

## WEDNESDAY, 21 JULY 2010

---

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

#### Estimates Committee F Members

Ms M O'Neill (Chair)

Mr JM Dempsey

Mr HWT Hobbs

Mrs BM Kiernan

Mrs RN Menkens

Mrs CA Smith

Mr SPA Wettenhall

---

#### In Attendance

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

##### Department of Infrastructure and Planning

Mr C Jensen, Coordinator-General and Director-General

Mr M Kinnane, Associate Director-General, Local Government Services

Ms P Jamieson, Executive Director, Regional Services

Mr D Willis, Director, Local Government Policy and Legislation

##### Department of Communities

Ms L Apelt, Director-General

Mr R Weatherall, Deputy Director-General, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Services

Mr J Marsh, Director, Financial Services

Mr D Glasgow, Commissioner, Family Responsibilities Commission

---

#### Committee met at 8.30 am

**CHAIR:** Good morning, everyone. I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today, and their elders past and present. I declare this hearing of Estimates Committee F open. On behalf of the committee I welcome to the hearing the minister, departmental officers, officers of statutory bodies and members of the public. I am Mary-Anne O'Neill, the member for Kallangur and the chair of the committee. Mr Howard Hobbs, the member for Warrego, is the deputy chair. The other committee members are Mr Jack Dempsey, the member for Bundaberg; Mrs Betty Kiernan, the member for Mount Isa; Mrs Rosemary Menkens, the member for Burdekin; Mrs Christine Smith, the member for Burleigh; and Mr Steve Wettenhall, the member for Barron River.

The committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2010 for organisational units within the portfolios of the Minister for Local Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport, and the Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women. The committee will examine the portfolio areas in that order.

The committee will suspend proceedings for the following periods of time: morning tea from 10 am to 10.20 am, a 10-minute break from 11.20 am to 11.30 am, lunch from 1 pm to 2 pm, afternoon tea from 3.45 pm to 4.05 pm and a 10-minute break from 5.20 pm to 5.40 pm.

In the event that those attending today are not aware, the committee's proceedings are lawful proceedings and subject to the standing rules and orders of the Queensland parliament. Members of the public are welcome to observe the proceedings, but may not participate in the proceedings. In that regard, and in accordance with standing order 206, any person admitted to this hearing may be excluded by order of the committee or at my discretion as chair. 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.

In relation to media coverage of this hearing, the committee has resolved that television and film coverage, photographs and sound broadcasts be allowed for the chair's opening comments and the introductory statements of each minister, and that television, film and photographic coverage be allowed at the change of organisational units. The committee has also resolved that audio and video of the hearing recorded by Parliamentary Services's cameras and microphones in the Legislative Council chamber be broadcast by the Parliamentary Service via the services's website and to receivers throughout the parliamentary precinct. I ask that all mobile phones and pagers be now switched off.

I remind members of the committee and ministers that, under standing orders, the time limit for questions is one minute and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a double chime will sound at the end of each time limit. 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. Standing orders require that at least half the time available for questions at today's hearing be allocated to non-government members. Any time expended while the committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between government and non-government members. Government members and non-government members will take turns asking questions, generally in blocks lasting 20 minutes and commencing with non-government members. The committee has resolved that non-committee members be given leave to attend to ask questions during the hearing today. To assist Hansard, officers are asked to provide their names and positions prior to responding to a question referred to them by the minister.

I declare open for examination the proposed expenditure for organisational units within the portfolio of the Minister for Local Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships. The committee will commence with examination of estimates for local government. 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 of no longer than five minutes. Minister, would you like to make a brief introductory statement?

**Ms BOYLE:** Thank you, Chair, I would. Today more time has been allocated to questions in my local government portfolio and so in my opening remarks I will address some perspectives on my portfolio of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships. I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today and pay my respects to the elders past and present. I am proud, indeed, to be the minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships at this time in the history of Queensland and in the history of the Queensland government. For our nation's first people, it is a better time than it has been, with promise and unprecedented opportunities ahead for the generation now in their childhood. Of great importance, and a turning point for many, was the 2008 national apology to our Indigenous people by then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. Also significant has been the inclusion in February this year by the Bligh government of a preamble to the Queensland Constitution. I quote the words, which were so eloquently crafted—

The people of Queensland, free and equal citizens of Australia ... honour the Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the First Australians, whose lands, winds and waters we all now share; and pay tribute to their unique values, and their ancient and enduring cultures, which deepen and enrich the life of our community ...

I am advised by elders of the importance to them of receiving the recognition they have long fought for as the first Australians. This recognition has made it easier for many Indigenous people to turn their faces from the insults and hardships of the past to the opportunities for a very different future. The preamble is one action only under the Bligh government's first in Australia, whole-of-government Reconciliation Action Plan. This RAP is a living document. It is a guide, giving all state government agencies and departments a role in reconciliation and a set of actions by which to measure progress. We are all aware that there is a huge gap between Indigenous and other Australians in life expectancy, in chronic disease incidence, in educational attainment, in unemployment rates, in homeownership and other key parameters.

The Bligh government and the current federal government have allocated major resources and efforts, now and for the years ahead, towards closing the gap through such initiatives as the Cape York welfare reform and the Family Responsibilities Commission, through the community-by-community negotiation tables and government champions program, through the remote Indigenous housing

partnerships and my department's establishment in Cairns of the program office to resolve land tenure, develop township-wide ILUAs, establish town-planning schemes and a five- to 10-year integrated capital works plan for each of the discrete Aboriginal communities and the islands of the Torres Strait. With all of this comes job and training opportunities for local people in those communities. However, the extent and pace of the success of such initiatives depends on a strong partnership with the communities. Developing this partnership requires continuing dialogue with community elders and traditional owners, and it also depends on the leadership of the mayor and council of the community.

In the meantime, a new overcoming disadvantage program for Indigenous people living in Queensland cities and towns is presently under consultation. One focus of this program is building the confidence of Indigenous people to step forward and have a go. In this regard I have to say that, after taking up this portfolio as minister some 16 months ago, I was surprised to discover the many hundreds and thousands of successful Indigenous people of whom we hear so little. They are there in diverse fields of endeavour, right across the spectrum of our society: Indigenous footballers and architects, hairdressers and doctors, artists and tradesmen, public servants and ministers of religion, farmers and lawyers, teachers and tour guides, academics and many more. My congratulations go to all these unsung heroes who are paving the way. How good it is and how hopeful we can all be that the generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children born now will share fully and well in the lifestyle and privileges that most Queenslanders take for granted.

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

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, I refer a lot of my questions to SDS 2-73, the departmental overview. Minister, can you advise what the present debt levels are for local governments across Queensland and what are their projected increases for the forthcoming years?

**Ms BOYLE:** Would you say the second part again?

**Mr HOBBS:** What are the present debt levels for local government across Queensland and what are the projected levels in the outgoing years?

**Ms BOYLE:** I will ask the associate director-general to speak to this in a moment, but to my knowledge the department does not simply record debt levels for each council in Queensland and then monitor them month by month or even year by year. The sustainability of a council, the quality of financial management, depends on a range of factors and not simply on level of debt. In fact, there are some councils about which QTC has commented that living on their cash reserves and not using debt wisely to pay for infrastructure is, in fact, not such good financial management. Therefore, I encourage you and others who might be concerned about councils and their financial sustainability to look beyond what is, in fact, the level of debt at any point in time. It is really important to recognise that debt can be wisely used by growing councils to fund infrastructure for future residents when it would be difficult for present residents to pay for all those who are coming ahead of them in future generations. Through you, Madam Chair, I ask the associate director-general, Mr Michael Kinnane, to comment.

**Mr Kinnane:** Often the words 'debt' and 'deficit' are confused. In borrowing terms, debt is the amount owed and operating deficit is where the revenues received during the financial year are less than the operating expenditures made. A deficit is not a debt. Debt has become a long-term operating deficit of the kind of debt councils are trying to steer clear of. Manageable levels of debt are negligible if they can be balanced against the income of the council. The argument that debt is the result of the amalgamation does not stack up. Amalgamated and non-amalgamated councils use debt to finance capital works programs and build for our future.

One example of a council managing debt to keep providing for ratepayers is the Townsville City Council. The mayor, Les Tyrell, has been very transparent with the \$371 million debt that council has accrued. The honourable member would be aware that there was an article in the *Sunday Mail* of 18 July, headed 'Sea of council red debt', which was misleading. Again it was trying to make the public believe that debt is bad. As the minister has mentioned, the QTC report, which came out last year, makes the point that a prudent amount of debt is quite reasonable and does not have an impact on the operating budget of the council. Since returning to the local government portfolio, the minister has emphasised to all local governments that the prudent use of debt, particularly to fund important infrastructure, is very much supported. The QTC makes the same statement to local governments time and again.

**Mr HOBBS:** If you do not know what the debt is, I can inform you what the debt is. It is about \$2 billion this year, it will be \$4 billion next year and \$6 billion in 2012. That is where local government is going. We are seeing an enormous increase in the number of councils with deficit budgets. I have no problem with using debt; the state government thought it had no problem with using debt, except we lost our AAA rating. There has to be a time when you, as a responsible minister for local government—

**CHAIR:** I ask the member to please come to the question.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, you say you have no concern with the rising debt that local government is accruing.

**Ms BOYLE:** Thank you for the question and the gratuitous comments which are quite inappropriate. I do not have that information and that is not a factual projection necessarily—a projection by some people well intentioned, maybe the LGAQ, but it is not information that has been provided to me. In fact, Queensland is leading Australia in terms of a financial sustainability reform program for local government. We are ahead of the other states in terms of rolling out those very difficult elements of the new standards of financial management. For the last several years, in fact, there has been a concentration on asset management, on forward capital works planning, on good governance and on community engagement. This has, as mayors and councillors will tell you themselves, pushed councils to a much more forward-looking, forward-projecting system of financial management rather than the old-fashioned way that it was when I was on council, and I dare say when the honourable member was on council, when you simply worried about this year's budget.

Within that context, many of the councils, not yet all, have provided the department in cooperation, not under demand, with their forward capital works program—five years in some instances and 10 years for some councils. Within that then they are able not only to project the works they believe they need to do and the costs but also to look at the impact that there will be on their debt levels. If you were to work with the Townsville City Council, for example, you would see that their debt levels are projected to reduce dramatically over the five years ahead. In fact, I take a moment to recognise Mayor Les Tyrell and his council in having very responsibly faced up to the debt issues that they inherited at the time of the amalgamation from the two component councils. Far from since amalgamation increasing the debt, they have managed to reduce this while at the same time also planning for the capital works that are necessary and are huge in the growing city and urban concentration that is Townsville.

**Mr HOBBS:** Those figures I gave you are estimates from Treasury. You ought to talk to them. Minister, how many councils are now on the financial watch list?

**Ms BOYLE:** I am very pleased to let not only you and members of the committee know but also to affirm for local governments that we do not have a watch list. We are working in partnership with councils to make sure that they take on the new financial sustainability standards and do the work that will allow them to see with their own eyes what their present and their future position is in terms of sustainability and to make the adjustments now if they need to make such adjustments. We have financial advisers within the department—experts in local government, as well as within the Queensland Treasury Corporation—and they are available, whether for information or further studies, to any council that need them.

I do recognise that back in the time of the Local Government Reform Commission there were particular concerns expressed by that commission about three councils. They were the North Burnett Regional Council, the South Burnett Regional Council and the Cassowary Coast Regional Council. As a consequence of that, there has been particular effort from the department in working with those councils to ensure that they are looking at their historical issues and upgrading their financial management. A further report from the Queensland Treasury Corporation in relation to the submissions for top up funding for amalgamation costs—a report tabled last year—signalled that the reason that they recommended top up funding was that the identified councils were ones that brought with them some sustainability problems from one or more of the component councils at the time of amalgamation. That was why QTC was recommending that they receive some extra help. That included North Burnett and South Burnett regional councils as well as Scenic Rim, Southern Downs, Isaac and the Torres Strait regional councils. They are the councils that have been identified through those reports as particularly requiring some extra support to reorganise their present finances and their planning for the future.

**Mr HOBBS:** I can advise the minister that never have we seen so many councils that have brought down deficit budgets this year. This is an absolute record—ever. Can you advise what the Department of Communities' funding to local government was identified in last year's budget as going to local government? This year \$281 million was identified. How much was it last year?

**Ms BOYLE:** Chair, I think that relates to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships. I seek your ruling on whether that question should not be more properly addressed in the second session.

**Mr HOBBS:** I will give an explanation. Minister, you put out a press release saying, '\$1.3 billion to local government—\$900 for every ratepayer. It is the biggest amount of money to local government.' That is what you have said.

**Ms BOYLE:** That is a summary table in Budget Paper No. 2 that summarises all of the grants and subsidies given to local government across state government agencies. I can address those now in this session through the Department of Infrastructure and Planning, but it is my view that I should address any grants and subsidies to local government in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships section of the estimates examination.

**CHAIR:** I think the questions do have to refer to the current portfolio. So I ask you to ask that in the next session.

**Mr HOBBS:** The question actually does relate to local government. Minister, it is quite clear. In fact, your answer to question on notice No. 3 quite clearly says that. However, we will move on. We will ask the question later on. It does not matter. Minister, what explanation do you offer Queensland

ratepayers considering this following scenario: since forced amalgamation in 2008, council general rates have increased by an average of 25 per cent; overall council debt has doubled and will treble by 2012; more councils are in financial trouble—I know that; I am not sure whether you know it, but it is happening; and the overall council workforce has grown by 2,000 employees. That is not a good record under your watch, Minister.

**Ms BOYLE:** Much of that is indeed a good record and a record that I absolutely support. Local governments in Queensland are stepping up to the mark. You can make whatever kind of negative connotations about that that you like, although in your own electorate you have been heard to praise your council for the more strategic and forward-looking approach that they are taking than any of the component councils ever took before.

This is a really hard time for the mayors, the councillors and the staff of councils. Far from the tin-pot little shires that there used to be, these are now major regional organisations facing huge growth pressures—pressures in the hinterland particularly and in the Bowen Basin and the Surat Basin from mining and other opportunities and pressures along the coast from tremendous dispersal and an increasing population. Yes, it is a hard time for local government. Yes, they are looking at their infrastructure in ways they never have before.

There are councils such as the Central Highlands that are absolutely amazed in reviewing their infrastructure to discover that councillors of the past have done nothing about upgrading it let alone even maintaining it properly. With that in mind and facing the growth that they are and the expansion needs that they have for their infrastructure, water, sewerage, waste and the like, then, yes, there are many councils looking at that forward capital works program and, with that, the wise use of debt. Just because a council is in debt does not at all mean that it is necessarily in a weak financial position. In fact, some of those in weak financial positions do not have much in the way of debt but neither do they have the present demonstration of an ability to plan for the future.

These are very difficult times for those councils that might have, for example, as many classes of assets as 15, 16 or 17. Do you know how many asset management plans councils of the past did? None, absolutely none. So under pressure from the state and federal government, I have to say, through the Financial Sustainability Program, we are putting it on them to get those asset management plans in place, to get the capital works planning done. Is it hard? Yes. Is it good work? You bet. Are they stronger councils for it? You bet. If we had an LNP government, they would still be back where they were in nowhere land. Instead, they are streaming ahead and deserve compliments for it.

**Mr HOBBS:** With the state government water and sewerage subsidies going, how do you propose councils fund upgrades to their water and sewerage systems to comply with EPA standards and meet the growing demands of their communities?

**Ms BOYLE:** Our water and sewerage program remains not the most glamorous part of the business of local government but probably the most important part of the business of local government. I thought you might be interested to know—and so I got the department to get out the figure—that, since July 1998, do you know how much we have given to local governments in funding programs? \$3.9 billion from this state government. Urban water and sewerage services have taken up the great majority of it.

The amount of \$617.3 million has been approved to councils under the water and sewerage program. That is a huge spend and that means a lot of projects have been completed. Your question does not take into account that you do not need a new sewerage treatment plant or a new water plant every year. So, for all of those upgrades—all of that huge spend that we have had right across Queensland on water and sewerage treatment plants—there is not as much need as there was five to 10 years ago for this huge budget. For example, 53 water and sewerage projects will be completed in 2010-11. There are only 73 councils. That is year on year on year a demonstration that through this huge funding we have provided very significant help to upgrading water and sewerage standards around the state.

Let me give you some examples of the kinds of projects that are not, despite the comments from the honourable member, being defunded: the Balonne Shire Council, with their St George sewerage treatment plant; and the Banana Shire Council, which completed the Biloela sewerage treatment plant. Over the next year, for example, further work will be done by the Hinchinbrook shire on their Ingham, Dungeness and Lucinda sewerage treatment plants. Work will be done by the Tablelands Regional Council on the Kuranda sewerage treatment plant to the tune of a \$1.8 million contribution from the state government. In the meantime, Whitsunday will go to work on the upgrade of Cannonvale and Proserpine sewerage treatment plants—\$15.6 million. Then there is a huge additional budget allocation of \$26.7 million to the Cassowary Coast Regional Council for the Innisfail sewerage treatment upgrade. So, far from deserting councils in terms of further upgrades of water and sewerage, this state government through my department is there with them.

**Mr HOBBS:** Thanks, Minister. I think you are gilding the lily a bit. Minister, I refer to last year's estimates in which I cited a letter that you wrote to the *Courier-Mail* objecting to their story 'Our trust is truly trashed now'. The article detailed broken promises and cutbacks to local government programs.

You wrote that the article was 'incorrect' and you said, 'I am pleased to tell you that no cuts to funding have been made.' However, this year's budget figures clearly show that those grants have been cut. Minister, how can you say one thing and the facts clearly show the opposite? It is simply not true.

**Ms BOYLE:** The associate director-general is keen to have a say and I will let him do so in a moment. A cut requires you to have had some money and to take it away. We have taken no money away from local government. What we committed—I was there as minister for local government at that time—was \$700 million over five years. That is pretty darn good you would have to say.

**Mr HOBBS:** You cut \$45 million—\$100 million overall.

**Ms BOYLE:** It is my turn to answer the question.

**Mr HOBBS:** You cut \$100 million out of government grants.

**Ms BOYLE:** Thank you. It is my turn, honourable member. You can make your comments in other places at other times.

**CHAIR:** Member for Warrego.

**Mr HOBBS:** Tell the truth.

**Ms BOYLE:** So \$700 million for five years we promised them. What have we cut? Nothing. What have we done? We have increased it.

**Mr HOBBS:** You have cut nothing, Minister? How dare you say that! How dare you say that you haven't cut grants.

**CHAIR:** Member for Warrego, I ask you to cease interjection and let the minister answer the question.

**Ms BOYLE:** The latest figure as at 30 June is \$874 million. In no sense of the imagination could you call an additional \$174 million a cut. We have been more than generous, but we have said that that is it for a while. We want the local government to spend all of that and then we will catch up on where they are. That is absolutely reasonable.

**Mr HOBBS:** So there are no cuts to grants in funding.

**Ms BOYLE:** There are no cuts—far from it. We are generous with local government.

**Mr HOBBS:** How can you say that!

**Ms BOYLE:** I have \$174 million worth of saying that. I repeat: \$174 million.

**Mr HOBBS:** You are kidding!

**Ms BOYLE:** I will say it to you 174 million times, honourable member. We are supporting local government very well through my department. They know in advance that a new grants program is starting next year and already there is interest in what projects they may make submissions under.

**CHAIR:** The time for the first period of questioning has expired. The next round of questions will be from government members. My question is: with reference to page 2-83 of the SDS, how has the Bligh government's investment in community infrastructure benefited local communities right across Queensland?

**Ms BOYLE:** Thank you for the question. Queensland's councils are responsible for delivering a huge range of services well outside the traditional purview of roads, rates and rubbish. In fact, we have helped regional councils build the types of communities that can attract and retain families and support industries. The types of local government infrastructure being realised range from community halls and playgrounds to sporting facilities and even in some cases television reception. All of this investment is helping rural and regional councils build and provide incentives for people to live in their areas.

Let me give you some examples of the types of projects. There is \$375,000 for Balonne Shire Council for the rejuvenation of the Dirranbandi hall; \$278,250 for Barcaldine Regional Council's new toilet, shower and kiosk facilities at the Alpha swimming pool complex; \$750,000 towards a total Bligh government commitment of \$1.5 million for Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council's new swimming pool complex, and my understanding is that will be ready for opening in August; \$145,066 for Isaac Regional Council to upgrade transmission equipment and infrastructure for residents of Carmila, Clairview and St Lawrence to be digital ready for TV and radio equipment; and \$72,000 towards the upgrade of Quilpie's Bicentennial Park playground. I inspected this playground in May with the mayor and it is a marvellous facility. One of the young mums who was there with a toddler made it plain that, in her view, it was definitely a thumbs up as an extra benefit to her community.

Proserpine, Dalby, Miles, Stanthorpe, Tambo, Gladstone, Childers, Gin Gin and Hughenden have all had makeovers thanks to local government funding. The member for Bundaberg would be pleased to know, if he does not know already, that the Bundaberg Regional Council will receive financial support under the Environmental Infrastructure Program for stormwater drainage. Tourists in the member for Warrego's electorate have much more reason to linger longer at the fantastic Dogwood Crossing facility in Miles which I had the honour of opening last month. The member for Burdekin can appreciate the new Arch Dunn park facilities at Home Hill which are making picnics a bit more enjoyable for locals and visitors alike.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** Minister, my question is in respect of the Auditor-General's report in relation to 2-83 of the SDS. I noted your opening comments on leadership of councils. As you know, the Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire Council within my electorate has incredibly strong leadership by Fred O'Keefe and his councillors. It has been identified through the Auditor-General's report that there has been a significant improvement in the performance of 12 shire councils. Can the minister outline the support your department has provided in this regard?

**Ms BOYLE:** Thank you for the question. I am pleased to join you in putting on the record my admiration for Mayor Fred O'Keefe. It is a very difficult time to take an Aboriginal council and step forward in the community and say, 'We're going to do better than ever before with our financial management, planning and community facilities.' Mayor Fred O'Keefe has more than demonstrated that he is up to the task, as in fact have many of the Aboriginal mayors of our councils. They are absolutely supportive of the department's wish that they be full local governments and meet the full standards of financial management and financial sustainability.

The Auditor-General's report No. 4 for 2010, which details the 2008-09 audit results for councils, was tabled in parliament on 21 April 2010. The Auditor-General commented favourably on the significant improvement shown by Aboriginal shire councils. I am also pleased to say that the Department of Infrastructure and Planning is taking an active role in monitoring the progress of these councils and is ready to provide support or expert advice as needed.

The improvement is further reflected in the fact that the Auditor-General issued three modified and six unmodified opinions. That is really good and a major milestone for our Aboriginal councils. It has not been done before. Three opinions remained outstanding at the time the report was released. This is a vast improvement on the 2007-08 audit results, where only one council received an unmodified opinion, one council received a modified opinion and 10 opinions remained outstanding at the time. I draw particular attention to Hope Vale, Kowanyama, Lockhart River, Palm Island, Wujal Wujal and Yarrabah. These councils all received unmodified opinions. It is a fantastic result for the councils. I congratulate the mayors, the councillors, the CEOs and the staff on their hard and good work.

The Department of Infrastructure and Planning, through the Office of Local Government, is working closely with all councils. This includes the establishment of the Indigenous Council Task Force. This task force worked with councils to help them meet the deadline for their draft financial statements as well as identify a number of governance and financial management issues that needed to be addressed. I would like to stress that some of these issues are a legacy of previous council administrations and, therefore, it may take several years for some suitable resolutions to be found and the historical problems to be put to bed so that the councils are able to face the future with their new financial standards.

**Mr WETTENHALL:** Minister, I note with reference to table 7.6 on page 143 of Budget Paper No. 2 that the Bligh government has clearly invested a significant amount of funding in Queensland local councils. Can the minister advise the committee on the detail of that funding?

**Ms BOYLE:** I am pleased to do so. This financial year the Bligh government is supporting Queensland's councils to the tune of \$1.3 billion right across state government agencies to subsidise the delivery of a range of infrastructure and programs. This equates to around \$900 for every ratepayer in the state. It includes more than \$515 million in grants and subsidies provided to local governments from the Department of Infrastructure and Planning alone in 2010-11. It includes \$122 million already committed towards a range of projects—such as \$41 million to assist Townsville City Council with upgrades of water infrastructure; \$4.9 million to assist Moreton Bay Regional Council upgrade Murrumba Downs Wastewater Treatment Plant; and \$5.3 million for the integrated water and sewerage project at Agnes Water and 1770 being built by Gladstone Regional Council. On top of this, there is more than \$31 million in subsidies to Whitsunday, Cassowary Coast, Hinchinbrook and Tablelands councils to upgrade sewerage treatment plants and help protect the Great Barrier Reef.

The \$1.3 billion also includes \$281 million from the Department of Communities. It includes \$170 million for Indigenous community housing; \$10.2 million towards the sustainable resource communities initiative, which is supporting projects like the replacement of the Chinchilla community centre and refurbishment of the Dalby aquatic centre; \$11.05 million towards youth and family services programs; and \$10.79 million to help support the Major Facilities Program.

Transport and Main Roads will be providing \$78 million to councils, which includes \$6 million for construction of the Jubilee Bridge in Innisfail, \$12.57 million for the South-East Queensland cycle network and \$3 million for rural and remote air strips. Community Safety will contribute \$6 million. Education and Training is providing \$2 million. There is \$12 million from the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation and \$21 million from Premier and Cabinet, particularly through the Arts portfolio. As you can see, the Bligh government is working with Queensland's councils to make a huge investment in the future of Queensland communities.

**Mrs SMITH:** Minister, I refer to page 2-75 of the SDS which details several elements of the Bligh government's strong record in strengthening Queensland's local government sector. Can the minister advise of any alternative policies that could potentially undo all this hard work?

**Ms BOYLE:** I thank the member for the question. Unfortunately, I am aware of alternative proposals for local government and they would be, in my view, a recipe for chaos. Little is known about the CHAOS policy. We have glimpses only in statements from the shadow minister for local government and from the leader of the LNP, but these glimpses are frightening indeed. It seems that they intend to allow communities to decide whether they would like to undo their amalgamations, sort of. The Liberal National Party has not said very much about exactly how and where this will happen, what limits there will be or whether in fact all amalgamated councils will be free to undo their amalgamations if there are people in the community who so wish.

