very much. I declare this public hearing now closed.

Committee adjourned at 5.33 pm