For example, they have said that they might deamalgamate the Sunshine Coast with Noosa, no questions asked, but elsewhere, where there is perceived support for deamalgamation, they may or may not. Presumably—

**Mr Hobbs** interjected.

**Ms BOYLE:** Pardon?

**CHAIR:** Member for Warrego, would you cease interjecting. The minister is answering the question.

**Ms BOYLE:** I think I heard the shadow minister say, 'We will deamalgamate Noosa from the Sunshine Coast.' That is really clear then. We have council No. 1 clarified. Let us talk now about Port Douglas and Mossman, which are part of the old Douglas shire and have been amalgamated with the Cairns Regional Council. The member for Noosa had said that that deamalgamation is on the cards too. He said, 'It remains LNP policy to give local communities the opportunities to have a say in whether they remain amalgamated or not.' The trouble of course is that this is not really a new policy; it is the same old same old that the LNP went to the last state election with, saying, 'Yes, we'll deamalgamate you if you want.'

One of the proposals—or maybe you cannot count this proposal because it comes from the ex-LNP member for Beaudesert—in fact suggested that councils be abolished altogether and that the mayors instead be put into the new upper house. I presume, given his excision from the LNP, that that is his policy rather than the LNP's. It would be good to have that put on the record clearly. The LNP parades as an alternative government, and the onus is on them to clarify which local governments they will offer that to.

**Mr HOBBS:** We have.

**Ms BOYLE:** I look forward to that list landing on my desk and it being tabled in parliament as soon as possible. I do thank the honourable member. There are some other elements of this that I would like to address and I request an extension of time.

**Mrs SMITH:** I would be happy to comply.

**CHAIR:** Go ahead.

**Ms BOYLE:** Thank you. Can I talk for awhile about the reform program that my government has strongly implemented. Our reform program saw the formation of the Torres Strait Island Regional Council and the Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council, replacing 17 individual island councils and three Aboriginal councils. Are you going to turn back the time on that one, Howard? We really need to know.

**Mr HOBBS:** Sorry, I missed that one.

**CHAIR:** Minister, I would ask you to refer to the member by his appropriate title.

**Mr HOBBS:** And can you repeat the question.

**Ms BOYLE:** In response to that clear request from the shadow spokesperson on local government, will deamalgamation be offered as an alternative by the LNP to the Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council or the Torres Strait Island Regional Council and all of those islands that have been in fact the most difficult amalgamation in the state?

**Mr HOBBS:** Yes, we offered the Torres Strait. We have done that. It has been in the papers.

**Ms BOYLE:** You will deamalgamate the Torres Strait?

**Mr HOBBS:** We have offered it to the Torres Strait, yes.

**Ms BOYLE:** Offered it on the basis of any community members who wish will therefore occasion—

**Mr HOBBS:** It is up to the community.

**CHAIR:** Member for Warrego and Minister, could you please not address direct conversation to each other?

**Ms BOYLE:** Along with structural reform, there has been legislative reform, Madam Chair. The new legislative framework for the local government system is the second major plank of the Queensland Labor government's reform program. This has resulted in the new Local Government Act 2009, the new City of Brisbane Act 2010 and early work in developing our first stand-alone local government electoral bill.

**Mrs SMITH:** Minister, I believe the Gold Coast has more cats and dogs per head of population than any other region in Queensland. Can you advise the committee of the benefits of microchipping cats and dogs?

**Ms BOYLE:** I thank the member for the question. When we think of family pets, we think of the affection—even love—that family members show towards them, but there are some sad stories as well about pets that are not so well loved and looked after. It is a sad fact that some 13,000 cats and more than 10,000 dogs are euthanased in Queensland every year. This is concerning to all of us, surely, but especially to pet owners. Reducing the number of animals euthanased is good for the Queensland environment, it is good for Queensland families and, most importantly, it is good for the pets themselves.

That is the primary motivation for the new Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008, which aims to help reduce these unacceptably high euthanasia rates. In doing this, however, we have helped to reunite lost or impounded cats and dogs with their owners. Under the act's provisions, all cats and dogs need to be microchipped when they are given away or sold. Newborn kittens and puppies also need to be microchipped before 12 weeks of age. A microchip is about the size of a grain of rice. I asked to see one and, with your indulgence, Madam Chair, I will pass around this key chain with the microchip in perspex material. Honourable members may be interested to see the size of a microchip. I am aware of the requirement that any version of materials demonstrated to the committee need to be transcribable, and so I table photocopies of this material. With your indulgence, I will pass the microchip to committee members to inspect as I continue to answer the question.

The microchip sits just underneath the skin and contains vital information that will connect the pet back with its owners. I commend councils which have introduced the legislative provisions ahead of the due date and also those that were offering special discounts or deals for microchipping, all of which are helping to reduce the number of animals euthanased. There are numerous examples of cats and dogs that have found their way back home thanks to this technology. Last year Muffy the dog was reunited with his family after nine years away. How? Because he was microchipped. Has the committee heard the story about Clyde the cat from Tasmania? He got lost and eventually turned up in Cloncurry—heaven knows how, because cats supposedly do not swim. Microchipping is also an extra layer of protection over and above a collar, which of course can come loose or get lost.

**Mrs SMITH:** Minister, continuing on the theme of animals, can you advise the committee how the state government's dangerous dog legislation is helping to keep Queenslanders safe?

**Ms BOYLE:** The Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008 has a very serious side indeed. It introduced a state-wide regulatory system for declaring and controlling dangerous dogs, menacing dogs and restricted breeds of dogs. The new act is helping councils better manage dogs in their local government regions and keeping their communities safer. Prior to the introduction of the new act, dangerous dogs were regulated under each council's individual local laws, which of course varied from council to council, and the state legislation applied to restricted dog breeds only. The new act, however, mandates extensive provisions on how dangerous, menacing and restricted dogs are kept and controlled. This includes requirements for enclosures and requirements for a dog to be muzzled and kept under effective control when it is in public.

Tough fines of up to \$30,000 have also been put in place to deter owners from doing the wrong thing and, more importantly, to promote responsible pet ownership. The Department of Infrastructure and Planning, through the Office of Local Government, has also developed a range of IT resources and other support for the act. This includes the dangerous dogs database, which gives councils the capacity to track irresponsible dog owners who try to go under the radar by evading authorities and moving from council area to council area. The information on the database is available centrally and access is restricted to authorised council officers who have a legislative need to know. I can advise the committee that as at 28 June 2010 there were 1,466 regulated dogs.

**CHAIR:** The next round of questions will be from non-government members. I call the member for Warrego.

**Mr HOBBS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, a while ago you made it quite clear, and emphatically said, that there were no cuts to grants to councils. I am reading the answer to question on notice No. 3 which you sent to me. It is titled 'Grants to local government in Queensland: Queensland government grants'. For infrastructure and planning the figure for 2009-10 is \$975 million. The budget is \$915 million. Minister, do I need new glasses or what? That, to me, has gone down \$60 million. Are you saying that the grants have not gone down to councils?

**Ms BOYLE:** I will be pleased to explain the changes in those budgetary figures between the two years. I will ask the associate director-general to address that.

**Mr Kinnane:** The figure for 2010-11 is \$515.966 million, so rounding up it is \$517 million. The figure for 2009-10 was certainly \$548.891 million, but the figure in the 2009-10 established budget—the actual estimate of the real figure in the budget—went to \$678 million mainly because, Mr Hobbs, there was a substantial increase in the NDRRA. As you know, the adjustments between 2009-10 and 2010-11 are mainly because of the real costs incurred during 2009-10 of \$227 million for the NDRRA. The budget for 2010-11 is \$188.5 million. As you know from the budget papers, the 2010-11 budget for local government is \$515 million. As you well know from your experience in the area of the state that you represent, 87 per cent of the state was affected by natural disasters in the last financial year. We therefore would expect that \$515 million budget figure to substantially increase with natural disasters which we can predict to occur this financial year as well. But there have been a number of other programs which have increased over the last 12 months, between 2009-10 and 2010-11. May I mention just a number of those.

The sewage treatment plant upgrade program went from \$5 million to \$31.3 million. The Cassowary Coast Regional Council priority projects will be \$13 million in this financial year. The Jezzine Barracks in Townsville will be \$2 million. The Flinders Street Mall will be a figure of \$13.2 million compared to \$3.7 million in 2009-10. The Queensland Fluoridation Capital Assistance Program in 2009-10 was \$7 million but in 2010-11 will be \$19.6 million. The Indigenous environmental health program is a program that I am really proud of because the people in our department, with the minister's support and with her ministerial portfolio responsibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partnerships, have secured additional state government funding of \$59 million. For the Community Development Employment Project for the Torres Strait Island Regional Council there is \$7.5 million. While some adjustments are definitely happening in some programs, we have seen a substantial increase in others.

**Ms BOYLE:** I also hasten to assure all of our local governments that I will, as I have in previous years, look for the best opportunity to find those increases and increased allocations from the Treasurer for local government, so my ambition is indeed that our base budget will again go up this year, as it did during 2009-10.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, I want to pursue that. Your associate director-general said that there were some adjustments made. Minister, you are being very deceptive by using the natural disaster relief assistance funding to try to top up council grants. The reality is that you have cut water and sewerage grants, and general road grants have been cut back. But because there has been a natural disaster you are using that money to top it up. Minister, why are you being deceptive with local government? Why can't you say that water, sewerage and road grants that have always been in place have simply been cut?

**Ms BOYLE:** Member for Warrego, 874 million times I will say it to you: we have given to local government an allocation \$174 million ahead of what we committed and we gave them five years to spend it. Local councils have not missed the opportunity; they are out there spending it. I will keep on reading those lists of projects to you because I am proud of them all—all over the state. Yes, that money is coming to an end—that is, \$874 million and eventually it will all get spent. This year approximately \$164 million of that \$874 million will be spent, and it is close to the end of that suite of grants from five years ago.

There is a new grants system starting up next year. That is the system which, by and large, particularly for major projects in water and sewerage, takes councils a couple of years to do all of the work they need to do. From the ambition and the idea or the recognition of the need to upgrade their plant, to beginning to do the costings, to having a look at the work, to putting in a submission, to getting through the approvals of the Department of Environment and Resource Management, and getting the approved subsidy from the council, organising their own money and then completing the actual works takes years of hard work. That is why, even though there is some \$165 million remaining in these grant budgets that has already been approved and which we are eager to provide to local governments, not all of the projects may be completed this year. Some may lapse into the following year. There is no cut. There is a continuing commitment to give every dollar of that \$874 million to local government.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, local councils across Queensland are under immense financial pressure, and this has been compounded by the loss of subsidies—believe it or not—for the provision of water, sewerage and roads. Will your government force councils to reduce infrastructure charges?

**Ms BOYLE:** That is really a question that should be properly directed to the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning.

**Mr HOBBS:** Would you support—

**Ms BOYLE:** Can I say to you that no proposal has been put to me. I am aware of no proposal at all to force councils in any regard about infrastructure charges.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, last year the LGAQ publicly stated that abolishing the 40 per cent subsidy on water and sewerage capital works—which comes from your area—would cost councils over a billion dollars over the next decade which would increase the cost of headworks charges by \$5,000 a block

from 1 July 2011. Has your department analysed this claim? Do you agree with the assertions? What do you say to prospective Queensland homebuyers who will invariably now face a considerably higher cost when they buy a block of land?

**Ms BOYLE:** The Office of Local Government has not analysed that claim and has no information that bears on it. It is a matter for the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, and I cannot answer for him.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, I refer to the additional 2,000 staff employed within the local government sector over the last 12 months. Bearing in mind the Beattie-Bligh government's forced amalgamations to merge for efficiency's sake, can you advise why the so-called efficient newly amalgamated councils need 2,000 extra staff to provide governance and services for Queensland?

**Ms BOYLE:** One of the good things coming out of amalgamation that we did also predict, and which even the shadow minister has given recognition to in his own electorate, is that our councils are getting stronger. They are bigger, they are more strategic and they are really working on the growth opportunities ahead of them.

**Mr HOBBS:** They are broke, Minister.

**Ms BOYLE:** That is partly why they are feeling things as hard as they are and partly why they are growing. I would expect every year of councils' history in the fine state of Queensland that they would have increased their workforce. The prediction from me, as humble as it is, is that next year they will increase their workforce and the year after as well. Far from our councils declining—they are growing; they are expanding.

Our council workforce across Queensland right now, from the best estimation I have, is 37,800 full-time employees. How good is that? Some 1,500 of them are employed by Indigenous councils. As their minister, I am absolutely proud of how big and how strong they can get. I have no doubt that in these financially difficult times, for all levels of government—councils are no exception—they are not hiring staff willy-nilly so some other staff can sit on their bottoms doing nothing. All of them are working themselves very hard.

I have no problem at all with those figures for growing councils. I think that actually supports what we have done in terms of local government reform, with the amalgamations front and centre but all of the other reforms—far from that holding down or suppressing or making life worse for local government—has indeed opened the door to an expansionary sector, GFC notwithstanding.

**Mr HOBBS:** So you think that increasing the bureaucracies of councils is an efficient way for local governments to go?

**Ms BOYLE:** Front-line workers in your local councils or mine would not be pleased to hear you call them bureaucrats—heavens, not at all. They are front-line workers. I have been really interested in the comments of some local governments about the choice available to them in March 2011. Some honourable members may recall that the Bligh government was very keen to work with the then LGAQ, LGMA and the unions to protect council workers during the early years of the amalgamations and transitions. Workers have not been able to be forced out of councils against their will and will not be before March 2011.

Of course there is already speculation within councils, at council conferences and occasionally it makes the newspapers as to whether local councils will suddenly downsize in March 2011 and whether forced retirements will be the topic of conversation at the end of March. I am pleased to say that the comments from councils at this stage are that no, if anything, they will be doing more hiring. They are far from saying, 'Woe is us, we are carry more staff than we need.'

The information to my department is that it will go the other way. To my knowledge, the most recent council talking about that issue in the paper is Southern Downs. The mayor has most recently made a statement saying that he thinks it highly unlikely that any council staff will be found redundant and that they are in an expansionary mode with a huge workload ahead.

**Mr HOBBS:** The government has stated its intention to involve itself in local government operational business by providing services and advice in relation to governance, monitoring and performance analysis. How does your department intend to use this gathered information? Who will compile and analyse the information? How will it value-add to local government's benefit?

**Ms BOYLE:** That is a really good question, of course. We are gathering that information voluntarily. It is not my ambition or the associate director-general's ambition to order councils to provide information. Of course we would much rather have a partnership where it is in their interests as well as the functions that we are charged with in overseeing the local government sector to have that cooperatively.

Presently it is through the financial sustainability and reporting program that councils are providing most of the information that we ask for. Sometimes, particularly for example in the preparation of the new regulations for the Local Government Act and maybe in association with the preparation of

the new model local laws, we might from different sections of the department ask councils for copies of their local laws in relation to trees overhanging neighbourhood fences or whatever matter it might be. It is important that the department be able to survey local government to have that knowledge of current issues and to use the best practice examples from some councils to inform our own legislation, regulations, model local laws and the like as well as to disseminate those through local government publications to other councils so that they may take a lead from the leaders.

I have no guess at all at what you might be hinting at, honourable member, in terms of any improper use of information. I think the relationship is really good in terms of that information flow. I will, however, ask the associate director-general whether he would like to make any comments in that regard.

**Mr Kinnane:** I am very pleased to comment on this question. One of the things that the department has done in recent years, particularly under the leadership of Minister Boyle and before her Minister Pitt, is to change its role from a regulatory type agency to one which works in partnerships with local governments. We in fact have a very strong partnership with the Local Government Association of Queensland and Local Government Managers Australia on the whole question of sustainability and asset management.

We have a group within the department who deal with this on a full-time basis. It is a small group of only three or four people. What we are doing in Queensland is actually leading the nation in the implementation of the Sustainability Partnerships arrangements with, I must repeat, the strong endorsement of the LGAQ. We have worked with both the engineers institute as well as the LGAQ on their asset management plans as well. We are leading Australia in that.

The sustainability reporting process for Queensland local governments has been implemented. I am delighted to advise that Queensland is far ahead of other state governments in our commitment to the Commonwealth's sustainability agenda.

**Mr HOBBS:** Are you saying that this information is mainly being gathered in the sustainability area? Will this be ongoing? There is no sinister move with this. I am trying to reduce the paperwork for local government. They are complaining about it out there. A lot of staff have had to come on to do all that paperwork. I am hoping in a bipartisan way to somehow get to the end of this information gathering to a certain degree and have a real partnership arrangement. Can we have a commitment or can you make some comment in relation to trying to reduce the paperwork?

**Ms BOYLE:** It is good indeed that there is a section this morning where the shadow spokesperson and I absolutely agree and are as one on this particular track. May I remind the shadow spokesperson, but also let other honourable members on the committee know, that I have made a very brave statement that has been hugely welcomed by local government, however delivering on that statement is going to be a whole lot harder I have discovered. That is that my department will review all legislation and regulations commissioned under the state jurisdiction to see their impact on local government and begin a harmonisation process. How much time would it save for the staff of councils if the provisions of all of the acts were in harmony? A whole lot of the time in terms of providing information and complying with standards under different legislation in transport, in main roads, in public health, in education, in arts, grants in communities and so on is used up by the local governments with that inconsistency.

The first stage of that project has been a scan of what legislation under state control impacts on local government. The count to date is some 240 pieces of legislation. That is the point at which my eyes went wide in terms of being able to deliver this harmonisation project within this term of government. In fact, I need to say to local government that I will do my darnedest to get it as far down the track as I can in the next 18 months, but it might not be entirely complete. So I say to the shadow spokesperson, with the risk that the LNP are in government next term: I would be very pleased to have your commitment to follow through on that project. It is really important that we do minimise unnecessary paperwork for local government in its interface with state government. I do not believe that the requirements for information from the office for local government are a primary problem or the primary cause of their complaint, but I would be pleased to work with you if you do identify any elements of our service delivery to local government that you believe could be improved.

**Mr HOBBS:** I will certainly give that commitment. Can you detail how your government intends to enhance the capacity building for non-amalgamated councils in Queensland?

**Ms BOYLE:** Thank you very much. That is an important question because so much attention has been paid to the amalgamated councils during the transition. It is not only extra attention but extra money of course. In the meantime there are many fine councils out there facing a lot of the same difficulties. They too have faced the GFC. They too have faced the loss of revenue from planning and infrastructure charges to developers. They too have faced communities where they are quite clear they want all the services but they are a bit poorer so they do not want to be charged too much.

Our focus for training with all councils of Queensland, not just those amalgamated, is on two fronts. The first has been the financial sustainability agenda which applies to all 73 councils now. It began with the 57 mainstream councils and we left the Indigenous councils for the second tranche to come on. The other huge work—

**CHAIR:** Minister, do you want to ask for an extension? The time has expired.

**Ms BOYLE:** I will ask for a short extension, with the honourable member's indulgence.

**Mr HOBBS:** Yes.

**Ms BOYLE:** The other important work we have been doing with all councils is in preparation for the new Local Government Act 2009 and its implementation on 1 July. Training has been offered right across the state to all councils in preparation for that. I am pleased to say that that training has been particularly targeted at mayors and councillors.

**CHAIR:** The next round of questions will be from government members. How can Queensland make the most of the Bligh government's cats and dogs act which is referenced on page 2-78 of the SDS to improve safety in their local communities?

**Ms BOYLE:** Thank you for the question. All Queenslanders have the right to feel safe walking around their communities. That means no-one should feel threatened by a dog. That is why the Bligh government introduced provisions under the Animal Management (Cats and Dogs) Act 2008 to enable councils to take the pre-emptive strike and prevent dog attacks from occurring.

Under the legislation, a council can declare a dog as menacing if it acts in a way that causes fear to a person or another animal. If a dog is declared menacing then the owner is required to comply with certain conditions that relate to the control of the animal. These conditions can cover how the animal is kept and effectively controlled in public.

Too often in the past councils have only become aware of dangerous dogs after an attack. This, of course, can be too late. Under the new legislation councils can get on the front foot and take steps before an animal hurts someone. Today, I take the opportunity to remind Queenslanders that if they feel threatened by a dog then they should report that animal to their local council. If a dog is behaving aggressively, if you think it might get out of an enclosure, if it is wandering the streets unattended, report it. This will give councils the imprimatur to act swiftly, strike early and prevent a potential tragedy.

I know many of us have just put up with threatening dogs wandering the streets from time to time, sworn under our breath and said something about the council doing more. It is incumbent upon all residents to be the eyes and ears of council, to give councils the opportunity to take action under the new legislation by reporting that dog. It is important that the barking dog that snarls menacingly at the fence and makes us jump whenever we go by is investigated by the council. It is important that under the new act these dogs are managed before in fact an attack occurs.

**Mr WETTENHALL:** In relation to 2-75 of the SDS, can the minister detail the benefits of the department's financial sustainability workshops?

**Ms BOYLE:** The Bligh government is delivering on its commitment to build the strongest local government sector in the country. A key part of our local government reform program is building capacity amongst elected representatives and ensuring that they have the knowledge and skills to keep their councils strong and financially sustainable. One of the ways we are doing this is continuing our very successful series of financial management and sustainability workshops for elected members.

Last year workshops were held in Cairns, Longreach, Redlands and Rockhampton. This year workshops have already been scheduled in Dalby, Emerald, Mackay and Brisbane. The workshops have been a big success. Last year 118 mayors and councillors attended while another 57 have already attended sessions this year. That indeed shows the need for elected members to have this training, which has too often in times past been restricted to council officers. Since July 2006 the Bligh government has committed more than \$874 million—in case you had not already heard that figure this morning—in local government subsidies to help councils build essential community infrastructure, from sewage treatment plants to recreational areas, to help them manage and respond to growth across the state. It is critical that these assets are well managed for their entire life span and that their full cost, including depreciation, is taken into account.

Accordingly, the workshops focus on long-term financial planning, asset management and accounting. They also reinforce key obligations under the Local Government Act 2009 and in particular the community planning obligations, which I am pleased to report are now being much more welcomed by local government than they were initially. Community plans are a requirement of the new act and will be in fact the overarching plans whereby councils can develop their corporate and strategic plans, capital works programs and the like. Community plans will be developed by engagement between the councils, councillors particularly I would hope, and their communities and thereby develop the kind of vision and priorities for action at the request of their communities. This kind of workshop program, according to feedback from participants, has been excellent. In fact, our problem, if any, is keeping up the program at the rate for which there is now a demand from the staff and in particular from the mayors and councillors of our local governments.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** Minister, you have just mentioned community plans, and I note that they are referenced on page 2-75 of the SDS. Can the minister give an overview to the committee in terms of how she sees this shaping the future of Queensland councils?

**Ms BOYLE:** I am pleased indeed. Thank you for the question so that I can talk some more about community plans. Following the introduction of the new Local Government Act on 1 July, every council in Queensland is required to implement a community plan. A community plan is an overall plan reflecting a community's priorities across a range of areas from, for example, how many parks will be required to what kinds of arts programs a council will implement. This is not pie-in-the-sky visioning stuff; it is nuts-and-bolts planning outlining what projects a council intends to do and how it will pay for them. The community plan will also guide and shape land use plans, corporate plans and town plans. Community plans must be built on inclusive and thorough community engagement and they must reflect the community's views and aspirations.

With this in mind, today I congratulate two councils in particular. I congratulate Redland City Council Mayor Melva Hobson on the launch of her personal Twitter account. I believe she is the first SEQ mayor to have her own Twitter account and I congratulate her for getting on the front foot in terms of community engagement. Redlands in fact is ahead of the game. I was pleased to be with the mayor at the launch of its community plan—one of the first in Queensland—earlier this year. However, a community plan is not static, and Melva is asking Redlands residents to tweet through their thoughts, ideas and visions for the bayside. I do indeed commend to you the Redlands community plan. It has been hugely innovative in its community engagement in ways of reaching people who would not normally be part of community engagement activities, and Mayor Melva Hobson is leading the way again.

The other council that I would like to bring to your attention today and congratulate is the Mapoon shire council, which has delivered one of the first community plans in this state. It is an Aboriginal council in the western Cape York area with not many ratepayers and with not many resources. It delivered its community plan. I asked for a copy and I have had a look at it, and I can tell you that, in my humble view, it is a very good community plan indeed. It has been well engaged through the community and clearly delineated. It is not 150 pages of blah but in fact some 10 to 20 pages of practical projects and clear work programs for the years ahead, and I congratulate that council as well.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** Minister, I refer to page 2-83 of the SDS. I note that there is always a lot of comment about the amalgamation of councils, focusing particularly on the councils. Can I ask the minister to advise the committee of any significant benefits to residents as a result of amalgamation?

**Ms BOYLE:** I do indeed thank you for the question, because it is the big question for amalgamated councils: how soon will they save money, how soon will they reap the efficiencies promised and will they be as big as promised? In fact, already we have councils saying that it is happening now and it is happening substantially, and I am pleased to offer some examples to the committee this morning from the councils themselves. For instance, Townsville City Council was able to identify significant savings and improved environmental outcomes by adopting a regional system for its wastewater upgrade. Mayor Les Tyrell said that this regional system has helped reduce an original estimate of the cost of work from \$264 million to \$189 million, a \$75 million saving for the amalgamated council.

Up on the Darling Downs, Toowoomba Regional Council has increased its annual road resealing program by 10 per cent, which equates to around an additional 750,000 square metres. Somerset Regional Council has combined four library administrations into one. Heavens, shadow spokesperson: would you undo the library amalgamations, too, and have four libraries to run again if the people so want under your CHAOS policy? In fact, the combining of four library administrations into one has allowed the council to open the brand-new Esk Library which means more books and services for residents. Moreton Bay Regional Council has identified \$34 million in operational savings across part of the first term of local government, while Central Highlands Deputy Mayor Paul Bell has pointed to the council's much stronger position with now a billion dollar asset base.

The benefits of amalgamation are real, they are here and every day councils are identifying new ways to make amalgamation work for them. One of the standout benefits of amalgamation has been the way it has positioned councils to capitalise on economic opportunities and plan for future growth. To quote Sunshine Coast Mayor Bob Abbot, a former opponent of amalgamation—

The position of mayor of this council, being the fourth largest local authority in Australia in terms of population, carries an awful lot of whack ...

That is my ambition and the Bligh government's ambition for local government—that as the years go on not only do they achieve the efficiencies and the savings and thereby provide better services and facilities for their residents but also they will increasingly carry an awful lot of whack.

**CHAIR:** Minister, could you please inform the committee how amalgamated councils are performing with regard to the transition of the four primary function areas which are referenced on page 2-94 of the SDS?

**Ms BOYLE:** Thank you for the question. Structural reform of the local government sectors provided Queensland's councils with a range of challenges, as we have said this morning. In particular, councils have been required to develop a consistent rating methodology, consistent local laws, a defined period for workforce structure transition, and a new enterprise bargaining agreement. That took only seconds to say, but if you think about those four tasks you will understand that they are huge tasks when you are amalgamating two or three councils, let alone when you are amalgamating five or six or eight or even more.

The protection of these four primary functions was to ensure consistency in local government services for ratepayers and a harmonious transition of council staff and their work entitlements during the move from the old to the new. These four elements were enshrined in legislation which came into effect on 15 March 2008, the day that the new local governments came into being.

The transition time line for consistent rating methodologies is 30 June 2012 and 16 March 2011 for the workforce structure transition and implementation of a new enterprise bargaining agreement. I have recently extended the transition period for the development of consistent local laws from 31 December 2010 to 31 December 2011. This decision was made after consulting with councils, which advised that more time was needed in recognition of the complexity of consolidating multiple local law regimes, which in the case of Toowoomba Regional Council, for example, meant consolidation of up to eight local laws for every local law already in place. I can inform the committee that councils are making significant progress on all four of these requirements.

In relation to enterprise bargaining, 76 per cent of local governments have already implemented agreements—well ahead of the March 2011 deadline—and the balance of councils are well progressed in their negotiations. All affected local governments are progressing the implementation of consistent rating methodologies across their regions. In fact, I might comment and pay my respects to the Southern Downs Regional Council, which has had a lot of difficulty putting together the rating methodologies from the former Warwick and Stanthorpe shires. Not only is this task a hard one and do I congratulate the council on facing up to it so soon in the transition period; I also congratulate them on the public discussion they have held about this program. It is not pleasant and it is not easy. Of course ratepayers, wherever they live, all want to pay as little as possible. But having this leadership from the council in facing this difficult issue and consulting with their community deserves commendation.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** Minister, I put this question to you with a great deal of interest. I ask the minister to please advise the committee on how the amalgamation process, which is referenced on page 2-83 of the SDS, has helped local councils to respond to major natural disasters.

**Ms BOYLE:** Thank you indeed for the question. Unfortunately, your councils are too often those that are caught in the middle of acts of God of major natural disasters. I have to say, one of the great things about the amalgamation process has been some of the unexpected benefits that have come along. One of these for some councils has been efficiencies flowing on from merging State Emergency Service branches. I had an opportunity to observe this firsthand at the recent Rockhampton community cabinet. Prior to the formation of the regional council, there were three volunteer controllers who were responsible for coordinating 10 SES branches. Now they have one full-time SES controller who is employed by council to coordinate all 10 branches. All of the people I met with—some considerable number of them who have had major experience over many years and made a huge contribution of volunteer hours—say that the system is indeed very much better.

I met the volunteers. I inspected their headquarters. They told me that having one controller overseeing the operations provides leadership and keeps an eye on the bigger picture and means better coordination, enhanced operations and cooperation and, most importantly in the time of disaster, superior communications. This sentiment was echoed also by the mayor and deputy mayor of the Rockhampton Regional Council. A more strategic approach has improved response capabilities and led to better use of resources and the valuable assets maintained by the SES that are now of course all regarded as 'ours' rather than those of 10 separate branches and ill coordinated.

It was good to hear from the Marlborough branch, for example, that it no longer had to stress about fundraising to meet its day-to-day operational costs because increased funding from councils means it has adequate funding. This was not the case prior to amalgamation and is a very real and tangible benefit for it. It is an example of how regional Queensland is benefiting from being able to tap into the resources—there is a thought, Madam Chair: will the LNP deamalgamate all of these SES branches if somebody in the Rockhampton area wants that? Will it go back to 10 branches if somebody so wants?

**Mr HOBBS:** Only what we have announced.

**Ms BOYLE:** This deamalgamation, this CHAOS policy, is absolutely frightening. The amalgamation has no doubt helped in this particular instance. In fact, it has helped also in the Maranoa. In fact, I quote the member for Warrego who sings the praises out there and says that, now we have a regional council, then the matter of dealing with the levy for the former Roma Town Council Area, so much a part of disasters, will no longer be an issue.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. That brings the committee's examination of estimates for Local Government to a close. The committee will adjourn for a short break. At 10.20 am we will commence our examination of the estimates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships.

**Proceedings suspended from 10.00 am to 10.21 am**

**CHAIR:** Good morning again. The Estimates Committee F hearing is resumed. The committee will now examine the estimates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships. The committee's examination will continue until 11.20 am. I again remind members of the committee and the minister that under standing orders the time limit for questions is one minute and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a double time will sound at the end of each time limit. 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. To assist Hansard, officers are asked to provide their names and positions prior to responding to a question referred to them by a minister.

In the event that those attending today are not aware, the committee's proceedings are lawful proceedings and are subject to the standing rules and orders of the Queensland parliament. Members of the public are welcome to observe the proceedings but may not participate in the proceedings. In that regard and in accordance with standing order 206, any person admitted to this hearing may be excluded by order of the committee or at my discretion as the chair.

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. I ask that all mobile phones and pagers are switched off. 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:** Thank you, Chair. Going back to my question that I asked you before about Department of Communities funding to local government identified in last year's budget as going to local government, this year it is \$281 million. How much was it last year?

**Ms BOYLE:** Thank you. In recognition that, of course, the Department of Communities crosses four portfolios, then some of that is not directly my responsibility. So I will ask the director-general of the Department of Communities to address that.

**Ms Apelt:** In relation to your specific question about the amounts of money, we will get that before the end of the session. However, it is practice across the Department of Communities to provide various grants in relation to diversionary programs that are often administered through local governments in the deed of grant in trust communities in particular. Also, we have a number of other auspicing arrangements that relate to community based activities that are best managed through the local governments. As the minister mentioned, that goes right across the whole Child Safety portfolio and other areas of community services and, of course, the housing program. So we will get that.

**Ms BOYLE:** And sports, of course.

**Ms Apelt:** And, of course, sports is a particularly big contributor. I have grants here that have gone to local governments. In terms of the amount that it was last year, the answer to your question is that it was \$182 million. So you are correct, it has increased, and also Disability Services and Sport are big contributors to grants being administered through local governments.

**Mr HOBBS:** Thank you for that. You are quite correct: it is \$182 million for 2009-10 and for 2010-11 it is \$281 million. So it is up \$99 million. Infrastructure and Planning has gone down \$60 million. I am trying to work out exactly what was in last year's budget for local government that is different from this year's.

**Ms BOYLE:** We addressed that question so far as the DIP part of things and mentioned the ups and downs, particularly in NDRRA funding that impacts on that budget. However, the extra \$99 million under the Communities portfolio; is there anything further on this point that you would like to say, director-general?

**Ms Apelt:** I can say that that relates to grants specifically for Housing, Disability Services, Child Safety, Sport and Recreation. I can provide you with a breakdown before the end of the session.

**Mr HOBBS:** Thank you. That would be important. We will deal with that later on. I refer to your answer to question on notice No. 130 on 11 February 2010 and the Partnerships Queensland program in particular. The adjusted 2008-09 budget is listed as \$4.2 million. The actual was \$2.7 million. The 2009-10 budget was \$8.2 million and expenditure on 10 January was \$2.8 million, or just over one-third of the budget acquitted more than halfway through the year. Why is this program consistently underspent?

**Ms BOYLE:** Thank you for the question. It is a good one indeed. I will ask the director-general to provide more detail in a moment. Can I let members of the committee know that under that program is a new program of partnerships called the Local Indigenous Partnerships Agreement program. This involves signing a contract community by community with the Aboriginal councils on what actions, jobs and duties should be done within that community as a partnership with the officer so appointed. That negotiation community by community took much more time than was expected and that is partly why the

local area partnership agreements took some time before they were in place and, therefore, staffed to implement them up and running. The staff are staff of the councils. So some of these negotiations were a matter of their timing rather than ours. Are there comments you would like to make?

**Ms Apelt:** Yes. The Partnerships Queensland program is actually made up of four separate programs. The Local Indigenous Partnership Agreements are funded one-off grants primarily to Indigenous councils, as the minister has indicated, to support the development of partnerships at the community level. Funding service agreements allow for the funds to be paid to recipients at various stages. So the funding is drawn down in tranches either throughout or upon the completion of the project.

As the minister has indicated, there are a number of reasons sometimes our initial estimate takes longer to deliver than we thought. Some of these reasons for the delays have been that several councils have requested a variation to the original purpose of their fund. So that takes time to negotiate those variations. Sometimes there are delays in the commencements of projects. Often this is about recruiting appropriate expertise in the various locations. Sometimes a specific component of a project might take longer than we initially estimated. One again, that is usually related to recruiting specific expertise. There was actually one council that did submit a late application. So we had not anticipated that.

Fourteen applications for Partnerships Queensland LIPA funding have been approved and one application is still to be finalised. Funds for 15 applications have been allocated and the Local Indigenous Partnership Agreement program is funded to 30 June 2011.

**Ms BOYLE:** The moneys that are late in delivering, as there may be, will be rolled over so there will be no loss or penalty for the delay.

**Mr HOBBS:** I refer to the Torres Strait regional councils. They got funding of \$7.581 million from the Community Development Employment Program for a Torres Strait Islander region. I understand that is the same figure as they got for forced amalgamation funding assessed by Treasury. Have you paid this money for CDEP, which is a good purpose, but in fact have not resolved the issue of forced amalgamation? You have not put the money into forced amalgamation, which is what they applied for.

**Ms BOYLE:** I will ask the director-general to confirm that the two amounts are exactly the same. It seems an amazing coincidence, but it is that—if, indeed, you are correct that they are the same. The CDEP money and how that has been arranged through government is a matter for the Department of Communities whereas, of course, it is the Queensland Treasury Corporation and the office of local government in DIP that has decided the top-up funding for amalgamation. So that is indeed coincidental.

We of course are talking about the future of community CDEP in the Torres Strait. I daresay that you would be aware that the federal government's intention is to close down CDEP and so compensation will need to be given. I do not have before me any information about the amount that you refer to, which is in last year's budget rather than this year's budget, as I understand it. Are you able to assist, director-general?

**Ms Apelt:** Yes, Minister. The amounts for the budget in 2009-10 and the estimated actual are exactly the same and the estimated budget for 2010-11 is \$100 million.

**Mr HOBBS:** So they got two payments of \$7.581 million?

**Ms Apelt:** There was a budget in 2009-10—sorry, yes, \$95,744 and this is for the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander—sorry—

**Ms BOYLE:** Yes.

**Ms Apelt:** Where is the \$7 million coming from, I am sorry?

**Mr HOBBS:** Community Development Employment Program for the Torres Strait Island Regional Council, budget paper, Department of Infrastructure and Planning, local government, \$7.581 million, one-off.

**Ms BOYLE:** That is DIP business. That is back to the previous—

**Mr HOBBS:** Question No. 2. But it is the CDEP program and an Indigenous council.

**Ms Apelt:** It might be helpful if I just outline what we have done in relation to CDEP. The Queensland government, of course, is supporting meaningful employment of Indigenous people by converting CDEP projects to real and, of course, sustainable jobs. Since July 2009, 108 Community Development Employment Project positions have been converted to real jobs. This includes 61 state government positions and also 47 municipal positions.

**Mr HOBBS:** Thank you for that. It is essential that we keep that program going for as long as we can. Minister, page 3-48 of the SDS is pretty well a summary across most of this. I refer to the ambitions of the Family Responsibilities Commission that states an intent to influence the wider acceptance of socially responsible standards of behaviour. I note that the average daily number of ATSI young people

in detention has risen 16 per cent—from 75 to 87 in 2009-10. What is your department doing to decrease this figure within the four Cape York welfare communities and elsewhere? Can you explain the rationale behind the targeted increase for 2010-11 to 92? So it goes from 75 to 87 to 92?

**Ms BOYLE:** Thank you very much for the very good question. As you would no doubt be aware, the Family Responsibilities Commission has taken some time to get up and running. You would also no doubt be aware, as would other members, that the introduction of new things, particularly delivered by the state government or the federal government, into Aboriginal communities can initially be treated with some suspicion and not immediately embraced, particularly because there is some level of exposure here of some very unhappy things—violence, alcohol abuse and child abuse—that occur in these communities. So in that context you can understand that not everybody rushed in with notifications and to welcome the commission and the commissioners straightaway. In my view, part of the increase over those years is as the community has come to terms with the commission. In fact, very many community members have welcomed it, derived some confidence in it and developed some trust with the locally based commissioners, and have been more willing therefore to report matters to them—to give them business, as it were.

So I am quite pleased, in fact, that there is more business for the Family Responsibilities Commission—not because I think that is more business occurring in the community in terms of child abuse, violence, alcohol or whatever it might be but more because I think we are getting it out from behind closed doors, out of the woodwork as it were, and it is being dealt with in a very different way to ever before, with practical support and action plans for the perpetrators and their families.

I take the opportunity to congratulate the Family Responsibilities Commission—I believe Commissioner David Glasgow is with us today—on their hard work. I am not at all sure, honourable member, that we will not see another increase even next year. Such is the extent of the problems with violence and abuse in these communities that we may not yet be at the end of it. Are we doing things as the Queensland government to reduce these figures? Well, yes. Not directly through the Family Responsibilities Commission, but that is what the very unpopular in some quarters alcohol management plans are about: our determination that we will get those kids to school and get them a good education—feed them breakfast, if necessary; our determination that we will deal with the job opportunities and the training opportunities that are necessary. It is action on education, training, employment, housing and health that is going to make those figures go down as the years go on.

**Mr HOBBS:** We would hope that in the next year we will see some additional funding that will be needed to help achieve that goal. Referring to SDS page 3-50, after recording a 20 per cent drop in estimated actuals for clients who have agreed to voluntary income management for the year ending 30 June 2009—20 to 16—against the target estimate of 40, is the Family Responsibilities Commission's decision to discontinue the measure an admission of policy failure or something else? Were the co-founders, they being the federal Department of Housing, Community Services, Indigenous Affairs and the Cape York Institute, consulted or advised of the discontinuation? Also, Minister, what is your department doing in practical terms outside the four Cape York communities?

**Ms BOYLE:** I am pleased to provide some information about the reason for the change to the service standard. I will deal with the service standard definition first. There are several categories of Centrelink benefits which were excluded from the application of the commission's ability for these recipients to volunteer for income management under section 106 and section 108 of the Family Responsibilities Commission Act 2008. During functioning of the commission since then, voluntary agreements and voluntary income management were considered matters of individual privacy as these clients were not the subject of an agency notification under part 4 of the act, not subject to conferencing. Therefore, not only were they entitled to some privacy because there had been no charge against them; at the same time the commission was not in a position to keep statistical records when they were not always aware of these people, who they were and what their circumstances were.

The measure has been discontinued as data is not reportable under the Family Responsibilities Commission Act 2008. Voluntary income management required changes to the Social Security Act 1991 and, therefore, clients on certain benefits were unable to volunteer to be subject to income management and the privacy issue has since ensued. These measures were first promulgated and included as performance measures during early discussions with the Cape York Institute and the Commonwealth government during the initial establishment of the Family Responsibilities Commission in 2008. So it is the experience of the actual set-up of the commission that has shown that, well intentioned as the identification of those measures was, they are not appropriate. The commission, in fact, has sought the removal by Centrelink of the exemptions applying to specific types of welfare payments.

The commission is keen to review and publish its service delivery standards. It meets routinely with the Cape York Institute and the Cape York Partnerships for Welfare Reform Board and these are performance measures that are jointly agreed.

**Mr HOBBS:** Reference is made on SDS page 3-50 to the Family Responsibilities Commission's reported target estimate of 90 clients to be subject to conditional income management in 2009-10. The same page reveals the actual to be 220 for that period. Can the minister explain the 244 per cent increase and itemise the number of conditional income management clients by their community?

**Ms BOYLE:** I wonder whether I might, through the director-general, invite Commissioner David Glasgow, who is with us today, to address the answer to the honourable member.

**Mr Glasgow:** Mr Hobbs, I will have to get specific community-by-community totals for each of those conditionally income managed candidates in each of those communities, and I will arrange for that to be delivered this morning. It is readily available; just a phone call to my office will get that information.

The difference between target and actuals was really how things turned out in the communities. A number of people continued their income management voluntarily, a number of people failed to comply, and in the year we are talking about—2009-10—we started our process of calling people before us who had failed to perform under agreement. So more and more people were brought before us who had failed to comply with agreements and decisions that were made. Having been given that opportunity to comply, for failure to do so they ended up with a basic card or the conditional income management order. I expect that that will continue as people fail to comply. The strength of the commissioners and the determination to make sure that people comply with the agreement is indeed encouraging, and in most instances the decision to issue a basic card is a decision of my colleagues.

**CHAIR:** The next round of questions will be from government members. I call the member for Mount Isa.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** Minister, I am very aware of the cost of freighting goods into retail stores based in remote communities. Would the minister advise what the Bligh government is doing to help keep the cost of essential food items, such as bread and milk, as low as possible?

**Ms BOYLE:** Thank you for the question. A major reason the state government has been operating retail stores is to ensure that communities have access to essential items like bread and milk when there are no other suppliers. As part of our retail stores policy, we have also been ensuring essential items are not price prohibitive because of the high cost of freight and related charges. For instance, the retail store price in remote communities for two litres of best-buy full cream milk is currently \$2.09, while the price of a 700 gram Tip Top sandwich loaf is \$3.79. These prices are in line with those of comparable products in major Brisbane supermarkets. Retail stores have also implemented a pricing policy that sees the less profitable stores subsidised by the more profitable ones, creating a level playing field.

There is also a partnership with a prominent soft drink manufacturer so that non-sugared drinks are promoted over high-sugar, energy dense alternatives. Some other examples of this policy in action include quality and pricing commensurate with similar items available in Brisbane, bottled water sold at prices similar to Brisbane, diet soft drinks, including Coke Zero, priced at 20 per cent less than sugary soft drinks, and cigarettes, confectionary and biscuits priced higher to compensate for subsidies on healthier options.

As retail stores operate on a not-for-profit, not-for-loss basis without support from consolidated revenue, transport costs are averaged throughout the year to enable lower prices on essential items to be maintained. Retail stores that are isolated in the wet season have been equipped with bulk-store facilities so that they can stock up as much as possible with dry and frozen goods. We have also been upgrading facilities, including installation of modern refrigerated display cases, for all stores to ensure longevity and freshness of fresh produce. Last year, in fact, I had the pleasure of opening the new Freddie Clarence Moses Store in Lockhart River. I was also pleased to inspect the refurbished Palm Island Retail Store earlier this year, and I must say that the Palm Island Retail Store would do just as well and be indistinguishable from any store in Cairns or in Brisbane, for that matter.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** I recently visited a few of the remote stores and saw a fantastic display outlining what the sugar levels are in each of those drinks. It was very, very good. I also note the references on SDS pages 3-3 and 3-8 to the Remote Indigenous Land and Infrastructure Program Office, which was established to resolve land tenure issues and also prepare the land for the massive housing program. Can the minister please update the committee on the work of the program office over the last year?

**Ms BOYLE:** I am very pleased for the question, because the work of the program office is so important. As some of the committee might know, the program office's mantra is 'plan, build, deliver', and it certainly is already doing so in its first year of operation. Just some of its accomplishments include: negotiated in-principle and written agreements for social housing leases, with 12 out of 16 Indigenous councils now on board; secured deeds of agreement to lease over 400 lots in Hope Vale, Aurukun, Wujal Wujal, Napranum, Woorabinda, Doomadgee, Kowanyama and Palm Island. This has enabled the rollout of new social housing in these communities. Remote land and infrastructure plans have been developed for 16 Indigenous councils providing a vital overview of land and infrastructure needs across these communities which we did not have before. As at 9 July, 46 new houses have been built with 152 upgrades completed.

The program office has been and will continue to charge forward. To give the community an idea of the complexities involved in rolling out this massive \$1.16 billion building program, there are some 80-plus tasks that have to be undertaken. These involve careful programming of works and liaising closely with departments, contractors and, of course, the council and communities themselves. Just some of

these programming works include, but are not limited to, tendering, state interest mapping, drafting local area plans, drafting planning schemes, undertaking state interest reviews, conducting field surveys, negotiating ILU agreements, registering ILU agreements, scoping and building water and sewerage infrastructure, registering leases, identifying and resolving survey anomalies and, of course, making sure the building construction gets underway. The list goes on.

Importantly, communities are continuously consulted, as they must be within the culture of these communities. They are being included in the decision-making process. For example, meetings are held with trustees and the councils in all communities. There are public forums, displays and information. The communities have made it plain that once is not enough. You cannot go to a community, have a meeting and call that sufficient consultation. An ongoing relationship and program of engagement is essential.

To show some of our progress, I have with me today the map of the land and infrastructure plan for Bamaga in the northern peninsula area. I also have some A3 versions of this map to table. With your indulgence and permission, Chair, I will table these versions but hand around for committee members the larger version with the overlay. Through the questioner, may I ask for an extension of time?

**Mrs KIERNAN:** Yes.

**Ms BOYLE:** This is the Bamaga community. The underlying page is the 'before' view. Even a cursory glance of the mapping that has been done by the program office shows that the surveying is all over the place and there are no clear survey lines and agreed lots for development within Bamaga. Clearly, a lot of work needs to be undertaken to organise the community. Following consultation with the community, we have a much better sense of where they want expanded development to go and what kinds of facilities they want to go where, so the expansion areas and their purposes can begin to be identified. I am pleased that already that is being passed amongst community members. The yellow blocks on the map indicate land and existing social housing that is currently constrained by native title. The purple or darker blue blocks show land and social housing that is not constrained by native title. Even getting that distinction and the proper process for managing those two categories of land has been very difficult.

This represents a first for this community and many of the others in enabling them to join with us in planning for sustainable growth and looking at their economic development opportunities and where they should occur in the community for the very first time. We all know that jobs are essential if these communities are to thrive in the future. You cannot have a job if there is not a business to offer you a job. Businesses have been absolutely—and reasonably so—unwilling to establish if no block of land can be leased to them on which they can build facilities. If you track back economic development you can understand how essential it is that we get these planning schemes in place and the opportunity for housing and other forms of community development.

**Mr WETTENHALL:** Minister, with reference to page 3-8 of the SDS, can you inform the committee how the preamble to the Queensland Constitution has been received in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?

**Ms BOYLE:** I thank you for the question. The words for our preamble were passed by parliament on 23 February 2010. It is an historic addition. It is a new vision for Queensland based on democracy, freedom, inclusiveness and peace. The preamble resulted from an idea raised at the Queensland 2020 Ideas to Action Forum that was held two years ago. The parliamentary Law, Justice and Safety Committee received a referral from the Legislative Assembly to draft a preamble, including a statement of due recognition of Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council provided a number of submissions to the committee, with the powerful and poignant recognition of our first Australians the result.

I have had very positive feedback from community members and, in particular, from elders during recent community forums held in Logan, on the Gold Coast and in the Inala areas, with respected elders and traditional owners congratulating the council on this significant achievement. I too thank the advisory council. This has been the first full year of its operations and, by heavens, what heavy weights they have shown themselves to be in terms of providing advice, not only to me as Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships but to other ministers in this government and to other departments, on the way forward for our first nation Australians. I would also like to thank Jackie Huggins from Reconciliation Australia for her contribution and Reconciliation Australia's important support.

**CHAIR:** Minister, I note that today in your opening statement you formally recognised the traditional owners of the land on which we are having this hearing. Can you please advise the committee on how the government is ensuring that a welcome to country is undertaken at important government events?

**Ms BOYLE:** That is an important custom that has been introduced and by which the Bligh government staunchly stands. It has now been one year since the launch of the Queensland government's Reconciliation Action Plan 2009-12. A significant commitment in the Reconciliation Action Plan was to review and implement whole-of-government protocols for working with Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander peoples. This included the strengthening of protocols relating to welcome to country, acknowledging traditional owners, custodians and elders and Queensland's two Indigenous peoples to ensure they are conducted in the most appropriate manner.

I am pleased to announce that the existing Queensland government protocols for welcome to country have now been updated and made available to all Queensland public servants on GovNet. The protocols for welcome to country and acknowledgement of traditional owners, custodians and elders are a guide to help government officers when preparing for and undertaking official government business by indicating culturally appropriate processes for engaging with traditional owners, custodians and elders to provide a welcome to country and acknowledgment of traditional owners, custodians and elders. They also make clear who should deliver a welcome to country and when, and also who should deliver an acknowledgement of traditional owners, custodians and elders and when.

As part of their commitment to the Reconciliation Action Plan, all government agencies must have regard for the protocol guidelines when carrying out their government duties. I am confident that agencies already promote the affirmation of our first Australians at government events and the updated guidelines enhance the consistency and significance of this symbolic but nonetheless important action. In addition, the Department of Communities has and will continue to develop community specific protocols for all Queensland public servants when visiting, working with and living in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. I am pleased to report the support and assistance of the Aboriginal councils with this local area protocol. These protocols are also being loaded onto GovNet for all public servants to access and will progressively be available on GovNet by the end of 2010.

**CHAIR:** Minister, with reference to page 3-3 of the SDS, which lists some of the most significant policy achievements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships by the Bligh government, are you aware of any alternative policy proposals in Indigenous affairs?

**Ms BOYLE:** In a word, no. I am not aware of any opposition alternative policies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partnerships. However, on a near daily basis we hear the LNP whine, carp and criticise the government, but never do we hear them come up with any actual alternative policies. It seems that they are simply too afraid to commit to anything when it comes to putting out policies of substance that would make a difference in the lives of Indigenous Queensland. This is in stark contrast to all that we in the Bligh government have done and, by heavens, do we have a story to tell.

During my time as Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, a range of practical programs and initiatives have been implemented that are having direct positive results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Queensland. For example, by joining Victoria, Queensland is now the second state to include a constitutional provision honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first Australians. This preamble is one of 20 initiatives included in Queensland's whole-of-government Reconciliation Action Plan which, of course, is a first for any state government of Australia. In Queensland, the LNP chooses to turn its back on acknowledging our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Their lack of support for the preamble to the constitution—in fact, they voted against the inclusion of the preamble—is a shame upon them. They did not want to recognise Indigenous Queenslanders in our constitution. Therefore, it is little wonder that there have been only a handful of questions, on and off notice, about Indigenous issues since the last election.

There is much for my government to tell. Beyond the Reconciliation Action Plan, we are pleased and proud indeed of the huge action we are taking under the Closing the Gap and COAG agendas. We are proud, too, of the huge work that is being done—and about which I will talk more in the months ahead—to address the problem of Indigenous disadvantage in the cities and towns of Queensland. We stand by the strong action taken and continuing to be taken by the Beattie and the Bligh governments in alcohol reform, particularly so far as the discrete communities are concerned.

**Mr WETTENHALL:** Minister, I refer you to page 3-15 of the SDS, which discusses your department's engagement with its stakeholders. Can the minister please advise the committee on the good work that is happening in the Mona Mona community?

**Ms BOYLE:** As the member is well aware, as am I as the local member for an adjacent area, for a long time the Mona Mona community has been calling out for assistance, particularly with determining the tenure of the land that they rightfully believe should be theirs. I am pleased to advise the committee that the Bligh government is delivering on our commitment to work with the Mona Mona community in relation to tenure resolution.

Our goal has been to hand back to the people of Mona Mona 1,600 hectares of land and to support them as they work their way through the issue of securing tenure. To get to this point, a Mona Mona steering committee was established to lead the consultation process required in the lead-up to the formation of a new incorporated body. I can advise the committee today that the Mona Mona Bulmba Aboriginal Corporation was formally incorporated on 2 June 2010. Its inaugural annual general meeting is scheduled for Sunday, 5 September 2010 at Mona Mona. I dare say the local member, who is also a member of this committee, will do his darnedest to be present, as will I.

The corporation is in the process of negotiating a 30-year trustee lease with the Department of Communities over the Mona Mona reserve area. It is anticipated that under the lease the corporation will regulate activities conducted at Mona Mona and protect the unique cultural and environmental values of the area. An on-site caretaker will manage these responsibilities. Once the trustee lease has been finalised, I understand the corporation will make an application to have the reserve deemed transferable under the Queensland Aboriginal Land Act 1991. Meanwhile, the Department of Communities has committed \$123,000 to upgrade septic systems, complete some remedial work on electrical faults and bore water supplies, and remove household waste. During 2010-11 work is also anticipated on four permanent buildings on-site, along with two ablution blocks and the meeting shed, at an estimated cost of \$1 million.

I take this opportunity to recognise the invaluable contribution—'invaluable' is a nice word for it—of my parliamentary colleague, Mr Steve Wettenhall. In other circumstances, some might say an alternative phrase is that the local member has nagged me mercilessly, but that has been on behalf of the people of Mona Mona and quite rightly so. The success for the people of Mona Mona is also a success for you, sir. I recognise your good action on their behalf.

**CHAIR:** The next round of questions will be from non-government members.

**Mr HOBBS:** I table a letter from Gidarjil Development Corporation. I would like the Minister to have that. Minister, again I refer to the objectives of the Family Responsibilities Commission, Closing the Gap and the Government Reconciliation Action Plan. I table the correspondence from Mr Kerry Blackman, the managing director of the Gidarjil Development Corporation, to the honourable Treasurer Andrew Fraser. Will the Minister advise whether the letter was forwarded to her?

**Ms BOYLE:** This is not a letter that I have ever seen.

**Mr HOBBS:** I find it strange that a letter of such importance goes to the Treasurer but was not forwarded to you. You are the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships. The system is breaking down somewhere. Why would that letter not have been forwarded to you? In government is there a system in place that catches these things?

**Ms BOYLE:** I am pleased to say that if it has gone to Andrew Fraser, there is a good chance that it is on its way to me. The date of the letter—not the date of receipt in the Treasurer's office, but the date of the letter—is 24 June. I think it is quite interesting and instructive to look at the people to whom the writer directly copied the letter. He chose not to forward it to me as the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, but he did decide to forward it to the Community Jobs Priorities Committee; to Michelle Davies, the acting regional director; to Rob Messenger, the Independent member for Burnett; and to Jack Dempsey, the member for Bundaberg. Both Rob Messenger and Jack Dempsey, as members of the Queensland parliament, albeit opposition and Independent members, also had the choice of forwarding that to me or bringing it to my attention directly, and they have chosen not to do so, at least to this point. I thank you, sir, for bringing it to my attention now.

**Mr HOBBS:** I have brought it to your attention. Other members did bring it to my attention. I presume that the government system would have it. So you would have already had it. The whole system seems to be breaking down. Minister, let us go through some of the issues. Mr Blackman has drawn attention to the parlous nature of the labour market in the Wide Bay-Bundaberg region and, at the time of writing, rues the Treasurer's decision not to fund one single stand-alone Indigenous project through the Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiative. Would you agree, Minister, that, as proposed by Mr Blackman, the outlook for Indigenous people is 'pretty grim unless you are prepared to work with successful Aboriginal corporations' to at least get them job ready? I think, Minister, what he is really saying is that you guys are all talk and no action.

**Ms BOYLE:** I am so pleased to inform you of the huge number of Indigenous related employment programs around the state. It is not my portfolio and I cannot comment, therefore, why there are none, if indeed the letter writer is correct, in the Bundaberg area. But you would look to the organisations that bid for these projects for a reason for that. Nonetheless, it is matter for another minister, not for me. I am able to say, however, that my department has provided \$102,499 to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Bundaberg electorate since 2009-10. I introduce to the committee the associate director-general of the Department of Communities but in particular leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services. He formerly worked in the employment field in Central Queensland and may wish to comment on this matter.

**Mr Weatherall:** The government has made a firm commitment to supporting Indigenous economic development. It has committed to the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Economic Participation to increase Indigenous people in employment with a focus on not only increasing employment in the Queensland Public Service but also seeking to increase Indigenous participation in mainstream employment. I am aware that Mr Blackman is a significant leader within the Indigenous community in Bundaberg. He is absolutely committed to enhancing the economic and social status of Indigenous people and has supported a number of very successful Indigenous economic initiatives through the Gidarjil Development Corporation.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, maybe you can go to the Treasurer's dead letter office. He might have a few more over there. Your answer to question on notice No. 1 reveals that the Indigenous Environmental Health Infrastructure Program was underspent by \$58 million for the year to 30 June 2010. Why?

**Ms BOYLE:** I ask the director-general to answer that question.

**Ms Apelt:** Mr Hobbs, while I am getting the specifics in relation to that question, I can give you the follow-up to your previous question in relation to the increase in grants to local governments. The net increase was \$99.215 million. The increase of \$99.215 million relates primarily to increases in grants of \$81.77 million to Housing and Homelessness Services, \$10.490 million to Community and Youth Justice Services and \$10.157 million to Sport and Recreation Services.

**Ms BOYLE:** We will table that information for the committee's further attention.

**Ms Apelt:** Mr Hobbs, would you mind repeating the question so I can get the specifics?

**Mr HOBBS:** Under grants and subsidies, \$84 million was budgeted for the Indigenous Environmental Health Infrastructure Program. The actual expenditure was \$26.382 million.

**Ms Apelt:** I am sorry, Mr Hobbs, but this is not an area of my administration. This relates to the Department of Infrastructure and Planning. The officers in the Department of Infrastructure and Planning would be better placed to help you with that question.

**Mr HOBBS:** Perhaps the minister might be able to answer this question, because it is the Indigenous Environmental Health Infrastructure Program.

**Ms BOYLE:** It is, but it is in the Department of Infrastructure and Planning budget. So picking now to ask about that, after the director-general and the finance people from DIP have gone, is not really very sensible. I will be pleased to get you a detailed and precise answer to that, however.

**Mr HOBBS:** Thank you, Minister—\$58 million is a lot of money not to spend, but I am sure you will have a good answer for it. I refer to the Cape York Welfare Reform and Partnerships Queensland, both featured in your answer to my non-government question on notice No. 1. I note that they have been underspent by in excess of \$10 million. This comes under the Department of Communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services. In answer to question on notice No. 1, attachment 2, the allocation for Cape York Welfare Reform was \$6 million, spent \$3 million; the allocation for Partnerships Queensland was \$13.9 million, spent \$7 million. The question is why?

**Ms BOYLE:** We are getting some further information about that. It is a matter of how fast we can roll out the services. That is the bottom line. Particularly for some of the component services that come under Cape York Welfare Reform, it depends on when we can find the staff to get them up and running. There is some further information here about that. Funding, for example, for parenting services has been delayed pending approval of a redesigned service model. So the first service model that was accepted by the Cape York Welfare Reform board, as well as by the Family Responsibilities Commission, and attempted to be administered was unsuccessful in getting the staff that was needed. So a redesigned service model has now been approved and the funds are expected to be released in 2010-11, along with the new service agreement and relevant acquittals. There have also been delays for program design for a range of support services that were committed and funded under the Cape York Welfare Reform program in relation to family violence and gambling.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, that is \$68 million so far that you have underspent in the department. That is a considerable amount of money.

**Ms BOYLE:** The director-general would like to comment.

**Ms Apelt:** You are quite right, Mr Hobbs, in that you have noted that there are funds in relation to these grant programs that have been rolled over. This is not unusual for grant programs that have a three- and sometimes five-year life. So the issues that the minister has outlined are not unusual when it comes to recruiting specialist staff. Often the budget goes fairly flatline for a while and towards the end of the project it goes up because by then all the planning and establishment work has been done, the staff are recruited and the actual work is being delivered. This is a fairly usual pattern when you have a three- and five-year program.

All of these grants programs here do run over a triennial period. Each is subject to an evaluation at the end of that period. Primarily, as the minister mentioned, the biggest issue we have in the Indigenous communities is the time it takes to recruit specialist staff—not only recruiting but also providing an environment that enables staff to remain there for the duration of the project. Otherwise we do have the kinds of delays you have noted which do result in a rollover of funds. But I can assure you that the funds are not lost; the funds are there and people still get the services.

**CHAIR:** The next round of questions will be from government members. I call the member for Burleigh.

**Mrs SMITH:** Minister, I refer to page 3-8 of the SDS and ask if you could discuss a real-life story that highlights the work of the Community and Personal Histories branch?

**Ms BOYLE:** I thank the member for the question. This is some of the excellent work done by ATSI staff that is rarely heard about in public forums yet for which I receive the thanks of so many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people all over the state. I can share some information uncovered by Community and Personal Histories for Auntie Ruth Hegarty, who is one of our Queensland Greats. She has given me permission to share this information with you today. It has been pieced together through files and government documents tracked down by the department.

Auntie Ruth was born in 1929 in a room at the back of Mitchell Hospital. Her mother, Ruby, was young and single. Her family moved to Cherbourg when Ruth was just an infant—her grandfather out of work for the first time thanks to the Great Depression. When Ruth was only four she was separated from her mum, who was sent away to work. Ruth lived in a dormitory until she was 14 and in 1943, at the height of the Second World War, she was sent out to work. Ruth later wrote—

It was a sad little Ruthie getting on that train. I thought of the older women's advice to be as though you weren't there, to fade into the background. I felt all alone and afraid.

It was a long journey to Brisbane and then to Jandowae on the night train. All other passengers were white. It beggars belief, doesn't it, that we put young people through such circumstances? After years in domestic service, Ruth married Joe Hegarty, whom she had known from childhood. Many years later, supported by her mother and children, Ruth got in touch with Community and Personal Histories to begin researching files kept on her and her family during the Cherbourg years. Much of this is featured in her second book *Bittersweet Journey*.

More recently, Auntie Ruth has asked the branch to help research her father's family, particularly records about his Aboriginal heritage that she new little of. The work of Community and Personal Histories continues to support eminent authors such as Auntie Ruth and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are searching for their families and their histories, searching for their identity.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** Minister, can you update the committee in relation to the divestment of the retail stores project, which the minister discussed at the estimates hearing last year?

**Ms BOYLE:** I dare say the honourable member is aware that in 2008 our Premier made a commitment to work with the mayors on an alternative model for the future ownership and operation of the government owned retail stores. This process has been progressing well. We have been working in partnership with the mayors and communities involved. In February this year the mayors gave their in-principle support for a statutory body model. The Bligh government more recently has given its endorsement to a future model for the six government run stores. This model takes into account the proposal developed by the mayors. The proposed model will be subject to further consultation and necessary legislation being passed.

The statutory body will be based on the Island Industries Board model, which is successfully operating retail stores across the Torres Strait. The proposed body will be governed by a board of up to eight members. The communities will be represented by three members. The remaining positions will be filled by independent industry experts. Supporting the board will be an advisory body comprised of a representative from each community. The board will then report through the director-general of the Department of Communities to me as the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships. The Department of Communities will allocate an experienced officer to support the statutory board. This is currently what happens with the IBIS stores.

A departmental review of the board and its operations will occur within three years of its establishment. The review will include consideration of the board's proposals for the future operation of the stores. The statutory body will also need to report within 18 months of its establishment on the sustainability of each store. The importance of this is that it is the eventual ambition of each of the communities to own their own store. At this time the mayors, speaking for their communities, have recognised that there needs to be joint management while management skills are developed on the part of community members and there needs to be provision for some subsidisation of some of these stores that are less profitable than others. But it is their eventual ambition to have the stores standing on their own two feet. They believe that this first step to a statutory body model is the right step, and its progress over the years ahead will be closely monitored.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** It certainly is proven that there has been a very strong consultative process with those stores and with the information today.

**Ms BOYLE:** Before you ask another question, Mr Glasgow, the Commissioner for the Family Responsibilities Commission, has the answer for the committee, if he could provide that information now.

**Mr Glasgow:** In response to Mr Hobbs's question, I can advise that the estimate in your papers was derived from actual figures earlier in the year and then 'pro rata-ed'. I now have the actual figures of the conditional income management orders which we have made in the full year 2009-10, and they are considerably more: Aurukun, 159; Coen, 24; Mossman Gorge, 49; and Hope Vale, 101. This represents a total of 333 orders made by the commission in 2009-10.

**Mr HOBBS:** Thank you.

**CHAIR:** There are only two minutes left in this session.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** Minister, I note with reference to page 3-15 of the SDS the new measure in relation to ministerial Indigenous round tables. I would be pleased if you could tell the committee about the recent round table held in Bamaga which I have to say that I unfortunately missed. What were some of the outcomes of that meeting?

**Ms BOYLE:** Thank you for the question. The Ministerial Indigenous Roundtable in Bamaga on 12 May was the first to be hosted by a mainland Indigenous community since the historic Indigenous Partnership Agreement meetings in Yarrabah and Atherton in 2007. The Bamaga round table gave the Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council the opportunity to showcase its community infrastructure and economic ventures which are helping to drive progress on the ground.

My congratulations go to Mayor Joseph Elu and his council and to CEO Stuart Duncan and council staff. They put their best foot forward and showed me and the department and, more importantly, the other Aboriginal councils the great work they have been doing in a wide range of local government areas. It meant that the round table was instructive and important in terms of the agenda for the round table, much of which was around the topic of financial sustainability. Our visit to Bamaga was also of great benefit to the mayors of the Aboriginal communities because they could see what another council—and a good council, I must say—is up to and they got some good ideas for their own communities.

Recent round tables have been held in the fine city of Cairns. As productive as the actual meeting might have been, obviously there was not that opportunity for learning about best practice Aboriginal council management on the ground. There has been some bidding from the Aboriginal communities to host the next round table. I am not in a position at the moment to formally announce where our next meeting will be, but it is the wish of the mayors that the next round table will also be held in an Aboriginal community.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. That concludes the examination of the estimates for the portfolio of the Minister for Local Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships.

**Ms BOYLE:** I have a bit more information if there is time. The director-general has some information relevant to an earlier question.

**Ms Apelt:** In reference to the 2010-11 budget for the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council, I need to correct that the figure is \$100,000, not \$100 million.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. I thank the minister and the officers. For the information of those attending today, the hearing transcript for this portfolio will be available on the parliament's website in approximately two hours. The committee will break and resume at 11.30 am. From that time, the committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the organisational units within the portfolio of the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport.

**Proceedings suspended from 11.24 am to 11.30 am**

## ESTIMATES COMMITTEE F—CHILD SAFETY AND SPORT

### In Attendance

Hon. PG Reeves, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport

Ms J Whitaker, Policy Adviser

Mr S Gay, Policy Adviser

#### Department of Communities

Ms L Apelt, Director-General

Mr B Swan, Deputy Director-General, Child Safety, Youth and Families, Community Participation

Mr T Hodda, Director, Financial Services

Mr R Moore, Deputy Director-General, Sport and Recreation Services

---

**CHAIR:** The Estimates Committee F hearing is now resumed. On behalf of the committee I welcome the minister, departmental officers, officers of statutory bodies and members of the public to this hearing. I am Mary-Anne O'Neill, the member for Kallangur and the chair of the committee. Howard Hobbs, the member for Warrego, is the deputy chair. The other committee members are Jack Dempsey, the member for Bundaberg; Betty Kiernan, the member for Mount Isa; Rosemary Menkens, the member for Burdekin; Christine Smith, the member for Burleigh; and Steve Wettenhall, the member for Barron River. The next item for consideration is the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport. This afternoon the committee will suspend proceedings for lunch from 1 pm to 2 pm.

In the event that those attending today are not aware, the committee's proceedings are lawful proceedings and subject to the standing rules and orders of the Queensland parliament. Members of the public are welcome to observe the proceedings but may not participate in the proceedings. In that regard, and in accordance with standing order 206, any person admitted to this hearing may be excluded by order of the committee or at my discretion as chair. 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.

The committee has resolved in relation to media coverage of the hearing that television and film coverage, photographs and sound broadcasts will be allowed for the chair's opening comments and the introductory statements of each minister, and that television, film and photographic coverage will be allowed at the change of organisational units being examined. The committee has also resolved that audio and video of the hearing recorded by Parliamentary Services's cameras and microphones in the Legislative Council chamber will be broadcast by Parliamentary Services via the services's website and to receivers throughout the parliamentary precinct. I ask that all mobile phones and pagers be now switched off.

I remind members of the committee and ministers that, under standing orders, the time limit for questions is one minute and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a double chime will sound at the end of each time limit. 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. Standing orders require that at least half the time available for questions at today's hearing be allocated to non-government members. Any time expended while the committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between government and non-government members.

Government members and non-government members will take turns asking questions, generally in blocks lasting 20 minutes and commencing with non-government members. The committee has resolved that non-committee members be given leave to attend to ask questions during the hearing today. To assist Hansard, officers are asked to provide their names and positions prior to responding to a question referred to them by the minister.

I declare open for examination the proposed expenditure for organisational units within the portfolio of the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport. The committee will commence with the examination of the estimates for Child Safety. 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 of no longer than five minutes. Would you like to do so?

**Mr REEVES:** Yes. Protecting the youngest and most vulnerable members of society is arguably the most important challenge of any government. The Bligh government's 2010-11 budget confirms our commitment to those Queenslanders who need us most—those babies, children and young people who have been harmed through abuse or neglect or who are at risk of abuse or neglect. The state budget provides funding for child protection, with expenditure of \$695.9 million to help us help those children who really need it.

This year, however, there is an even stronger focus on prevention and early intervention. We want to address problems early to stop families from reaching crisis point so that their children do not need to go into care in order to be safe. To support those Queensland families who are finding it hard to keep their children safe, the Bligh government is providing \$55 million over four years for the Helping Out Families initiative—a new direction on child protection that aims to cut the human cost of child abuse and keep Queensland families safe together. The focus is on providing these vulnerable families with the right support at the right time. To start with, Helping Out Families will be implemented in three South-East Queensland locations: Logan and Beenleigh/Eagleby/Nerang from October, and the southern Gold Coast early next year.

What will this mean? In practical terms, it means that more families will be referred to appropriate counselling and referral services before their situations get out of control and their children need to be taken away. For example, some families with new babies can struggle to cope so visits from a child health nurse could help them with the new stresses of family life.

The Bligh government's budget also includes \$8.5 million for 11 family support services for Indigenous families. These services will use trained Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers to improve the attachment between children and parents, and build on the strengths within the child's family and support network. It makes good, practical sense to have Indigenous people working earlier with Indigenous families on a range of personal, cultural, social and family issues. This budget also provides \$3 million in recurrent funding to provide approximately 35 additional child protection staff in high-demand areas.

In the sport and recreation arena, the Bligh government has allocated \$159 million in the state budget, reaffirming our commitment to help Queenslanders become Australia's healthiest people. These funds will create more jobs in local communities, build important infrastructure and deliver vital programs that will help Queenslanders to become more active and involved in sport and recreation.

From 2010-11, the government is providing a massive \$138 million over three years to enable local governments, sports clubs and associations, and schools and community groups to increase participation, support volunteers, build local capacity and provide equitable access for people who are disadvantaged. This new funding package is the culmination of a major reform of sport and recreation funding programs, restructuring the way in which state and local sporting organisations, community groups and infrastructure projects are supported.

Local clubs will now have access to more minor capital works funding. We have increased the range of community based organisations who will now be eligible to apply for our support. In fact the new, three-year \$38 million Local Sport and Recreation Jobs Plan is an excellent outcome of the recent program reform. This plan will enable groups of local sport and recreation organisations to employ a local sport and recreation coordinator to assist with recruiting and retaining volunteers, fundraising, promotional activities and seeking sponsors. Applications for the plan are currently open, and I urge all interested organisations to apply for funding, if they have not already done so.

The Bligh government is also proud to support our elite athletes to help them reach their ultimate goals of competing in major international events. In 2010-11, we will provide more than \$11 million to the Queensland Academy of Sport to continue preparing our athletes for the upcoming Delhi 2010 Commonwealth Games in October this year.

The Bligh government is also supporting new initiatives and existing ventures that showcase Queensland as the premier sporting destination. We have allocated \$1.1 million over two years to enable the Townsville City Council to improve facilities for the Townsville 400 V8 Supercars event. The new bridge was completed in time for the 2010 event, providing more efficient movement of the 152,000 people who attended earlier this month as well as providing an important access point for police and emergency services personnel. We will continue our investments, with \$144.2 million for the redevelopment of Carrara Stadium.

I am very proud of the fact that this government provides more funding to sport and recreation than any other state. The Bligh government is doing its bit to create balanced, strong and beneficial opportunities for Queenslanders from all walks of life to be involved in sport and recreation activities.

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

**Mr DEMPSEY:** I refer to Service Delivery Statements 3-15 and notifications requiring investigation. Minister, with a record budget in 2009-10 and a further record budget in 2010-11, why is it that more than 40 per cent or some 7,000 finalised investigations into notifications took more than 61 days to finalise?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. The honourable member was correct in saying that the 2010-11 state budget is a record budget, as was last year's budget. The variance between the 2009-10 target is less than 10 per cent which is not considered a statistic of significance. The lower than expected number of notifications in 2009-10 is likely to be due to the continued use of our structured decision making.

Responding to reports of child abuse and neglect is tough work, as the member would realise. Staff who work for Child Safety Services dedicate their lives to protecting children and young people. They perform a service to our society that should not need to be performed but has to be. People should not abuse and neglect their children, and that is the bottom line here. I was pleased to recently complete my visits to all of the 50 Child Safety Services offices in Queensland where I heard firsthand from the hardworking staff on the front line who support our communities. I have also visited all seven regional offices and all the hub officers.

At any one time, Child Safety Services expects to be working on more than 1,800 investigations and assessments. This is a tremendous effort by the Child Safety Services staff and is testament to the hard work of all staff. Child Safety Services investigates all notifications, and therefore the volume of investigations conducted in Queensland is higher than in other jurisdictions. The decision on how soon the department must respond to a notification is based on the available information, the nature of concerns, the child's need for immediate safety and the likelihood of harm occurring to the child in the future. Child Safety staff work diligently to ensure the timely commencement of investigations and assessments. I am pleased to tell the committee that we have increased the proportion of notifications commenced within the response time since 2008-09. For the year ending 31 March 2010, 82.5 per cent of notifications requiring a 24-hour response were commenced with 24 hours—up from 76.1 per cent in 2008-09.

There are a number of valid reasons contributing to delays in completing an investigation, including some that are out of the control of Child Safety Services. For example, not all siblings may be available for sighting and interviewing as one or more may be temporarily residing elsewhere, such as interstate. Child Safety Services are committed to continuing to improve its completion time of investigations and assessment and providing effective responses to the needs of vulnerable children and young people.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Again, I refer to SDS 3-16 and the percentage of children subject to protective orders who were Indigenous. Minister, with a record budget for 2010-11, will you explain why there has been a 59 per cent increase in the number of Indigenous children subjected to a further case of abuse within 12 months of a previous case of abuse between 2004 and 2008?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. We are committed to working closely with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to improve outcomes for children and young people. I am acutely aware of the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system, and I can assure the committee that I am working closely with our non-government partners to address this issue. Through strong partnership with the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak, we are working hard with other agencies and Indigenous communities to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families stay together where it is safe to do so.

I recognise that the most important place for a child to be is with their family, and that is why we are refocusing our efforts to address the family issues before they escalate. There are a number of initiatives being introduced, with a key focus on early intervention and prevention. We are committed to working closely with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to help reduce overrepresentation in the child protection system.

In October 2009 we established the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander task force, which is made up of key stakeholders from government and non-government sectors as well as members of the Indigenous community. It will advise the department on three major issues—firstly, the purpose of the recognised entity and how it continues its statutory role; secondly, the requirements of the strategy to address the delivery of culturally appropriate and responsive child protection services; and, finally, the required policy development planning program designed at child protection service delivery across the government and non-government sector aimed at addressing overrepresentation. There are also the changes which I announced in my opening statement regarding extra family support in Indigenous communities. Indigenous organisations and staff will work with Indigenous families to overcome the problems that they tackle on a day-to-day basis. We will continue to strive to get those targets down.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** I refer to page 3-15 of the SDS and the number of notifications requiring investigation. Minister, you keep stating a record budget for Child Safety each year yet, according to your own figures, as of 31 December 2009, 80 per cent of notifications requiring a response within 10 days were not met; 73 per cent of notifications requiring a response within five days were not met; and 18 per cent of crisis notifications requiring a response within 24 hours were not met. Are these the results that we can expect with a continued record budget?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. I refer him to my previous answer, but I also say that child safety officers have a tough job. From my visits to all the officers I can say that they are committed to the important role they play. I note the consistent criticism of the hard work that they do. Since 2004 we have tripled the budget and doubled the staff. That has enabled us to better deal with the increasing number of reports of child abuse and neglect.

Today in Queensland we have more staff and better coverage than ever before. Our hardworking staff are better able to access regional and remote communities to ensure our children and young people are safe and protected. However, in some circumstances, families will actively avoid Child Safety Services staff. They will actively avoid the police, whom we work closely with to ensure the safety of our children and young people. Sometimes reports of child abuse and neglect will not contain enough information about where a family is or even whom the report is about, though the concerns they have reported reach the threshold for investigation. Despite the efforts of our staff, it is sometimes not possible to commence an investigation within the time frame.

The committee can be assured that Child Safety Services is committed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of Queensland's vulnerable children and young people. I can give you an assurance that our staff work very hard to investigate all reports that reach this threshold. This data indicates that Child Safety Services is rightly focusing its efforts on those children and young people at the highest risk of abuse and neglect. I mentioned the big improvement in regard to the 24-hour notification compared to the last financial year.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** My next question relates to page 3-12 of the Service Delivery Statements and 'enhancing the wellbeing of children in its care'. How many of the 79 children who died who were known to the department were under care and protection orders at the time and did not have a current case plan, a health passport and their associated child safety officer had not completed induction training?

**Mr REEVES:** Sorry, which 79 are you talking about?

**Mr DEMPSEY:** From page 3-12 of the Service Delivery Statements.

**Mr REEVES:** Can you tell me where on page 3-12 it refers to 79 children? I would ask the chair to have a look at that as well.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** How many deaths were recorded in the care of the department last year, Minister?

**Mr REEVES:** That is a different question. You have referred to 79 and I have asked whereabouts on 3-12 that is referred to.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Of the 79 children within the care of the department, did they have a current case plan or a health passport or had the associated safety officers completed induction training?

**Mr REEVES:** I am asking for the committee's benefit as well as mine: are you talking about last year's question or are you talking about this year?

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Well, Minister, how many deaths were recorded in the care of the department in relation to the Service Delivery Statements?

**Mr REEVES:** I understand the intent of the question. I think we all understand the intent of the question. The death of any child is a tragedy. As I have told the House before and as I told the estimates committee last year, as a father of three young daughters I could not imagine anything worse than losing one of my children. Child Safety Services is working very hard with communities across Queensland to try to prevent this tragedy from happening.

The latest report for the financial year just ended illustrates that there has been a reduction in the number of children who have died, but that is not something to be proud of. Any child who passes away is an absolute tragedy. I think the number of children in total in Queensland who die through a range of circumstances is over 500. As I said, of those who are known by the department there has been a reduction this year as compared with last year. But, as I said, no-one can be proud that any child has passed away. Most of these children, unfortunately, have died due to illnesses which they were born with or which they contracted. Child Safety Services and the Coroner review all these deaths and take them very seriously to learn any findings that we may need to, from the perspective of the child and from a whole-of-government perspective. As I said, the death of any child is an absolute tragedy, and I think the whole community has a part to play in that regard.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** I was mainly referring to your department's responsibility in relation to that. I will reiterate my question. Page 3-12 refers to 'enhancing the wellbeing of children' in relation to the number of deaths. It is relevant to the monitoring of Child Safety meeting its goal of enhancing those issues. My original question is: how many of those children had a current case plan, a health passport or the child safety officer had completed induction training?

**Mr REEVES:** Every child death—

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Sorry, Minister—

**Mr REEVES:** I am answering the question.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Sorry, in addition to that, through you, Madam Chair, the majority of them would have also had a review completed, I surmise. How many would have had those three basic informations?

**Mr REEVES:** All child deaths are reviewed by the internal assessment committee and the commission for children's Child Death Case Review Committee. Any learnings that result from the child death review are enacted by the department. Whether they are learnings in regard to the subject matter that you are talking about or not, they are all acted upon by the department. If action needs to occur or policy needs to be changed, it is implemented.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Minister, maybe I am not explaining my question well. Of the children who have passed away, can you provide me with basic information such as how many had a current case plan or a health passport and had the child safety officer completed induction training?

**Mr REEVES:** I just mentioned to you that 79 is incorrect.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** How many?

**Mr REEVES:** In relation to your question, 44 children previously had no current involvement with the department and four children were subject to child protection orders and were in the care of the department. Of these four children, one death was accidental, two were caused by diseases or morbid condition, and for one child the cause of death is currently unknown. Sixteen children were subject to departmental involvement such as ongoing intervention and assessment. Of these 16 children, 10 children passed away from disease or morbid condition. One death was allegedly the result of a fatal assault that occurred prior to departmental involvement, one was a result of an accident, and for four cases the cause of death is unknown and they will be reviewed by the Coroner.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Minister, I really did not want to go into numbers, but how many does that add up to? In the Service Delivery Statements it says that the estimated actual for 2009-10 was 79. That is on page 5-57 of the Service Delivery Statements. Of those which you just mentioned, how many does that add up to? I know we can add up later, but my specific question is: of those who unfortunately passed away in the care of the department, how many had a case plan, a health passport and a child safety officer who had completed induction training? Surely that is basic information.

**Mr REEVES:** I think it is an absolute tragedy when a child dies, and for you to try to politicise it in such a way I think says more about yourself than the hardworking—

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Madam Chair, I ask the minister to review that cheap political statement for what it is.

**CHAIR:** I think the minister will move on and answer the question.

**Mr REEVES:** Of the 79 that you refer to, and I will get the exact figure, my understanding is that at this stage 64 children—and I say 'at this stage' because not all of the cases are finalised and I do not want to give incorrect figures. I just read out the number of children. I refer you to my answer to question 954 which I gave to you last year in that regard as well. All staff are required to be trained. Those children and young people who unfortunately passed away who were known to the department, whether it was as a result of the action that occurred to them, I have read out earlier. Those that were known would have had an ICMS record. The case is reviewed by the child death review and the practice review. I think that is the correct measure to be acted upon. Then the department follows the results of those reviews and implements those actions.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Minister, you just mentioned ICMS information and so forth. I am not wanting to go into numbers. The death of one child is a tragedy. I am a father of five children, and I understand the difficulties and the hardship that child safety officers go through, but surely you must have basic information in relation to those deaths. Can you give me a percentage of them that surely had a case plan or health passport and say that the workers had completed induction training—gathering information from all those resources that you have at hand?

**Mr REEVES:** As I said, all staff need to have training and have had training. In regard to the death of any child, each particular child's death is reviewed by the children's commission. If the children's commission finds that there are aspects that were not undertaken by Child Safety Services, they will alert the director-general and me, and action will be taken in that regard. I have not got with me each particular report on those children that have unfortunately passed away, and I would think it would be inappropriate for me to look at the cases of each particular child when the proper procedure is for the independent children's commissioner who chairs the child death review to look at these without adding any political colour to it.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Minister, do you not agree that it is your department's standards in relation to the current case plan and the health passport, not the commission's—not after a young person has passed away in great tragedy, which it is? It is the responsibility of your department. Surely you are able to tell

me about not just these children who have passed away but every child within the department. Of these particular cases that I am asking about, did they have a current case plan and a health passport, and had the child safety officer completed inductions? If you are unable to answer that now, I am happy to put it on notice, or perhaps someone from the department can answer.

**Mr REEVES:** The children who were on orders at the time of the death would have had case plans.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Would have or did?

**CHAIR:** The time has expired for this round. The next round of questions will be by government members. Minister, with reference to page 3-4 of the SDS, can the minister please outline how \$55 million over four years for the Helping Out Families initiative will help keep Queensland families together?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. The Bligh government is committed to protecting Queensland's most vulnerable children and young people. Early intervention and prevention is one of my main priorities as child safety minister. That is why I am very proud of the Bligh government's Helping Out Families initiative. This is an innovative \$55 million strategy aimed at helping families and preventing children and young people from having to go into care to keep them safe. It will ensure Queensland families receive the right services at the right time.

Helping Out Families is being piloted in Beenleigh, Eagleby, Nerang and Logan from October this year and the southern Gold Coast from early next year. We will establish family support alliance non-government organisations at three pilot sites to receive referrals and to identify the needs of families.

When a family is referred to them by child safety staff the non-government organisation will make contact with that family and engage with the family to identify their needs. They will then seek the family's consent to be referred to intensive family support services, domestic and family violence services or other services depending on their needs. In practical terms, it means that families whose situations do not require a tertiary child protection response but are in need of support will be able to access services from non-government organisations.

In 2010-11, the Helping Out Families initiative will provide: \$2.5 million for child health nurses to visit mums of newborns to three-year-olds in the pilot areas at their home or in community based facilities depending on the preference and assessment; \$4.8 million for non-government organisations to provide intensive family support services, in-home care and brokerage; \$1.6 million for more domestic and family violence services; and \$850,000 to set up family alliances to assess and refer families to family support and domestic and family violence services.

We will streamline the initial point of contact by establishing regional intake services dedicated to receiving all reports of suspected child abuse, with services to be established in South-East Queensland by August 2010 and state-wide by December. We have employed additional child safety officers in the South-East Queensland regional intake services to refer families who do not require a tertiary response to the Family Support Alliance. This initiative will also enhance health home visiting services to parents in the trial sites with children aged zero to three years. The Bligh government is committed to providing Queensland families with the support they need when they need it.

**Mrs SMITH:** Can the minister please advise how the Health Home Visiting Program will ensure families can access the right type of support to help their children reach their full potential?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. I know she is very passionate about this announcement because it will impact on people in her electorate. The Bligh government has invested \$10 million in 2010-11, increasing to \$15 million recurrently from 2011-12, to support families through our Helping Out Families initiative. A key plank of this initiative is funding of \$2.5 million in 2010-11 increasing to \$3.75 million in 2011-12 for enhanced home visiting services to all parents in the pilot sites with children aged zero to three years. This service is aimed at improving the confidence and capacity of parents in their parenting role.

The service delivery model will include a universal component comprising up to six health contacts with parent carers with children aged zero to three years living in the pilot site areas during the first three years of the child's life. The health contacts will begin from the first week following the birth of the child and may continue at key ages and stages of six to eight weeks, four months, six months, 12 months, 18 months and 2½ to 3½, as per Queensland Health's personal health record. This will enhance health outcomes for the child and family and reduce the risk of the family coming into contact with the statutory system.

For families where risk issues have been identified, the family will be eligible for up to 15 contacts in the first 12 months of the child's life. Health contacts will be delivered in a variety of settings, including clinics, groups in community based facilities or the client's home depending on their preference and consent. This initiative will increase the access of parents to a comprehensive assessment of risk and protective factors to assist with the early identification of health and risk issues.

The service will also focus on health promotion by providing information to assist parents with breastfeeding, immunisation and promoting positive parenting, including engaging fathers. Parents will also benefit from referrals to other appropriate services available through Queensland Health and the secondary service system as part of the Helping Out Families initiative.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** With reference to the recent question on notice and the reference on page 3-4 of the SDS around supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, can the minister please advise the committee how the Bligh government will ensure staff in the new Indigenous family support services receive appropriate training and support?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. Given the electorate she covers, I know she has a passion for ensuring that Indigenous families get the support they need. I have had much pleasure to go to many parts of her electorate.

I am pleased to advise that I have recently approved non-recurrent funding of up to \$110,000 to the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak to procure a training and development program for staff of the 11 new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family support services in the Triple P program. The funding will allow for the delivery of training in the Triple P program for 40 staff through two programs in October. The training will be made available to staff of all new family support services and any spaces not taken up will be offered to Indigenous staff in other programs funded by the department, such as family intervention services and referral for active intervention services.

The Triple P program, as we all know, is widely known and acknowledged as a world leader in parenting programs. Triple P International employs only highly and appropriately qualified Triple P accredited trainers with postgraduate qualifications in clinical or educational psychology at masters or doctorate level. The department has received a presentation on this program by its founder, Professor Matt Sanders. He has also confirmed that the program is culturally appropriate for Indigenous families. The Indigenous peak body has also attested to the suitability of the program.

The need for additional training in this program will be reviewed once the new Indigenous family support providers become established and indicate their interest in the program. It is estimated that once fully operational as many as 80 new family support staff may need the training. I would like to acknowledge the important role that the peak body will be playing in the process of providing ongoing coordination and support in the training and engagement of family support services and the ongoing support of the coordination of cultural supervision in the service delivery of Triple P.

The primary reason notifiers will refer families to Indigenous family support services is to prevent that family from further escalating in the statutory child protection system. For example, Child Safety Services may have child protection concerns about an Indigenous family; however, these concerns do not meet the threshold for placing the child in out-of-home care and the child remains at home on an intervention with parental agreement. Child Safety Services could refer the family to an Indigenous family support service that works intensively with the child to prevent the need for this child to be removed into out-of-home care.

It is expected that a targeted program of support delivered by Indigenous staff to vulnerable Indigenous families will make a significant impact on reducing the need for statutory child protection intervention. Early intervention and prevention is one of my main priorities as child safety minister. This is another example of the Bligh government working with our external partners to provide culturally appropriate child protection services.

**Mr WETTENHALL:** With reference to page 3-4 of the SDS and the recent question on notice, can the minister please advise further why the Bligh government is refocusing its investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child protection services?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for question. I know he also has a big focus on that given the electorate he covers. Since 2004, Indigenous recognised entities have been funded to actively participate in significant decisions made by the department regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. It was made clear that a new service type to deliver intensive family support and early intervention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families with children who come to the attention of the department could address risk factors prior to entry into the statutory system.

Last year a Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child safety task force was established to provide advice on ways to reduce the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and young people in the statutory child protection system. Many Indigenous organisations and the recognised peak body, the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak, have strongly advocated the importance of family support services in the context of prevention and early intervention.

The refocus of the current investment in Indigenous child protection services includes \$8.5 million for the new early intervention and Indigenous family support programs that will help address the risk and challenges they face early on. This will help to reduce the risk and number of children who need to be

removed from their homes and families. The new family support services program is a targeted program providing early support for vulnerable Indigenous families and will be delivered by Indigenous organisations.

These new services will also link with the family support alliance non-government organisations in the pilot sites, which I mentioned before, under the Helping Out Families initiative. A further \$8.5 million has been allocated for the recognised entity services. This will continue the valuable statutory role recognised entities play to ensure the department makes the best decisions possible for Indigenous children, including appropriate placement choices for those needing out-of-home care. I am confident that by redirecting funding to family support services this will significantly reduce the need for statutory child protection intervention for these families.

**CHAIR:** I note the reference on page 3-16 of the SDS to placement of children and young people. I also note your response to question on notice No. 7 about placement funding. Can you advise how many foster and kinship carer placements will be supported by the recent investment in our non-government service providers.

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. It is a sad fact that children in our community are abused and need the intervention of the department to find a safe and secure home in which they can live. I am pleased to advise the committee that the Bligh government is delivering over \$42.8 million per year in new and enhanced grant funding for non-government organisations to deliver a range of out-of-home care places for abused or neglected children and young people who cannot live safely at home.

This includes funding from the \$36.25 million that was advertised in a recent placement round and includes the reapproval of some existing services already provided by our valued non-government partners. This funding round enhances the stability and diversity of placements and the options available to Queensland's vulnerable children and young people. Funding will enable these organisations to deliver a range of out-of-home care places for abused or neglected children or young people who cannot live safely at home.

The sad reality is that some children cannot live at home due to the abuse and neglect of their parent or guardian. It is Child Safety Services' responsibility to place these children where their needs can be met. For some children this is a home based foster or kinship care. For other children who have more complex needs their needs may be best met in a residential facility or a small group home.

The best interests of the child or young person are of paramount importance to Child Safety Services when making any placement decision. This funding will deliver a total of 930 new places and renewed funding for a further three years for 1,293 existing places, including 716 new foster and kinship care places, 125 new specialist foster carers, 65 new residential care places and 24 new supported independent living places. The new grant funding will provide safe places to live for children and young people who are unable to live at home because of abuse or neglect. Funding will provide a wide range of placement options, including family based and non-family based care environments, to best meet the varying needs of children and young people.

Enhanced funding to some existing services will also improve the viability of services leading to better support for the clients and the increased stability of places. The Bligh government is also proud of its investment in safe houses—the member for Mount Isa visited them with me—in 11 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander remote communities. This additional \$45 million investment complements other placement options available across Queensland. This is another example of the Bligh government's commitment to supporting Queensland's most vulnerable children and young people.

**Mrs SMITH:** In earlier answers you have passionately acknowledged the need to support families, particularly those with young children. With reference to the Helping Out Families initiative, can you provide further advice about how the significant funding boost for secondary services will enhance existing early intervention and prevention services?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. The Bligh government's 2010-11 budget includes a significant investment in child safety and protection. The Child Safety budget of \$695.9 million for child protection has more than tripled in six years, up from \$182.2 million in 2003-04. We know that the best place for a child is in the family home, but only as long as it is safe for them to be there. By providing support in a variety of ways, the Bligh government will be protecting children by keeping them safe at home. As well as support offered by our front-line staff, our capital program will support and create jobs in communities across Queensland.

The Bligh government has also invested \$55 million over four years for the development of those three pilot sites to boost the existing secondary support services through the Helping Out Families initiative. The initiative will ensure that readily accessible and appropriate prevention and early intervention services are available to vulnerable families facing multiple and complex needs. In 2010 the budget builds on existing family support services. Some \$4.8 million for additional intensive family support will be available which will include practical in-home management and budgeting skills and

maternal and postnatal home visits. To boost the secondary support services, domestic and family violence services will receive \$1.6 million in 2010 for additional funding to boost their existing responses.

This is an excellent example of a prevention and early intervention approach taken by the Bligh government to provide increased practical support to Queensland families. Intervening early to help families as early as possible when difficulties arise ensures that they develop the skills to prevent those difficulties getting worse. It also helps keep children out of the statutory child protection system and with their own families and in their own homes. Other child protection initiatives in this state budget include an additional \$25.3 million for children in care and to support those transitioning from care. This includes specialist foster carers for children with high needs and disabilities; improved opportunities for front-line staff as part of the four-year \$15.1 million initiative to help keep child protection workers; and—I am sure this is something the member for Warrego will be interested in—\$2.02 million over 2½ years for Indigenous youth mentoring in south-west Queensland, which is doing a great job. This significant investment in child protection services demonstrates the Bligh government's strong commitment to keeping children and young people safe in Queensland.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** Minister, you just mentioned the safe houses which are referenced on page 3-4 of the SDS. As you and I both know from that recent visit, this is one of the most positive and embraced initiatives within the communities themselves. I ask the minister to provide the committee with the progress of the first round of safe houses.

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. Like her, I have a passion for this. As has been said, these safe houses are being embraced by the communities probably more than we could have imagined they would have been. Keeping children and young people safe and connected to their culture and kin is a priority of the Bligh government. That is why the Bligh government is investing more than \$45 million over four years to establish safe house services in 11 Indigenous communities. The Queensland government is well advanced in establishing these safe house services to ensure that children can stay safe in the communities if it is not safe to stay at home. For the seven first-round communities I am pleased to inform the committee that the safe house facilities are complete in six of these seven communities—Aurukun, Pormpuraaw, Kowanyama, Doomadgee, Yarrabah and Palm Island. The Napranum service is operating from an interim facility. However, a tender for the construction of the permanent facility has been awarded and construction is expected to commence towards the end of the year.

It gave me great pleasure last month to join with community and council members to officially open the Pormpuraaw and Doomadgee safe houses and to inspect the completed safe houses in Aurukun and Kowanyama with both the member for Cook and the member for Mount Isa. I also opened the Napranum service earlier this year, and I think the member for Mount Isa was with me for that one as well, as was the member for Cook. Safe houses in Napranum and Doomadgee have opened for referrals since Christmas 2009. I am pleased to report that the Pormpuraaw safe house has been opened for referrals since June 2010 and family intervention services are operating in Kowanyama and Aurukun while residential services are being established.

In Yarrabah the house is completed and ready for occupation. Regional service providers are working together to recruit the staff to establish the service. Ahead of schedule and most recently, the construction of Palm Island was completed and the service provider recently accepted the first set of referrals and is currently providing services to the community of Palm Island. I look forward to the full establishment of this service in due course. When fully operational, these facilities in 11 communities will provide up to 66 additional placements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and provide family support services in Indigenous communities. This is just another example of the Bligh government delivering on front-line child protection services that communities need.

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

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Minister, as the chief executive officer, going back to the SDS at page 3-12 in relation to young children who have passed away, it says that the chief executive is required to review the department's involvement in relation to section 246A of the Child Protection Act. Minister, are you saying that the chief executive would not know the basic requirements in relation to a case plan or a health passport or the child safety officer having completed an induction program?

**Mr REEVES:** I am trying to work out where that is on page 3-12, but can I make it quite clear that I have full faith in child safety staff and departmental staff, including the chief executive officer, to ensure that the act is followed and in fact policies and procedures are updated. We make the information that we have available to the Children's Commission. It releases an annual report on child safety matters, including the child death review. I am extremely confident that we have an open and transparent system in place to review any matters, including a child death review, and appropriately qualified and independent people like those in the Children's Commission leave no stone unturned to thoroughly review these cases. If any learnings or action need to come as a result of the review, they are implemented by the department.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Minister, these are basic requirements that come under section 246A of the Child Protection Act. These young children have already been reviewed and now you are expecting this committee to approve a budget when you are able to provide nothing about a very serious issue in relation to the basic requirements with regard to these children.

**Mr REEVES:** With due respect, I do not believe that this committee system is about talking about individual cases. I do not get involved in the individual operation of cases.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** I am not asking that, Minister.

**Mr REEVES:** The proper processes in place is that when a child is known by the department in the three years prior to their death—in some cases, as I have said before, the department only becomes aware of that child as a result of the action that caused the death—that child's case is still reviewed comprehensively, both internally and externally, with a child death review. On top of that, you have the Coroner to review the action. If anything is brought forward that needs action or needs a policy change or in fact a legislative change but in particular with regard to work practices or the staff itself, then that is acted upon by the department. As I said, when talking about individual cases, the parliamentary estimates process is not the proper place to discuss this issue. It is by the independent Children's Commission, and that is what I stand by.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** So, Minister, have you learnt from any of those reviews—I am not just referring to those that occurred last year but the year before and the year previous to that—in terms of the basic requirements of a case plan and a health passport?

**Mr REEVES:** I have—and I will not call it a pleasure because it was far from being a pleasure—read the last financial year's child death reviews and I know that the department has implemented changes and processes as a result. The Children's Commission made recommendations and it then checks that those recommendations are implemented, and we report to it in that regard. If you look at our record in Queensland in terms of reporting, for example, we report on a quarterly basis. Not even your LNP friends and colleagues in Western Australia do that. We are more open and accountable—

**Mr DEMPSEY:** We are not approving the budget for Western Australia; we are approving the budget here in Queensland.

**Mr REEVES:** We are more open and accountable than any other state when it comes to child safety and child protection matters. We report on 80 measures per quarter, and that increases depending on how it goes, and we report on over 150 annually to the Children's Commission and ROGS and a range of things. I stand by what we do. As I said, we will continue to follow the process, but I am not going to use the estimates committee to talk about individual cases when we are talking about—

**Mr DEMPSEY:** We are not asking you to, Minister. I refer to the SDS at page 3-15 relating to notifications requiring investigation. How many of those children who were not seen within the required time frames as at 31 December 2009 were subjected to a further notification in relation to meeting government standards?

**Mr REEVES:** Can you repeat the question please?

**Mr DEMPSEY:** How many of those children who were not seen within the required time frames—that is, 31 December 2009—were subjected to a further notification?

**Mr REEVES:** I will take that on notice to see whether we can get the information.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Thank you.

**Mr REEVES:** I refer to an earlier answer. Of the 64 children who have lost their lives who were known to the department, only four children were actually in care. So case plans are necessary before a custody order by the court. All staff, as I have said before, received the appropriate training.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Thank you, Minister. Minister, I refer to the SDS at page 3-15 relating to children on protection orders, and I ask: when the department does DNA testing of children on protection and care orders, what power does it rely on to require a parent or care giver to provide a DNA sample? Can the minister point to the law that requires a parent to give such a sample to prove paternity?

**Mr REEVES:** I will get it verified, but I am pretty sure that we do not do DNA testing of children when they come into care. I will get that verified for you. With regard to the last part of the question, it sounds like a police and family law matter, not a child protection matter. I think you should do yourself a favour and read the Child Protection Act.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** So are they doing DNA testing or not?

**Mr REEVES:** If you listened to my answer, I said I am sure that they are not but I will get it verified that DNA testing does not occur.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** So you are not sure?

**Mr REEVES:** I said that I will confirm that with you.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** So, Minister, if no power to compel adults to give a DNA test exists, if you come back with that reply, but it is happening that Child Safety officers are making people provide such samples to provide paternity—we are talking about paternity—does this not make the taking of such samples unlawful? How many samples have been forced on people? Is this not a form of unlawful detention in relation to the adult?

**Mr REEVES:** I am not aware—

**CHAIR:** Could the member just explain—

**Mr DEMPSEY:** This relates to the child, specifically child safety.

**CHAIR:** But can you refer it to the SDS?

**Mr DEMPSEY:** It is in the SDS at page 3-15 as originally stated.

**Mr REEVES:** Whereabouts?

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Protection orders.

**Mr REEVES:** I am not aware of any DNA testing of any child demanded by Child Safety Services. If you have evidence of that, please bring it forward and the department will investigate it.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Minister, is it not a fact that your department recognises that it is unlawful to take DNA samples?

**Mr REEVES:** As I said—and I will make it quite clear for you—I and the director-general are not aware of any DNA testing of children connected with Child Safety in out-of-home care, but if you have any evidence of that we are quite prepared to investigate that matter. But let me make it quite clear: we are not aware of what you are trying to say occurs.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** So are you then denying that any sort of—

**CHAIR:** Member for Bundaberg, I think the minister has answered that question. Could you move on to the next question.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Have you commissioned any university researchers to report on the issue in relation to DNA in 2008-09?

**Mr REEVES:** I would hardly recommend a researcher to report on DNA testing if I am saying to you that I am not aware of DNA testing occurring. It would hardly be logical that I would require it. We will get back to you but the director-general and I are unaware of it.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** I refer to page six of the Capital Statement, Child Safety Services. How can this government claim to be committed to closing the gap for Indigenous children in abusive situations when it underspent on services to Indigenous communities by \$2.766 million in 2009-10? How can these communities have any faith in the delivery of services when this gross underspend has become a regular feature of this government year in, year out, for the past four years? By way of example, \$9.856 million was budgeted in 2009-10 but \$7.9 million was spent. Notes for the previous years show there were underspends of \$2.8 million in 2009-10, \$5.2 million in 2008-09 and \$5.435 million in 2007-08. This is coupled with a cost blow-out on the delivery of key infrastructure of \$9 million.

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. Before answering that question, can I just make it perfectly clear from the advice that I have from the department—and I have no evidence of it occurring—we do not DNA test children. If there is a dispute about who the parent is, that is a matter for the Family Court, not a matter for child protection. So the member's line of questioning is wrong. The Child Protection Act does not provide a legislative basis to require DNA testing. On top of that Child Safety staff do not have the power to order a DNA test. I think the information he has has been made up by somebody.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Child Safety.

**Mr REEVES:** Let me make it quite clear: we do not DNA test children. If there is a dispute about who the parent is, that is a matter for the Family Court. The Child Protection Act does not provide a legislative basis to require DNA testing. Child Safety staff do not have the power to order DNA testing. If you have any evidence of that occurring, bring it forward so that it can be investigated. Do not just come in here and make wild speculation.

In regard to the capital projects, as you would appreciate the delivery of specialised infrastructure is complex, time consuming and requires detailed planning from the outset to ensure that the finished products meet our clients' and service delivery needs. In reality, the time frame for a project does not neatly align with the financial year. Larger capital projects, which commence in a particular financial year, inevitably complete in a later year. They are funded for the life of the project; however, not for a single financial year. In other words, the Capital Works Program is of a rolling nature and it could take two to three years to have complex infrastructure plans established and operational. When capital programs are announced, that is the beginning of the rollout.

There are many steps involved. They include finding a suitable site, community consultation, investigating issues, actual design works documentation, tenders and construction. Because you used Indigenous housing as the basis of your question when talking about safe houses before, we ensured that the safe houses were in the right spot and that the community supported the spots. That takes time.

The other part of the time involved is if you think about the wet season up there. There is the least amount of time to do the construction. If you talk to the mayors, it is not about rushing in. An example is Napranum, where we have opened a temporary house. It is because we can get that up and running. There was a house that we could use temporarily. That is not the case in all communities and the construction will take some time.

**CHAIR:** Minister, your time has expired.

**Mr REEVES:** Unless I can get an extension?

**Mr DEMPSEY:** No. Just in relation to that, though, there has been a consistent underspend since 2007. I know about weather permitting and so forth, but for this committee to approve budgets that continue to underspend, surely we would learn from those mistakes or we are able to plan in relation to the weather for these areas. We are not just talking about North Queensland; this is for the whole of the state—an underspend since 2007. Why would we as a committee continue to approve an underspend in a budget considering the amount of resources that the department has to be able to facilitate the completion of a budget in the first place? Or is it like a dividend at the end of a budget that we expect things not to be completed when we take year in, year out weather conditions?

**Mr REEVES:** Weather conditions was one example that I gave. It is not just weather conditions. The deferral of funds does not mean that the department's capital works are not being delivered, nor that the funds are being underexpended; it simply means that the project time lines are not consistent with the financial year time lines.

We have a set time. You know that because of this government's record construction program there are issues of getting enough staff to build constructions, getting enough designers and the like. That puts pressure on them but without this Bligh government's construction program there would be many hundreds of thousands of people out of work. I use the safe house as an example. You talk about employing Indigenous young people in these communities to help build those houses so that they have training and apprenticeships. As I said, the weather is one part but it is the design work, it is the documentation, it is the tendering, it is native title if that has an impact—it is a range of issues. It is not about the money not being there, because the money is there. We want it built. All capital budgets are scheduled according to the stage in the development. We are continuing.

If you were listening, one of the government questions before was about how the Palm Island one is ahead of schedule. So some go slightly behind, some go ahead of schedule. It really depends on a range of factors, including finding a suitable site, the community consultation, investigating the site for issues to do with design and construction, the actual design work, documentation, tenders and the construction phase. You know that even in your own life when you are trying to get construction done at your own house that different issues come up, different applications take a bit longer than what was first thought, the tradesmen do not turn up when you want them—there is a range of issues. But the big issue here is that the money is there to be spent and we are spending it. Most importantly, we are going to have 66 young people to be able to be safe in their own community and stay in the community in regard to safe houses.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Minister, in relation to guardianship decisions, why does your *Child Safety Practice Manual* in chapter 5 clearly state that DNA should only occur in exceptional circumstances and should be done in consultation with the court support unit. Why would the *Child Safety Practice Manual* say this if it has not happened? Or are you saying that, despite the direction in the departmental own's manual, it is not happening?

**CHAIR:** Could you relate that to the budget?

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Yes, that goes back to the original question relating to the Service Delivery Statements page 3-12.

**CHAIR:** It is my opinion that you have exhausted the opportunity to ask that question. The minister may have a different view. Minister, do you wish to comment?

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Just in addition to that—

**Mr REEVES:** I am happy to—

**Mr DEMPSEY:** We ask the questions, Minister. It is actually from the Child Protection Act 1999, section 13, applying to Child Safety.

**Mr REEVES:** I was going to answer it.

**CHAIR:** I have no doubt, but where in the budget? We need to refer to it.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** It is all to do with enhancing wellbeing. If we cannot provide simple facts in relation to a budget how can we approve a substantial record budget?

**CHAIR:** Minister, we have a very short time. Do you want to make a comment?

**Mr REEVES:** Our court support workers work with the police and in family law matters in that regard. That is the process that we use.

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

**Mr WETTENHALL:** Thank you. Minister, with reference to page 3-4 of the SDS, can the minister outline how the Bligh government will continue to invest in safe houses in our communities? In that regard I refer you to the previous question from the member for Mount Isa and your answer, which was in relation to the first round of safe houses.

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. I am glad that safe houses has such an emphasis, because I think they are fundamentally going to make a great difference in communities. I might elaborate on that further later. Keeping children and young people safe and connected to their culture and kin is a priority of the Bligh government. That is why the Bligh government is investing more than \$45 million over four years to establish safe houses in 11 Indigenous communities.

In the four second-round communities of Mornington Island, the eastern Cape York area, the northern peninsula area and the Torres Strait Islands we are doing extensive work to plan and establish safe houses. While we have been busy constructing facilities and establishing services in the seven first-round communities, we have not taken our eye off the ball in relation to the second-round communities. We have been getting on with the job and laying the groundwork that is critical for the establishment of services in these communities.

A great deal of progress has been made in establishing these services. Extensive community consultation has occurred with the purpose of ensuring that the services are successful when established and that the community understands the models and supports the service. Progress has been made towards identifying sites in discussing with communities the nature of the safe house that is required for each community. In Mornington Island, the council has nominated a site for a safe house and site surveys and feasibility activities are underway. In Lockhart River, east Cape York, two sites have been identified and are being investigated. The department is working with the communities of Mornington Island and Lockhart River to establish interim family support services so that services can be provided to communities before the safe houses themselves have been constructed.

In the northern peninsula area, I recently approved the Northern Peninsula Area Family and Community Services Corporation as the service provider. This will allow the service provider to plan for and work towards the establishment of the service. I know that the member for Cook is excited about this, because he knows the benefit of it. In the Torres Strait, a great deal of community consultation has occurred, both with the centre and the outlying islands and we are working on the development of a model that will take into account the needs of the 17 diverse island communities that make up the Torres Strait communities.

While it takes time to establish new services in remote locations, it is important to comply with native title and cultural heritage legislative requirements and, just as importantly, to engage the community appropriately in respect of the consultative process right through to the delivery of a safe house service. These safe house services will be operated by non-government organisations and staffed by community workers who will receive training development and support so that they are skilled and ready to provide child protection services within remote communities. Each safe house will also have an associated family support service to provide practical assistance for parents so that children can return home.

When fully operational, these facilities in 11 communities will provide up to 66 additional places for children and will provide family support services in Indigenous communities. This is another example of the Bligh government delivering front-line child protection services that communities need.

**CHAIR:** Minister, I note your response to question on notice No. 3 with regard to the implementation of the adoption legislation. This is also referred to this on page 3-8 of the SDS. Can you provide any further advice about how this has helped Queensland families?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. I must say February this year was a momentous day for many people who have been impacted by adoption. The Adoption Act 2009 has provided enhanced opportunities for access to information for persons affected by adoptions regardless of when the adoption took place. The new laws balance people's right to information and the rights of others to maintain their privacy. Queensland's new adoption laws have also provided for more openness between the child's birth family and the adoptive family after the child is adopted.

If all parties agree, open arrangements can empower families to think positively and openly about their child's adoption. We know from research and experience that positive adoption outcomes are most likely when adopted children are able to incorporate knowledge of their birth and their adoption into a

positive self-image. As I indicated in response to a question on notice about the implementation of adoption laws, the majority of Queensland's birth parents and prospective adoptive parents have embraced the reforms and have been willing to explore the more open adoption processes.

With the support of the new legislation, Adoption Services Queensland is also now in a position to support mutually agreed contact through the development of adoption plans and enhanced mailbox services. This is assisting Queensland families to approach adoption in a way and manner that is best for them. As an example, the department is currently working with a teenager who has been exchanging very positive non-identifying correspondence with her birth family through the mailbox service for several years. The young person has wanted to share their adoption information with their birth family but prior to the legislative reform was unable to do so before turning 18. Under the new act and with the continuing support of her adoptive family the young person can participate in the development of an adoption plan that will allow for the sharing of more open information including photographs and information about extended family.

Another benefit for Queensland families has been the establishment of the new Post Adoption Support Queensland. I had the pleasure of opening their office yesterday in West End. The Benevolent Society which provide the service in Queensland bring a wealth of expertise and experience from their delivery of similar adoption services operating in other states. The service is not only providing dedicated support services for people affected by adoption but also ensuring other professional support bodies are aware of the unique and personal issues that can arise when people are involved in adoption.

The service is planning to develop a resource to distribute to professionals to help them understand adoption issues and better provide services to people seeking help. The resources will provide information about the impact an adoption experience may have on a range of people's perspectives. These changes are ensuring a positive future for adoption in Queensland.

**Mrs SMITH:** I again refer to the Helping Out Families initiative. Can you outline why the non-government sector plays such an important role in Queensland?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for Burleigh. She is obviously asking a lot of questions about this because she has a real passion for it. She knows that the members of the community in her electorate who need assistance will benefit from it. Child protection is everyone's business. I want to acknowledge the valuable work done by our non-government sectors in caring for Queensland's vulnerable children and young people. Without them we could not continue to provide the high levels of care and support to vulnerable children and their families. The amount of \$374 million, more than half of the Child Safety Services budget, is spent through our external partners. This includes grants to non-government organisations, allowance and expense reimbursement to our foster and kinship carers and fee-for-service payments for transitional out-of-home care placements.

Investments in our external partners constitutes about 53 per cent of our annual budget. In 2010-11 the non-government organisation grant expenditure will increase to \$258.3 million and will fund a range of services, including foster and kinship care and specialist foster care with carers recruited, trained and assessed, monitored and supported to provide safe and nurturing homes for children in care; residential care, where young people with more complex needs receive 24-hour supervised care seven days a week; supported independent living, where young people who are more independent learn life skills with external supervision; other specialist placements such as therapeutic residential care or Indigenous safe houses in remote communities; family intervention services which support families with children in the statutory system; counselling and intervention services and sexual abuse counselling services for children and young people who have experienced trauma; and recognised entity services provided by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations who actively participate through the provision of cultural advice and information when Indigenous children and young people come to the attention of Child Safety Services.

The Bligh government maintains a very robust relationship with our valued child protection stakeholders because child protection is everyone's business. That is why, as child safety minister, I regularly meet with peak bodies and key stakeholders at child protection partnership forums. This government is proud to fund our peak bodies including Foster Care Queensland, CREATE Foundation, PeakCare and Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak. These forums enable these organisations and many others to engage directly with government. The department also works collaboratively with external partners through the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child safety task force. The task force is made up of key stakeholders from both government and non-government sectors as well as members of the Indigenous community and was established to advise the department of the role and purpose of recognised entities and required policy development, planning, program design and child protection service delivery across both the government and non-government sector. The Bligh government is proud to work hand in hand with the non-government sector to provide services to vulnerable children and young people.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** With reference to the minister's portfolio responsibilities as outlined in SDS Book 3, can the minister please advise the committee how he is encouraging linkages between Child Safety and Sport?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. She knows, and she has a passion for, the benefits that sport can have for children who are connected with the child protection system. As minister I have been very keen to pursue the links between my two portfolios because I recognise the ways in which children and their carers can benefit from this partnership.

I am often asked why I have the portfolios of Child Safety and Sport. I believe the answer is simple. As minister for sport I am determined that everyone in Queensland has the same opportunities to participate in sport and recreation because I know that that will help them reach their full potential. As minister for child safety I am also determined to help our children and young people reach their full potential. The sad reality is that sometimes we need to remove them from their homes for this to be able to be achieved. Participation in sport and recreation teaches our children important values and life skills, including self-confidence, teamwork, communication, inclusion, discipline, respect and fair play. Sport and active recreation activities can also be positive diversions from antisocial behaviours.

One way we are doing this is through the new Children in Care funding program opened in February 2010. This program will provide \$1 million to improve access to sport and recreation for children and young people in out-of-home care. Under the program carers can be reimbursed for up to \$300 for each child to cover sport and recreation registration and participation fees. The initiative helps to ensure that children in care have opportunities to participate in sport and recreation. As of 30 June almost 1,100 children and young people have accessed this funding source to support their participation in a range of sport and recreational activity such as swimming, gymnastics, rugby league, soccer, hockey, dance and scouts.

The program is a positive example of how working together can achieve better outcomes for all concerned. In June this year the member for Mount Isa joined myself and the member for Cook on a visit to Cape York and the gulf to inspect and open the safe houses. These are genuine community facilities and the department is committed to working in partnership with local elders, councils and key community people to ensure that they are successful and responsive to the needs of children and families. The member will be pleased to know that I have announced, following my recent visit to the community, that I have approved a one-off boost for our safe houses to purchase additional sporting equipment. Each of the seven safe houses will receive a \$1,000 sports kit. I can also advise that 80 of our residential facilities will also receive a \$500 sports kit. These kits will ensure our vulnerable children and young people who cannot live at home have access to a range of equipment that meets their physical and recreational needs. I am pleased that a strong partnership between Child Safety and Sport and Recreation Services is delivering positive outcomes across Queensland.

**Mr WETTENHALL:** With reference to page 3-3 of the SDS, can the minister advise further on work to support young people transitioning from care?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. The Bligh government is committed to improving outcomes for young people transitioning from care to adulthood and independence. The department has approximately 1,100 young people in the 15- to 17-year age group who face unique challenges. They have experienced harm and trauma and often the safety net of a secure and supportive family is not available to them. Because of this, young people living in out-of-home care are at significantly greater risk of experiencing a range of issues. Their transition into adulthood is therefore a critical development event and they need support and services to guide them through this phase of their life. I have been heartened by the consistent improvements in this area in the last year. The improvements have occurred with the assistance of the CREATE Foundation, the peak body for children and young people in out-of-home care. CREATE receives annual funding of approximately \$548,000 from the Queensland government. The Bligh government has funded a pilot program for transition from care services for 90 young people in the Beenleigh, Logan and Goodna areas. This has been implemented in 2009-10 with joint funding from the Department of Employment and Economic Development and the Department of Communities totalling \$500,000 per year over three years. Life Without Barriers operates this program to assist young people leaving care to overcome barriers in accessing suitable education, training, employment, housing and health services.

In July last year the department launched a range of practical resources for young people to give them support and information on their journey to independence. These included a resource to support their access to education, employment and training opportunities. Feedback from our key partners in child protection has informed the department's recent review of existing policy procedures for their staff. The consistent message was that young people need to participate in their planning for transition from care and this has been strengthened through the revised policy and procedures.

In conjunction with the workshops, transition from care was promoted through the Department of Communities during November as Transition from Care Month. All young people who are in the transition from care age group are able to access financial support to assist them plan for the future. This funding can cover the cost of things such as setting up independent living, driving lessons, cooking

classes or training or employment related activities and a working group exploring a range of options to further enhance access to driving lessons for young people. A number of Child Safety Services centres have organised transition from care camps for young people with similar life experiences. This gives young people the opportunity to learn new skills and enjoy activities together.

Cultural support plans are particularly helpful in identifying critical areas of support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people as they face transition into adulthood. The staff of the Department of Communities have worked hard to access federal funding to develop programs to address the reasons for homelessness of young people leaving state care. The Youth Housing and Reintegration Service and After Care Service will have a strong focus on engaging young people in education, training and employment to ensure that they transition to greater independence and stability. Our primary focus is continuing the wellbeing of these vulnerable young people as they try to make their way in an increasingly complex society.

**CHAIR:** With reference to page 3-13 of the SDS, can you outline how child safety funding has improved in recent years?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. The Bligh government is committed to the provision of child safety services throughout Queensland. We are also strongly committed to supporting the staff who support our communities to deliver these vital services. I have now personally visited all 50 child safety service centres, seven regional offices and all hub officers in Queensland to personally meet the staff and discuss their role on the front line. I thank them for allowing me to visit and listen to them and seeing firsthand the great work that they do day in, day out.

The Bligh government is committed to supporting our staff so that they can get on with the job of ensuring Queensland's children and young people are safe and protected from risk of harm. That is why in this year's Child Safety Services budget of more than \$695 million we are investing increased recurrent funding of \$3 million to recruit additional front-line staff in high-demand areas. This is additional to the 10 front-line Child Safety Services staff who were employed as a result of the voluntary early retirement scheme undertaken in the Department of Communities in late 2009.

I note that the LNP's commitment to Child Safety Services in March 2009 was to cut the budget by three per cent. At the time this would have meant 170 officers out of a job and an almost \$20 million budget cut. In contrast, the Bligh government has more than tripled the budget and doubled the workforce for Child Safety Services in the last three years. We now have better coverage of Queensland than ever before. The Bligh government, through the Department of Communities, has implemented a number of key initiatives to ensure its attraction and retention program provides the staff we need now and in the future.

In Queensland, Child Safety Services has put in several initiatives to increase the retention of experienced staff, including accelerated career progression which has seen 383 child safety officers progress to the PO3 level between October 2008 and April 2010; a pilot program for a principal child safety officer position to provide support and mentoring to new staff; and an incentive scheme to enhance rural and remote retention. The Bligh government has achieved significant success in raising the permanent ratio since January 2008 with 646 front-line service delivery staff converted to permanent status. A professional and resilient workforce with high-level skills and a passion for helping people is the key to delivering the best services possible to the communities of Queensland.

**CHAIR:** The committee will adjourn for lunch. At 2 pm we will resume our examination of the proposed expenditure of the portfolio of the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport.

**Proceedings suspended from 1.00 pm to 2.00 pm**

**CHAIR:** Welcome back. The hearing of Estimates Committee F is resumed. We will resume our examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport. We will continue with the estimates for Child Safety. The first period of questioning is allocated to non-government members. I call the member for Bundaberg

**Mr DEMPSEY:** I refer to SDS 3-18 and the output summary for Child Safety Services, and in particular how much funding from the department goes to research. Minister, before the break you vehemently denied any involvement with any DNA testing or research for DNA of adults who have children in the care of the department. You also stated if there was any evidence, you would present it to the committee or at another time. Minister, obviously this is similar to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* because, during the break, simple research of your department's website indicated that your department is currently funding research conducted by a university graduate. I will now table a copy of your research register, which includes research titled *Genetic testing and child protection: An exploration of the use of DNA paternity testing in the context of child protection practice*.

**CHAIR:** The time has expired for the question.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** I table that for the information of the minister.

**CHAIR:** And your question is?

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Exactly that. He vehemently denied that there was any testing.

**CHAIR:** But you have made a statement.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Do you agree that there is testing?

**Mr REEVES:** I take the question, but did you say 3-18?

**Mr DEMPSEY:** It is in relation to research.

**Mr REEVES:** 3-18 does not refer to Child Safety. It has Community Services, Disability and Community Care Services, Accommodation Support Services—

**Mr DEMPSEY:** It is the overall Child Safety.

**Mr REEVES:** But you said 3-18, didn't you? I will let the chair have a look.

**CHAIR:** Can you ask another question while we are researching this?

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Minister, it is the overall research. Do you agree that research comes within the budget estimates? Do you agree with that, Minister?

**Mr REEVES:** My understanding is that the practice is that he has to refer to it. I will let the chair make a ruling.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** It is 3-18, the Output Summary for Child Safety Services and, in particular, how much funding for the department goes to research?

**CHAIR:** That is your question? Thank you, Minister—

**Mr DEMPSEY:** No. It is also covered in the summary of 3-13, if the minister would like to look there also.

**Mr REEVES:** In regard to research, research expenditure for Child Safety, youth and families last financial year was \$90,712. The department received a research application to undertake research as part of a PhD at the University of Queensland entitled *Genetic testing and child protection: An exploration of the use of DNA paternity testing in the context of child protection practice*. This research proposal was received on 26 July 2006. I am not too sure what it has to do with this budget committee. On 13 November 2006 the former director-general of the department of child safety gave approval to conduct the research. The research was not commissioned by the department and it occurred at no direct financial cost to the department. Approval was provided for the researcher to interview a sample of eight to 10 child protection practitioners who had experience in DNA testing with adult clients—I repeat, with adult clients.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** That is right.

**Mr REEVES:** Ethical approval was provided by the School of Social Work and Human Services Committee on 24 July 2006. The interviews did not commence until 2007. The research was listed on the former department of child safety's website, on the research register.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** If that is unlawful under your department, why is it in your funding register in relation to research?

**Mr REEVES:** Sorry—

**CHAIR:** I believe that the minister has answered the question. Member, could you move on to another question, please?

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Through you, Madam Chair, this goes directly to the minister's previous vehement denial. Does the minister agree that he was misleading in his previous comments in relation to DNA and the department?

**CHAIR:** I would like you to refer to the SDS.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** It is still 3-13.

**Mr REEVES:** I thought it was 3-18.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** We have moved on, Minister. We are moving forward.

**CHAIR:** You are referring to 'Staffing' and the 'Service Summary'?

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Research.

**Mr HOBBS:** It does not matter where it is.

**CHAIR:** It does matter where it is because it is supposed to refer to the SDS.

**Mr REEVES:** Just to clarify, seeing we are supposedly talking about research, the total funding for research in 2009-10 was \$268,036 for Child Safety, youth, families and community participation. Community services would come under that budget item. From what I have just read, this research was about talking to practitioners. Bear in mind, this is in 2006-07, so I have had no influence or understanding of this because it was done well prior to my time. The research involved child protection practitioners who had experience in DNA testing; it was not about DNA testing.

I would like to provide further clarification in relation to the earlier question about DNA testing. In the past the department has only arranged DNA testing on rare occasions, and that would be as the result of court orders. The department has no power to compel parents to undertake DNA tests. However, as I said previously, DNA testing is ordered by the courts and is not unlawful. In relation to the question about the research, as I have clarified that was in 2006-07. I really question what it has to do with the budget for 2010-11 and the record expenditure of \$695 million in child protection matters. If the member for Bundaberg wants to pursue that line of questioning, please go ahead.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Minister, you have said it is from previous years, but why is it still listed on the current register as of 21 July 2010? It is still on your current research register?

**Mr REEVES:** Obviously because research occurred. It is not as if you do the research one year and then, all of a sudden, the next year it disappears.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** So were samples taken from that research?

**Mr REEVES:** I will read again what I just said. The research involved interviews of a sample of eight to 10 child protection practitioners who had experience in DNA testing with adult clients. It was about talking to child protection practitioners involved with adult clients; it was not about doing DNA testing. It was about talking to the child protection practitioners who had experience in DNA testing with adults clients. Eight to 10 child protection practitioners were interviewed. I am really—

**Mr DEMPSEY:** How do you interview a DNA?

**Mr REEVES:** They interviewed eight to 10 child protection practitioners who had experience in DNA testing with adult clients. That is who was interviewed. If you have any evidence of wrongdoing, please bring it forward and it can be investigated. I cannot guess what happened in 2006-07—

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Which is in your register now.

**Mr REEVES:** The research is there because, obviously, the research was conducted in 2006-07. I imagine there is probably other research that might have been conducted at—

**Mr DEMPSEY:** So you are not responsible for your research register?

**Mr REEVES:** I will just read: the research register lists the active research projects. It is available to child protection workers, researchers, academics and members of the public. The research register is an avenue for those interested in research on child protection issues to liaise directly with researchers, to seek information and exchange ideas. Obviously, it is there so that people can make contact with the researchers if their bent in life is wanting to talk about different research. Research projects include: *Building knowledge for policy and practice in out-of-home-care; Behaviour management training for foster carers dealing with challenging behaviour; Footprints in time: A longitudinal study of Indigenous children; Establishing and sustaining a novice graduates professional practice in the field of child protection.* There is a range of other research there that people can access and make comment on. As you know, academics love commenting on research. If it is all right with the member for Bundaberg, I will reply to a couple of other questions put on notice.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Through you, Madam Chair, we can do that at another time.

**CHAIR:** Minister, he has not given you permission.

**Mr REEVES:** You do not want it? You put a question on notice, but you do not want the reply?

**CHAIR:** Not at this stage.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Not at the present time. I thank you for that, Minister. In relation to the continuation of that research, it clearly states—

To examine the application of DNA paternity testing in the context of child protection practice and the implications that this genetic information has for child protection practice in working with children and their families.

Minister, you paid so much for this research; where is this research being used?

**Mr REEVES:** Member for Bundaberg, you ask the questions and we answer them, and usually you listen to the answers and then respond. I made it quite clear that the department had no direct cost from this research. This was research conducted by a University of Queensland student, Ms Jo Yellowlees. Once again, the research proposal was received on 26 July 2006. The former director-general of the department of child safety approved the conduct of the research on 13 November. The research was not commissioned—not commissioned—by the department and occurred at no direct financial cost to the department. Approval was provided for the researcher to interview a sample of eight to 10 child protection practitioners who had experience in DNA testing with adult clients. Ethical approval was provided by the School of Social Work and Human Services Committee on 24 July 2006. The interviews did not commence until 2007. The research was listed on the former department of child safety website and the research register, and obviously came across when the whole-of-government change occurred. Research publications should remain on the website, as they add to the body of knowledge for the Department of Communities, which is sound practice.

In regard to another question that I took on notice just before the break, information requested by the member will take valuable Child Safety staff away from what they are employed to do, which is keeping our children safe. I take the work of child safety officers very seriously, yet the member thinks the Child Safety staff are here to flip one way or another depending on his whim. This snapshot of life under the LNP is one where they have all our dedicated Child Safety staff compile report after report, rather than doing the job they are employed to do, which is to keep our children safe. I am sure the people of Queensland want their Child Safety staff doing what they are employed to do, which is protecting our children rather than spending their time running errands for the opposition spokesperson. I note the member's comments during his budget reply speech about bean counters—

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Madam Chair, it is a direct reflection on this committee if you are not allowed to ask questions.

**Mr REEVES:** The member must have forgotten his many questions asking for complex—

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Madam Chair, I ask you for a direction to the minister. It is a direct reflection on the committee.

**CHAIR:** Minister, could you just wait a moment please. What is your question?

**Mr DEMPSEY:** The comments by the minister are a direct reflection on this committee. He has stated that any questioning of him by the opposition is flippant. That contrasts with what this committee is about, which is to ask questions in relation to the budget.

**CHAIR:** Minister, refer your answer to the question.

**Mr REEVES:** I was replying to the question on notice. I said that the information requested by the member will take valuable child safety staff away from—

**Mr DEMPSEY:** What is this about here today? That is a flippant comment if I have ever heard one.

**CHAIR:** Minister, just get to the answer.

**Mr REEVES:** What I am saying is that I am not prepared to take child safety staff offline, when they are looking after the most vulnerable people, to get the numerous reports that the member for Bundaberg asks for—

**Mr DEMPSEY:** What are we here for today?

**Mr REEVES:**—when this state, compared to any other state, and particularly Western Australia, produces quarterly reports on 80 different measures.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Madam Chair, why is the minister refusing to answer the question?

**CHAIR:** Is the minister refusing to answer the question?

**Mr REEVES:** No. As per the question on notice he asked me, he wanted data that would have meant a very complex, very long and time-consuming report, and I am not prepared to tell child safety staff to go offline when they have a valuable job of protecting our children and young people.

**CHAIR:** The minister can choose to answer the question however he deems proper. Minister, do you have anything else to say on that question?

**Mr REEVES:** No. I am sure I will get another question.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Minister, how many other studies from university students in relation to child safety are not on this research register? What benefit would the research that has been completed be to your department?

**Mr REEVES:** As I said before, research publications should remain on the website as they add to the body of knowledge for the Department of Communities and it is sound practice to do so. It is not up to me as a minister to judge academic research. I let the professionals do that, not me as the Minister for Child Safety. It would be improper for a minister to say, 'We're going to have that one, but we're not going to have that one or that one.' You might agree with that, but I disagree. I do not have a problem with Child Safety Services reporting on 80 different measures—data, tables and the like—on a quarterly basis and over 150 on an annual basis, unlike those opposite.

I point out that when the LNP was last in government its annual report contained only one measure for five regions, and that measure was the number of children under protective orders. I table that for the committee. There were five regions and one report on the number of children under protective orders. That is all the LNP did the last time it was in government. Now, on a quarterly basis we update 80 performance measures and on an annual basis 150—reporting to national frameworks, the children's commission. The proof is in the pudding there, member for Bundaberg. I am not prepared to take our child safety staff offline to report on another measure when we are well and truly proud of the fact that we are the only state that produces quarterly up-to-date figures. I am not prepared as a minister to judge whether research should be on the website or not.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** No accountability, no openness, no transparency.

**Mr REEVES:** I leave that for the professionals. If the member has a problem with that research, he should talk to the person who conducted the research or the University of Queensland.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** She is probably a lovely lady, Minister, but this is about openness. I refer to page 3-12 of the SDS and enhancing the wellbeing of children in care. How many children in the department's care or under care and protection orders were pregnant during the last financial year?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. I go back to the point I made earlier about individual cases. I will take that on notice. While we are talking about others, in relation to children who sadly passed away in 2009-10, I can advise that four children were in the care of the department at the time of their death. One of the four had a health passport. Two of the young people requiring a health passport had refused to engage with a health professional. The other one was in hospital for a significant period of time which ensured that ongoing health treatment would have been received. In each of the four cases a case plan had either been developed or been reviewed and in each case the officers responsible for the service delivery to the four children had completed induction training.

**CHAIR:** The time has expired except for 30 seconds.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** I refer to page 3-12 of the SDS and enhancing the wellbeing of children in care. How many children absconded from their placement in 2009-10 and how many children who absconded were not located within 24 hours of going missing?

**Mr REEVES:** I will take that on notice.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** On how many occasions was the Child Safety After Hours Service Centre unattended or unable to be contacted and how many intakes were not actioned until business hours?

**Mr REEVES:** Child Safety Services has a 24-hour contact service. So the answer is that Child Safety Services is always contactable.

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

**Mrs SMITH:** Minister, you have previously acknowledged the value of the non-government partners of Child Safety Services. Page 3-3 highlights the importance of the services delivered by the non-government sector. In my electorate of Burleigh, I have recently taken part in the Pyjama Foundation's Pyjama Drive. Thanks to the generosity of the community we donated close to 100 pairs of pyjamas. Minister, can you advise further on the role of the Pyjama Foundation and provide an update on the Pyjama Drive?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. I am surprised you are not in your pyjamas today. I know she is a great supporter of the Pyjama Foundation just like me and many other colleagues. The Pyjama Foundation is a valued non-government partner which provides an innovative reading and literacy program for vulnerable children in care. The Love of Learning Program receives funds of up to \$235,805 per annum from the Queensland government. It is joint funding from the Department of Communities and the Department of Education and Training.

The Pyjama Foundation recruits, trains and supports volunteers, known as Pyjama Angels, who commit at least one hour per week to visit children in care to read, play literacy games, do puzzles and assist with homework. The children are referred to the foundation by a child safety service centre and all volunteers are required to have a blue card. The Pyjama Foundation is currently providing support to children in Brisbane, Ipswich, the Gold Coast, Beenleigh, Gympie, Murgon, Toowoomba and Cairns. It has plans to expand throughout Queensland.

It is a sad fact that currently over 7,500 children and young people in Queensland would not live safely at home because one or both of their parents abused or neglected them. Thanks to organisations such as the Pyjama Foundation, children and young people who have been abused or neglected are receiving the support they need and have a much brighter future. The Pyjama Angels use puzzles, games and puppets in their storytelling so children can interact and learn. This helps children to build trust, learn about relationships, be positive in life, become confident and have happy, positive memories. This program boosts children's literacy skills and instils a love of reading from an early age—something we know helps them succeed in school. The Pyjama Foundation has also achieved extra benefits in that most volunteers provide additional support to children in care, including foster care. Most volunteers spend more than one hour per week with a child and many volunteers take the child on outings and many become respite carers for the child.

A Pyjama Drive is also conducted on an annual basis by the Pyjama Foundation, as the member mentioned. From 1 June to 16 July, during the colder months, the foundation partners with a number of community groups and corporate organisations. I am advised that the Pyjama Foundation has collected nearly 2,500 pairs of pyjamas from around Queensland.

I also have recently provided one-off funds of \$21,000 to the Pyjama Foundation to develop and produce a personalised colouring-in book for children aged three to 10 years entering foster care to help introduce living in their new home and people with whom they will be living. The book will encourage

carers to spend time with children talking about change and listening to their thoughts and feelings. By funding projects such as this one, the Bligh government is meeting its commitment to boost the literacy skills of young Queenslanders. I had much pleasure last week in launching this book at the Brisbane library. I met the author, who is an outstanding individual and who has done a great job with it.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** Minister, page 3-8 of the SDS references the South West Queensland Indigenous Families and Youth Coaching and Mentoring Service. Minister, can you please update the committee on this service?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the member for Mount Isa. I am surprised that the member for Warrego has not asked the question actually, because it covers his electorate. The Bligh government is committed to working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities to support the Closing the Gap initiative, advance reconciliation and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Prevention and early intervention initiatives are an integral part of our endeavours.

I wish to draw the committee's attention to the South West Queensland Indigenous Families and Youth Coaching and Mentoring Service, which has been allocated \$2.02 million over 2½ years. I was very pleased to personally launch the service earlier this year during a visit to the region. Lifeline Darling Downs and South West Queensland is providing this new and innovative prevention and early intervention service that started in May 2010 in Roma, Charleville, Cunnamulla, St George and surrounding areas. These communities have high rates of child protection and youth justice orders and a high rate of Indigenous young people involved in the youth justice system. Young people aged 10 to 18 and their families will be assisted by the service. Each family and youth coach will work with a maximum of 10 families for up to six months per family. Families and youth coaches link young people to education, training and employment opportunities. The coaches work intensively with young persons and their families to provide parenting skills and help the family support the young person.

A mentor also provides support and linkages to the local businesses in the community to find jobs and volunteer work. By working with the whole family, the service will also assist siblings of the young person. Young people on bail are supported so that they can live in their communities with their families or extended families and comply with the conditions of bail. Consultation with families and youth coaches will assist in identifying child protection concerns at an early stage. Since May 2010, the service has received a total of nine referrals—five through the Cunnamulla office and four through the Roma office.

Since commencement of the service six weeks ago, young people from many families have engaged and are receiving support from the service, including parenting skills and linking the young people to education, training and employment opportunities. For example, the Cunnamulla office had a client who they successfully re-engaged with the school and another who found employment through this program. Lifeline Darling Downs and South West Queensland have employed six people to deliver this very important service. This is yet another example of the Bligh government working closely with our non-government partners to deliver positive outcomes for Queensland families and in this case south-west families.

**Mr WETTENHALL:** Minister, with reference to page 3-4 of the SDS, can you please outline how the therapeutic residential care services in Queensland being established will help our vulnerable young people?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. I am committed to ensuring that abused and neglected children and young people who are not able to remain at home have a safe and supportive place to live. The Bligh government has provided capital and operating funds to buy or construct four therapeutic residential care services. The services will be operated by the non-government sector to provide around-the-clock supervised residential care and intensive therapeutic supports for young people with extreme needs. Some \$3.5 million was allocated in 2009-10 to provide these services. At this time I am pleased to announce that three of these four services are operating. These are located at Cairns, Townsville and Goodna, west of Brisbane. The fourth service, planned for Morayfield, north of Brisbane, is expected to be operational in 2011. The availability of operational funding for this service was advertised on 10 July this year.

These services are the most intensive services provided through the non-government sector. These services work in close collaboration with specialist therapeutic and behavioural support services, known as Evolve, which are provided by Queensland Health and Disability and Community Care Services. The objective of this service is to work actively to reduce the young person's level of support need by de-escalating their behaviours to enable a move to a less-intensive form of care or even return home if it is safe and appropriate for them to do so.

These services will support young people and their families with behaviour management strategies such as trauma and grief counselling provided by qualified practitioners. At the same time, the educational needs of these young people are addressed to ensure they keep up with their age group at school. The service provider and the department ensure that young people are linked to all available

educational support programs. The department has also developed a therapeutic care framework within which the service providers operate. The department maintains links with other states to ensure that these services are connected with the best contemporary practice in this area.

As part of the Child Safety residential capital program budget, the buildings from which these services will be delivered will be purpose-built houses or appropriate existing buildings renovated to meet Child Safety needs. Based on the early experience in purchasing some of these properties, a new procurement method was implemented which resulted in accelerated delivery of both the therapeutic residential care properties and the small group homes. The revised method of purchase has delivered capital savings in the purchase of both land and existing buildings. Additional savings have also been achieved by aligning Child Safety project management and construction delivery with existing Department of Communities processes.

Overall, Child Safety is on track to exceed its revised 2009-10 residential capital acquisition objective. I am looking forward to the establishment of the new Morayfield service, which will provide a new placement option for young people with extreme needs in South-East Queensland.

**CHAIR:** Minister, can I confirm that you wish to table this report?

**Mr REEVES:** Yes. I seek leave to table that.

Leave granted.

**CHAIR:** Minister, page 3-8 of the SDS refers to the recruitment and retention of foster and kinship carers who care for children and young people who are unable to live at home due to abuse or neglect. Could you please advise further on the recruitment of these carers across Queensland?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. The Bligh government acknowledges and commends the dedication and commitment of Queensland's current foster and kinship carers. As at 31 March there was a total of 3,940 carer families, and 522 of these were from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. To sustain this pool of dedicated foster and kinship carers, the Bligh government has worked hard to increase the number of foster and kinship carers for those Queensland children who are not able to live safely at home.

The continued increase in new foster and kinship carers in Queensland can be partially attributed to the foster and kinship carer campaign which began in May 2008. This campaign attracted an unprecedented number of expressions of interest from across the state, and inquiries have been received from both rural and remote communities who have not previously responded to previous campaigns. From the start of the campaign to 30 June 2010, a total of 1,192 foster and kinship carers have been approved. It is pleasing to see that there has been a flow-on effect on inquiries since the commencement of the foster and kinship carer campaign in May 2008.

Although the particular campaigns have been completed, the Bligh government has continued its efforts to increase foster and kinship carer numbers. In 2009-10, \$400,000 was provided to ensure a continued focus on locally specific placement needs in each of the seven regions. Each region has developed and implemented local carer recruitment and retention plans. These plans enable each region to run targeted recruitment campaigns in their region. This includes a range of activities to widen the pool of emergency and respite carers and increase carer retention on a region-by-region basis. These plans use a targeted approach to meet local placement requirements and identify community members and groups that may be prepared to care for children of different ages, cultures and needs. Funded foster and kinship carer services and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community representatives contribute to the development of these plans, which incorporate strategies to recruit and retain carers for specific needs, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, adolescents, large sibling groups, and children and young people with a disability.

In addition, during 2009-10, 41 foster and kinship carer services received funding of \$10,000 per service to enhance their recruitment and retention activities. These grants provided opportunities for these organisations to gain an additional boost to print promotional material and run targeted recruitment campaigns. The recruitment of these new carers significantly contributes to the current pool of carers and the Queensland government's Toward Q2 target of a 50 per cent increase in the proportion of Queenslanders involved in communities as volunteers.

**Mrs SMITH:** I again refer to the Helping Out Families initiative. Can you please outline how this initiative and others align with the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. The Queensland government is currently implementing the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, investing over \$2 billion over three years on a range of initiatives to implement the framework. The national framework focuses on the need for an integrated approach to the protection of children through prevention and early intervention through to statutory services. Queensland is working closely with the federal, state and territory governments and non-government organisations to achieve a substantial and sustained reduction in child abuse and neglect over time.

The framework is being delivered through a series of three-year action plans. The first three-year action plan, 2009-12, is aimed at achieving better outcomes for children and families. The Bligh government's \$55 million Helping Out Families initiative is aimed at helping families by preventing children and young people from having to go into care to keep them safe. This closely aligns with a number of the framework's strategic outcomes. The 11 Indigenous family support services to be established across Queensland also support many of the strategic outcomes of the framework.

Queensland is working in collaboration with other states and territories and the federal government to progress a number of other national priorities. An example of this collaboration is the Communities for Children Plus initiative. This initiative will provide children and parents with intensive early intervention services. These services will have a strong focus on engaging with disadvantaged and hard-to-reach families with multiple and complex needs. This may include families experiencing drug and alcohol misuse, a parental mental illness and domestic and family violence. Queensland was selected for the establishment of one of these sites in Ipswich. Planning for the service in Ipswich has commenced, with service delivery to the community to begin later in 2010.

To date, Queensland has contributed to the following national priority projects: the development of an out-of-home care consultation paper in February in Queensland and assisting to host public consultation in Brisbane and Cairns; the development of the workshop in Newcastle on 3 December 2009 on the Closing the Gap priorities project to determine national priorities for Indigenous community based activities; and coordinating the residential care workshops to be held later this year on consistent improvements in the area of transition from care, including the development of resources and a collaboration of working relationships across government and non-government agencies to help young people and staff plan for young people's transition from care to adulthood.

Queensland has also undertaken a number of initiatives to support the implementation of the national framework. These initiatives include: the recruitment of foster and kinship carers to establish a more stable and diverse group of care which will improve our capacity to find the right carer for children who require out-of-home care and minimise the number of placements for each child; focusing on carer recruitment and retention to enhance the placement options for Indigenous children; and auditing policies, procedures and information collection to inform the placement of Indigenous children in out-of-home care. I support the national priority to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children in the community. Queensland's implementation of the national framework will support this goal.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** Minister, earlier this year I attended numerous events in my electorate during Foster and Kinship Carer Week, and I have to say that our carers are extraordinary people. With reference to the number of children placed with foster and kinship carers outlined on page 3-17 of the SDS, can you please outline to the committee some of the ways the Bligh government recognises the valuable work of our carers and non-government organisations?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. As I always say, child protection is everyone's responsibility. The Bligh government is proud to work hand in hand with our foster and kinship carers and our non-government partners to ensure vulnerable children have safe places to live. From 7-14 March this year, the Queensland government joined in celebrating Foster and Kinship Carer Week. This week highlights the vital role carers play in supporting Queensland's most vulnerable children and young people. The Bligh government provided \$58,000 towards the week to encourage community participation and support carers.

During the week I was pleased to present foster and kinship carer excellence awards to eight Queensland families from across the state right here in Parliament House. These awards went to Mick and Pam Dunne of Ellen Grove who have looked after about 150 children and young people in the 20 years they have been carers. Sharan and Barry Winslade, who have a house full of toddlers on their five-acre property near Ipswich, cannot receive enough accolades for the work they do. Other recipients included Paul and Natalie Upshall from Gympie, Lina and Paul Swalling from Carrara; and Cheryl Montgomery from Robina. A Mackay couple who preferred not to be named care for six grandchildren aged two to 10, and Sam and John Devine from Thursday Island and Josie and Mark Beck from Central Queensland were all honoured.

Our esteemed community partners and peak bodies provide services to recruit, train and support thousands of carers throughout Queensland. The many good things achieved by child protection workers on a daily basis must also be acknowledged.

I am pleased to advise that the Bligh government will provide \$100,000 this year for ACT for Kids to be the auspice body for Child Protection Week in Queensland. Child Protection Week runs from 5-11 September, and this year the theme is 'Protecting children is everybody's business'. This is a call for everyone in the community to take responsibility for protecting our most vulnerable citizens. Child Protection Week provides an opportunity to celebrate the people, the partnerships and the networks our communities rely on to nurture safe and confident children and young people who are valued by society.

A number of events for all ages will be held throughout the state during Child Protection Week 2010. I encourage everyone to get involved. Events may include family fun days, school events, barbecues, picnics, information stalls, art competitions and street parades. The Bligh government is proud to support both Foster and Kinship Carer Week and Child Protection Week because we know that child protection really is everyone's responsibility.

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

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Minister, I refer to SDS page 3-16 and the percentage of children subject to protective orders. Despite a record budget in 2009-10 which the minister said he is very proud of, will the minister explain why in the same period the number of children exiting care who had four or more foster care placements actually increased by 10 per cent?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. Before I refer to that question, can I go to the question of how many who were in care on child protection orders were pregnant. This information is captured on individual case files for the purpose and use of the dedicated child safety officers in charge of the person's case. As for the second part, we do not capture all data on individual records so to gain that information I refer you to the same response I gave before which you did not like. We do not capture all data on individual records. It is contained in the case notes for officers working with young people. That illustrates that ICMS is about individual casework. It has some reporting arms and it is improving all the time. Its No. 1 priority is that child safety staff, no matter where they are, can get in and work with that individual case file and work for the best of that individual child and young person and work through that.

In regard to this question, as of 31 March there were 53 young people who had left their approved placements. There are some young people in care who leave their departmental approved placements. Where possible, Child Safety Services has regular contact with these young people to ensure their safety and wellbeing and to continue negotiating more suitable placements or supported independent living arrangements. In regard to your placements question, were you saying that they had four different placements? Is that what you were saying?

**Mr DEMPSEY:** There was a 10 per cent increase yet a record budget.

**Mr REEVES:** The Bligh government is committed to protecting children and young people who have been harmed or are at risk of harm from abuse. In some circumstances, children must be placed outside the family home. We have a range of placement options. You might have heard me talk in my opening remarks about the new and improved placements, with over \$42 million worth of new and enhanced placements announced. With a low number of placements, it is desirable that this is balanced against other placement quality indicators, such as placement in accordance with the Indigenous child placement principle, local placements and placements with siblings. Multiple placements may also occur for other positive reasons, such as initial emergency placements followed by a longer term placement or a change in placement to achieve better child-family compatibility. For example, kin may be found. It is obviously important to get as much stability as possible, but Child Safety Services do what they can to ensure the best fit for all children and young people when it comes to placements.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Minister, I would like to clarify the answer that you gave in relation to possible pregnancies and detailing that it was in each individual case. With the number of child safety officers that there are, the huge workload that they experience and the hard work and the good work that they do, if you had a number of pregnancies within a set area—and these may be occurring from sexual abuse—surely there is a computer record or system to pick up trends in relation to pregnancies and possible sexual abuse, instead of, in this day and age, looking at an individual's file when a person may be on leave, sick or whatever. Does that child have to wait until that person comes back? Surely it must be recorded in an ICMS system that is worth over \$50 million.

**Mr REEVES:** I remind you of the answer that I gave to the question. ICMS is accessible by all staff and Child Safety Services staff, whether they are in Bundaberg or Mount Isa. They can access the records of every child and they work with that individual. It does not matter if someone is on leave for whatever reason. First and foremost, the focus of the ICMS is to provide a clear, real-time picture of a child known by Child Safety Services. It is accessible by over 2,000 staff throughout Queensland. Case files on ICMS capture key information to assist the front-line staff. As I said to you in my answer to question on notice No. 5, it is about what is best for the individual person or child who has a case file. Information that you are requesting is information that is on the file of each individual child or young person, but at the moment in order to collect that information you would have to take staff offline to individually check and data collect every single one.

ICMS is an improving system. As it goes on, more data similar to what you are referring to can be collected for the whole of the state or the whole of a region or whatever. At the moment I want to clearly say that ICMS's main focus is that individual child on that ICMS system. It is not about getting a statistic that you or others might want at a particular time in the political cycle or other cycle. It is about making the best decisions for those individual children. ICMS for a particular child is not just accessible by its

case worker; it is accessible by over 2,000 workers. For example, we know about our transient population. If a child moves from Mount Isa to Bundaberg—and I do not know why they would want to do that, because Mount Isa is such a great place—information about that individual child would be accessible to Bundaberg child safety officers just as it is accessible to Mount Isa child safety officers.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Minister, to clarify that, are you unable to tell me how many young children are pregnant within your department? It would seem for the general public to be a priority if there were a trend happening within a certain region or a certain area. You are unable to tell me that?

**Mr REEVES:** You must not have listened when I said that ICMS is focusing on the individual child or individual young person. You can have statistics upon statistics upon statistics. If you go out and talk to the hardworking staff, as I have had the pleasure of doing—I have visited every single office in Queensland, all 50 of them including all of the hub officers and the seven regional offices—you hear that their passion is about those individual children, not as a statistic but as an individual person. It is not about collecting statistics after statistics after statistics; it is about changing those people's lives by ensuring that they get the right placement, the right education and the right opportunities in life. It is about improving an individual's life. It is not about a statistic or a number; it is about that.

We are improving all the time the different statistics that are collected, but those statistics you can get from the push of a button and the data cleansing that needs to happen. They do not result from pulling staff offline to get the different statistics that you want or that other people want. As I said, I am proud of the fact that there are 80 different measures quarterly updated by Child Safety Services in Queensland. That is more than any other state. There are 150 national measures that we report to. The measures that really make a difference on the performance of the department are there for all to see. They are there for people to criticise and to compliment.

ICMS's main focus is about the individual young person or child. It is about improving the right match in placement and improving the right match for services. That is what I want our Child Safety Services staff to focus on—an individual, not a statistic.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Minister, in relation to that same question, are you saying that if you had a computer system that was able to collate a trend of a number of young women pregnant in a certain area you would not use it? To avail yourself of resources and to prioritise those resources to a set area, are you saying that you would not use that information?

**Mr REEVES:** After going to every single office—every regional office and every hub officer—I have enough confidence in the staff—

**Mr DEMPSEY:** How long does that take?

**Mr REEVES:**—the team leaders and the management of each particular office—

**Mr DEMPSEY:** How long does that take, Minister? You have a computer system.

**Mr REEVES:** If there was a trend emerging in that regard, they would pick it up and they would work with the other.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** How would they know?

**CHAIR:** Your time has expired.

**Mr REEVES:** I do not mind taking government time on this issue because—

**CHAIR:** You will have to ask the member for an extension.

**Mr REEVES:** Can I have an extension?

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Yes.

**Mr REEVES:** I will give you a prime example of an individual case. I went to Cooktown and there was a young woman who was 17 and just about to transition from care. Yes, she just had a baby. We were able to work with the department of housing, as part of the Department of Communities, so that young woman was able to transition from care, have a house and have support services. We had dedicated staff from both housing and Child Safety Services who worked with that child and was able to help that child transition from care, provide a house and provide the support services. Not only was it a successful outcome for that young woman; it was a successful outcome for that young baby. They were not having to be removed from their home or from their mother. It is a great outcome and it just goes to show you that, if you focus on the individual—not the statistic but the individual—real outcomes can happen.

**CHAIR:** The time allocated for questions by non-government members has expired. Minister, you mentioned before that child protection is everyone's responsibility. With reference to the performance measure mentioned on page 3-15 of the SDS, can you inform the committee why the government works alongside organisations like the RSPCA to monitor reports of abuse and neglect?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. Research has shown that people who are violent towards other people often start out being violent to animals. As we know this, it seems obvious that the RSPCA and Child Safety Services should have some sort of process in place to share information that may help keep both children and animals safe.

It is with this in mind that in late 2009 both organisations signed a groundbreaking agreement to make this information sharing happen. This new memorandum of understanding set out principles, roles and responsibilities to support services to children and young people who have been harmed or who are at risk of harm and to protect the welfare of animals. Under the agreement, RSPCA officers advise Child Safety Services of child protection concerns in homes they visit, and child safety officers will encourage families with whom they are involved to contact the RSPCA for advice on the welfare of the animals.

Sometimes in carrying out their duties RSPCA officers notice signs that abuse may not be restricted to family pets. The agreement provides clear paths for RSPCA officers to report suspicion of potential family violence when investigating animal welfare concerns. There are documented cases of people who have abused animals progressing to serious violence against people. Two years ago RSPCA Queensland launched a campaign Tested on Animals to raise public awareness of the link between child abuse, domestic violence and cruelty to animals. The campaign also highlighted that cruelty to animals may be a precursor to other forms of violence.

Animal abuse by children and teenagers is one of the clearest warning signs that a child can become a violent offender in the future. This agreement is complementary to the RSPCA's campaign. I am happy to utilise whatever protocols and agreements are necessary to ensure that we receive the earliest possible advice on potential child abuse. The agreement will remain in effect for two years but will be reviewed after the first year of operation. I would like to thank both our dedicated and hardworking child safety staff and the RSPCA for their assistance in getting this agreement off the ground and for their combined efforts to keep both our children and animals safe.

**Mr WETTENHALL:** Minister, I note that at page 3-8 of the SDS it shows investment in intervention services such as increased funding of \$2 million for Family Intervention Services. Can the minister advise of any other ways in which the Bligh government is investing in prevention and early intervention?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. Early intervention and prevention is one of my main focuses as child safety minister. I am working closely with the Minister for Community Services to keep this at the top of our agenda and continue refining programs and responses to early intervention and prevention. One example of support to families is through the successful Family Intervention Services. These services are provided by our non-government partners and provide practical, common-sense assistance to families in the child protection system. This includes teaching parents skills that relieve stress, family conflict and anxiety as well as how to manage the household budget, prepare healthy meals, establish routines and set guidelines in the home. These services are provided to families in the statutory child protection system.

Today there are 50 Family Intervention Services providing support to families across Queensland with a budget of more than \$18 million for the 2010-11 financial year. This increase in investment will provide support for over 1,700 Queensland families. In addition, community services funds a range of prevention and early intervention programs. In 2009-10 the Referral for Active Intervention initiative received \$10.2 million to provide intensive family support services at 11 sites across the state. In 2009-10, the Referral for Active Intervention program assisted more than 1,700 families.

Another example of the government's commitment to prevention and early intervention is demonstrated by the allocation of \$2.7 million over 20 months to implement the Breaking the Cycle of Domestic and Family Violence program which was trialled in Rockhampton. This trial commenced in November 2009 and reflects the government's ongoing commitment to increase the safety of those affected by domestic and family violence to hold perpetrators more accountable. This commitment is outlined in *For our sons and daughters: a Queensland government strategy to reduce domestic and family violence 2009-2014*. The trial links criminal, human service and justice responses to provide timely, holistic and effective responses to people affected by domestic and family violence.

I am also pleased to advise that in 2009-10 there is a new initiative aimed at addressing the overrepresentation of Indigenous young people in statutory child protection and youth justice—the south-west Queensland Indigenous family coaching and youth mentoring service, which has been mentioned previously. This shows that the Bligh government is committed to working in collaboration with our external partners to deliver services to vulnerable children and young people.

**Mrs SMITH:** Minister, your portfolio responsibilities of Child Safety and Sport have been highlighted in the SDS. I also note your earlier comments about linkages between these two portfolios. Can you advise of further ways in which children will be encouraged to participate in sport and recreation?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. I know that she has a passion for making sure children and young people are not only protected in her society but also gain access to sport and recreation. The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children seeks to improve the quality of care so that children and young people in care have the same opportunities as other children to reach their full potential.

The Bligh government is proud to have a number of initiatives that align with that framework. I mentioned earlier that this government has a number of initiatives to encourage children in care and those living in other residential care facilities to get involved in sport and recreation. In addition to these initiatives, foster carers are also given the opportunity to attend practical workshops where they can learn how to provide safe, active movement for young children and information on basic motor skills for toddlers in their care. The workshops, supported by the Children and Young People's Participation Strategy, are designed to assist carers to incorporate physical activity into the daily routine of children. Participants in the workshop, as well as child safety officers, have been provided with copies of the very popular *Move Baby Move* resource to assist foster carers and families with children at risk. I might add that this resource is also available to the general public and can be ordered by accessing the Department of Communities website.

As children get older, having these basic motor skills will help them to successfully participate in sport and build self-esteem, confidence and social networks within our communities. We also know how having these basic motor skills improves a child's capacity to learn. A further benefit of the organisational alignment of Child Safety and Sport and Recreation is that it gives children and young people in care an opportunity to attend camps and workshops led by sport stars such as Brian Kerle, Steve Renouf, Derek Collins and Andrew Walker. That camp came about as a direct result of a visit to Beenleigh in my first few weeks as minister. One of the child safety officers spoke to me about having a young people's transitioning-from-care camp and getting access to sporting stars. From day one we were able to do that. We keep hearing about its success. I am pleased that the strong partnership between Child Safety and Sport and Recreation is delivering positive outcomes and making a real difference to individuals.

**CHAIR:** That brings the committee's examination of the estimates for Child Safety to a close. The committee will now commence its examination of the estimates for Sport. The committee's examination of the estimates for the portfolio of the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport will continue until 3.45 pm. The question before the committee is that—

The proposed expenditure be agreed to.

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

**Mr DEMPSEY:** I refer to page 3-7 of the SDS. The modelling for the funding rounds appears to closely follow the model that was the subject of the recent and ongoing CMC inquiry. What organisational development have you introduced to ensure such an investigation is not required again?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. Obviously, it would be inappropriate for me to refer to the inquiry while we await the report. This funding model came about as a result of the Rogers review. I refer you to the answer to the question on notice. The Rogers review went all around Queensland gaining information about what people believed about the system. As a result, we implemented a system which I think has been very well received. If the applications we have received are any indication, it has been very well received.

In terms of the infrastructure funding, we received \$80 million worth of applications. We had about \$11.5 million to allocate. We have actually allocated a little bit more than that. In terms of the funding for the Active Inclusion Program, we had applications for four times the amount of money we had to allocate. I am proud to be part of a government that allocates a record amount of funding compared to any other state. I think our record both on and off the field matches that.

In 2009-10 some \$57.63 million was provided to encourage more Queenslanders to become involved in sport. The new \$138 million sport and recreation funding package will be delivered over the next three years with four aims. They are: to increase participation in sport and recreation; to increase the number of volunteers involved in sport; to support capacity building in the sport and recreation industry; and to increase opportunities to groups with inequitable access to sport and recreation activities and infrastructure. That is a very important one when you look at the findings of the review.

Of the \$138 million, \$51.5 million is available for the new Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Program to continue building infrastructure. To date, funding of \$11.961 million has been approved for 91 sport and recreation infrastructure projects expected to be completed this financial year. The program replaced the three former capital works programs—the major and minor facilities and local sports and recreation programs. Under this new program, access to minor capital works funding for sporting clubs has been more than doubled. In addition, we have increased funding for major infrastructure projects and eligibility has been expanded to include Catholic and independent schools. Further to this, \$18 million is available from the new Sports and Recreation Active Inclusion Program to assist organisations willing to find ways to remove obstacles and give opportunities to those less fortunate to participate in sport.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** There is a corruption cloud hanging over the entire funding program for this year. Why are you not addressing the perception that there is corruption in your department or do we have to wait until the recommendations come out of the inquiry? Surely a department as large as Sport and Recreation should be able to work towards implementation.

**CHAIR:** Could you refer to the SDS?

**Mr DEMPSEY:** The same SDS page as the previous question.

**Mr REEVES:** I am happy to take the question. We have fully cooperated with the CMC—in fact, it was the director-general who referred the matter to the CMC—and we are happy to wait for that report. I make it quite clear that we have gone through a thorough process in assessing those successful applications—the 91 projects in the infrastructure program. I have accepted lock, stock and barrel every recommendation that was put up to me by the department. I have full confidence in the way the departmental officers have evaluated and assessed the recent round of applications. Quite frankly, what you are proposing is that we hold off funding these projects until the CMC reports back. I was not prepared to let local sporting clubs wait for funding.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Madam Chair, the minister is being misleading. I did not ask about that. I asked what he was doing in relation to this so he is not waiting for the CMC inquiry to finish.

**CHAIR:** The minister can answer the question.

**Mr REEVES:** I will take that question. We conducted a thorough review—that is, the Rogers review. We initiated a comprehensive review of sport and recreation funding. Of particular concern was the ability of the former funding programs to meet the Q2 ambitions, foster community participation and inclusion, target children, youths and families at risk and build capacity in sport and recreation. To ensure this review covered a range of perspectives—the industry, the community, local and state governments—I established an external review committee chaired by Mr Rogers. It also had on it people from Queensland Outdoor Recreation Federation and QSport, the old Sports Federation of Queensland. It talked widely about the funding.

We then designed the funding model based on the findings of the Rogers review. We implemented those findings. The department received applications, assessed those applications and put recommendations up to me which I approved lock, stock and barrel. As a consequence, we have some very happy people but we have probably got more unhappy people because we had \$80 million worth of applications. The member for Bundaberg might not have confidence in the system, but \$80 million worth of applications proves that they have confidence in the system.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Taking into account confidence in the system, can you tell this committee why Craig Matheson was sacked?

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

**CHAIR:** Just a moment, I need to check something. Minister, it is my opinion that that question is asking for an opinion rather than anything specifically related to the appropriations.

**Mr REEVES:** I am happy to clarify the record. As it is a staffing matter, it would be inappropriate for me to make a statement in that regard. I will ask the director-general, who appropriately deals with all staffing issues, to address that question.

**Ms Apelt:** Mr Matheson left the employment of the state government on 28 May 2010. His decision to leave was Mr Matheson's decision alone. It had nothing to do with the CMC inquiry into sports grants.

**CHAIR:** Next question, please, member for Bundaberg.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Moving on to another matter, I refer to page 3-14 of the SDS which states that you are responsible for administering Stadiums Queensland. I have gone to many fixtures. I want to ask specifically about beach balls at the cricket. Do you support the outlawing of beach balls at the cricket? Can you tell this committee why you want to continue to be part of the fun police here in Queensland?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. I cannot believe you have 20 minutes of questioning of Sport and Recreation and you believe that beach balls are the most important thing. I have been known to throw a beach ball at the cricket previously.

Can I openly say that the responsibility for issues such as beach balls or whatever being thrown at the cricket is that of the hirer. In the example you give it is Cricket Australia or Queensland Cricket, depending on who has hired the venue. They make those decisions. At any stadium in Australia now, if beach balls end up on the field, whether big or small, the police take them away.

This gives me an opportunity to talk about Stadiums Queensland. We are very proud of what we do at Stadiums Queensland. We attract the greatest events. Last financial year, home and away games attracted an economic benefit for the state of \$308 million. That does not include the State of Origin, extra concerts or other events. It is terrific. Stadiums Queensland now owns eight venues. They are: The Gabba, the Sleeman Sports Complex, the Queensland Sport and Athletics Centre, the Brisbane Entertainment Centre, Suncorp Stadium, Dairy Farmers Stadium, Skilled Park and the Queensland Tennis Centre. Soon it will own a ninth venue—Carrara Stadium, once it is open.

As I said, it is an asset of about \$1.3 billion. Stadiums Queensland is developing and implementing operational plans for eight venues used by nearly four million people per year and developing and implementing event plans for up to 52,000 people. The most important thing about these stadiums is that they are good for fans, good for jobs but great for the local economies. Just a normal

Broncos home game employs up to about 1,500 staff for about 35,000 people. It is great for the local economy and, more importantly, people can also see their stars competing. The model of Stadiums Queensland is second to none in Australia and will continue to be because we will support it because we know it means real jobs. I note that the member for Burleigh is smiling because she knows that another great stadium is being built right in her very heartland of the Gold Coast, so not only are they going to have Skilled Park to brag about but the new Carrara Stadium to brag about shortly as well.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Minister, I refer to page 3-14 of the SDS which states that you are responsible for administering Stadiums Queensland. Minister, can you tell the committee why contracts for catering rights at certain Stadiums Queensland facilities have such a long period of up to 11 to 13 years?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. I have placed on record before the fact that I do not talk about individual contracts or hiring agreements in that regard because of commercial-in-confidence. I do not approve, and neither should I, the contracts of individual catering rights. That is inappropriate. That is why Stadiums Queensland is set up the way it is. Stadiums Queensland ensures that the right tendering process occurs, and that is what happens. I am not aware of the contracts that you are talking about. That being said, I am not prepared to talk about individual catering contracts. Some of them could be as a result of when they were formally under trust like the old Gabba Trust and the like. Some of them might even be as a result of when the council had them. However, I have made it abundantly clear that I do not get involved in commercial agreements with the stadiums in that regard because it would be improper to do so. We appoint a board—ably led by Mike Pelly, who is also chair of Airtrain, and before him Wayne Myers, who did a terrific job as well—to do that work on behalf of the Queensland government. It would be inappropriate as minister to get involved in hire agreements or catering agreements. Let the professionals do it. Leave the politics out of it.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Minister, you have said a number of times that you are responsible for the administration of Stadiums Queensland. Surely as a minister you would know what rent is paid to these facilities, when the rent is reviewed and who does the review. Are you prepared to give those facts to this committee to supplement the coming budget?

**Mr REEVES:** To ensure financial viability and maximise the use of state facilities, these facilities need to be available for multiuse hiring agreements. Suncorp Stadium is currently achieving a utilisation rate of about 80 per cent through successfully negotiating hiring arrangements and franchises with the NRL, Super 14 and A-League. Hiring agreements are primarily legal mechanisms by which the sports or promoters gain access to venues. They also assist sporting franchises to build sustainable businesses. For example, hirers of Stadiums Queensland venues are able to leverage income from the stadiums through signage—because, unlike other stadiums throughout Australia, we have what we call clean stadiums, so they have access to signage more than any other stadium in Australia—plus assigning certain supply rights, merchandise, corporate facilities as well as ticket sales. As well as delivering benefits for sporting franchises, hiring agreements deliver benefits to local economies by generating employment, direct and indirect. Stadiums Queensland adopts a commercial approach to hiring agreements with sporting franchises with the development of commercial-in-confidence.

**CHAIR:** Minister, your time is up. Member for Bundaberg, do you want to give him an extension?

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Yes, please.

**Mr REEVES:** We take the approach that Queensland based franchises hiring venues for national and international sporting events recover all of the direct costs associated with staging the event as well as a proportionate contribution towards the venue. We do not want to get to the situation where, firstly—I have said this on the public record before, and I will say it again here—I know what the hiring agreement was, because we appoint a board confident that that is what it does. My view is that the minister should not meddle in hiring agreements. Secondly, if we announce the hiring agreements, we put Queensland at a complete disadvantage to ultimately get major events like the Bledisloe Cup or major concerts, because I have to tell you that the entertainment and sporting world is very competitive. If our interstate opposition knew what we were paying for particular events, then we would be at a distinct disadvantage to them and we would miss out on events because we would be forever undercut. It would diminish the significant economic benefits to the state which, as I said, are estimated at \$308 million from regular premiership games. Thousands of jobs would also be lost, and I am not prepared to put that at risk. I do not get involved with the hiring agreements for particular sports. That is what we employ Stadiums Queensland to do, and that is what it does.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. The time allocated for questions by non-government members has expired. Minister, with regard to page 3-7 of the SDS, can you outline any funded programs that have targeted groups in the community that have traditionally faced barriers to their participation in sport and recreation?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. One of my priorities as Minister for Sport is to improve access to sport and recreation opportunities for disadvantaged Queenslanders. This goal is being realised through a number of initiatives. For instance, over \$18 million is being made available over the next three years through the Sport and Recreation Active Inclusion Program for local organisations to work with disadvantaged groups in their local communities. Together they can develop

participation initiatives to help people facing access issues to lead more active and healthy lives. For example, this funding package will enable local organisations to establish sporting competitions or improved participation access for people with disabilities.

We had an overwhelming response to the program, with more than 900 applications received. To date, I have approved funding of \$4.575 million towards 496 projects under the program. Some examples of the projects that have been funded include \$48,190 to Mission Australia to provide participation opportunities for adult homeless people in multiple recreation activities in Brisbane; \$19,855 to the Cherbourg/Murgon Youth and Community Combined Action Association to conduct a Sports for All program for a number of sports at Cherbourg; \$49,000 to the Caboolture Area Youth Service to develop a referral and support package program for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to participate in sport and active recreation in Caboolture; \$43,700 to the Women's Health Awareness Group of Gladstone to provide cross-cultural training for sports and recreation and community organisations and to conduct Come and Try days for culturally diverse families in Gladstone; and \$50,000 to Community Solutions for a recreational program for families affected by domestic violence on the Sunshine Coast.

The program will be opening for round 2 on 1 September 2010 where we hope to again provide invaluable support for groups that face the largest barriers to being involved in sport and recreation. I know the member for Barron River is passionate about this program. He was there on the night we launched the program. I have also introduced a program that provides children in out-of-home care with the opportunity to access sports and recreation. Under this program, carers can receive up to \$300 per child for sport and recreation registration and participation. Almost 1,100 children have already accessed the program. Sport and recreation activities play an important role in Indigenous communities. They teach important life skills and they can be used in a variety of circumstances.

**Mrs SMITH:** Minister, the Gold Coast stadium currently under construction is a major project for the Gold Coast. How will this facility boost the Gold Coast's Commonwealth Games bid?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. I have had the pleasure of being with the honourable member to see this facility build up, and I look forward to a big announcement on the Gold Coast tomorrow night about its AFL team. The redeveloped Gold Coast stadium is the centrepiece of the Gold Coast's bid to host the 2018 Commonwealth Games and will be a great asset for the Gold Coast community. Said to be a world-class multisport venue, the Gold Coast stadium will have the capacity to seat 40,000 people for a Commonwealth Games event in 2018. And should the bid be successful, the Gold Coast stadium will host the 2018 Commonwealth Games opening ceremony and track and field events, showcasing the Gold Coast to the world.

I am very proud of the Queensland government's commitment to the redevelopment of the Gold Coast stadium at Carrara. The redeveloped stadium will have a permanent grandstand seating 23,000 and can be used for AFL, with the potential to host cricket, athletics and other football matches if required. Once completed, the venue will be operated by the AFL under a lease from Stadiums Queensland. It will also have the capacity to host special events and concerts, provided the promoters comply with the local government or agency permit conditions. Construction commenced on the site on 30 October and is progressing well, with the installation of steelwork to the ground floor of the western stand complete.

In March this year the Premier announced that the government would contribute an additional \$11.9 million towards an \$18.2 million project for the construction of the permanent southern stand, complete with extensive solar panelling. In total, the redevelopment is now a \$144.2 million project for the Gold Coast. With the support of the Gold Coast council, the Bligh government's contribution to this latest development will be achieved through recognised savings from other local projects such as the Gold Coast 600 V8 Supercar event. Energy-efficiency measures have been incorporated in the new stadium, helping to reduce Queensland's carbon footprint, including water harvesting and energy-efficient lighting. Even during the demolition stage, every effort was made to recycle as much of the old stadium as possible.

As well as the government's bid to host the 2018 Commonwealth Games, the Gold Coast stadium is a venue for Football Federation Australia to bid to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup. The total redevelopment of the Gold Coast stadium is expected to generate more than 1,100 full-time staff during construction and up to 700 jobs a year once operational and boost the estimated \$308 million already injected each year into Queensland's economy through this major stadium. With the Gold Coast stadium at its centrepiece, the Commonwealth Games will provide a lasting legacy through the development of international standard sporting facilities that can be used by the community and which will assist in attracting further major events and training programs. I can understand why the member for Burleigh cannot get the smile off her face.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** Minister, I note that the Active Inclusion Program also has a focus on people with a disability. Can the minister please provide some examples of this to the committee?

**Mr REEVES:** As I mentioned earlier, the Bligh government is allocating \$18 million over the next three years under the new Sport and Recreation Active Inclusion Program to assist organisations willing to find the ways to remove obstacles and give opportunities for those less fortunate to participate in sport and recreation. This means more sport and recreation opportunities and more jobs for Queenslanders. In particular, the program focuses on those groups that face the greatest barriers—people with a disability, children and families at risk, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culturally diverse groups and communities considered to be of greatest disadvantage in Queensland.

As I said, the first round of the program was very popular, with 900 applicants requesting about \$12.6 million worth of projects. Of these applicants, 496 asking for funding of \$4.575 million were successful. A number of projects provided excellent opportunities for people with disabilities to be involved. Those projects included \$49,280 to the Super Performance Active Community Inc. to conduct a 40-week physical activity program for children with a disability right there on the Gold Coast, member for Burleigh; \$10,400 to Triathlon Queensland to develop and deliver Try 4 All inclusion resources, participation opportunities and volunteer and coach education programs for people with a disability; \$14,900 to the Rockwheelers Wheelchair Basketball Inc. to provide a training program for wheelchair basketball in Central Queensland; \$18,405 to Inclusion Work Association to develop the community inclusion train the trainer program for people with a disability for multisport activities at South Townsville; and \$45,000 to Special Olympics Australia to conduct training and raise community awareness throughout Brisbane and Western Queensland and the Darling Downs catchment area.

Organisations will be delivering these projects over the next 12 months to deliver fresh and innovative avenues for people with a disability to be involved in community sport and recreation activities. The Bligh government is also proud to support state level disability organisations. Sporting Wheelies and Disabled Sport and Recreation Association, Deaf Sports and Recreation Inc., Life Stream Foundation and Riding for the Disabled Association all do excellent work with the funding the government provides. In 2010 we contributed \$699,600 to these organisations to continue their important activities. The Bligh government remains committed to ensuring that people with a disability have equitable access to sport and recreation opportunities, and these initiatives will assist in achieving this goal.

**Mr WETTENHALL:** Minister, it is not only the member for Burleigh who has a smile on her face. I refer you to page 3-11 of the SDS which makes reference to the Bligh government's investment in sport and recreation infrastructure. Can the minister provide an update on the rollout of the regional tennis facilities and the benefits to Queensland communities, particularly in my home region of tropical North Queensland?

**Mr REEVES:** I am happy to answer that question. I think the member for Mount Isa has a smile on her face about tennis as well. The Bligh government has been working closely with Tennis Queensland and Tennis Australia in recent years to help revitalise the sport of tennis through the provision of state-of-the-art tennis facilities. The first part of the revitalisation strategy was the establishment of the new Queensland Tennis Centre at Tennyson, which opened in January 2009. This venue has now hosted two Brisbane Internationals and the recent Davis Cup tie between Australia and Japan. It is great to see top-level tennis back in Brisbane, because the Bligh government knew that if we built it, they would come.

The second step in the revitalisation strategy is regional tennis facilities being delivered in partnership with Tennis Queensland. The program is aimed at establishing a network of new and improved tennis facilities in key regional cities across Queensland. The program provides pathways for Queensland tennis players to progress through a regional feeder network to the Queensland Tennis Centre and beyond. It also provides regional communities with access to quality tennis facilities, which assist in providing increased opportunities for Queenslanders to participate in physical activity. Each facility will also have the capacity to host tennis events and competitions. In that way, facilities can generate economic benefits to the region and promote tennis in the local community. Five regional tennis facilities are funded under this program in Cairns, Mount Isa, Rockhampton, Toowoomba and Townsville.

As the member would be aware, I was pleased to recently announce that Australia will play Belgium in the Davis Cup World Group Play-off in the new Cairns Regional Tennis Centre from 17 to 19 September. What a weekend that is going to be for Cairns. The Cairns tennis facility includes 12 new international-standard courts of the same surface as the Australian Open and the Brisbane International, high-quality lighting and a new clubhouse. The courts and clubhouse are almost complete, with the courts expected to be completed in the coming months.

I was very pleased to join the member for Mount Isa and her local community in the opening of the Mount Isa centre on 12 March 2010. The centre has eight international-standard courts with high-quality lighting and a new clubhouse. It was great to see so many young people there on that Friday afternoon. The Rockhampton tennis facility includes an upgrade of 19 courts to international standard, high-quality lighting and a new clubhouse. The upgrades to the courts have been completed, the courts are in use and the clubhouse is in construction and is expected to be completed in the coming months.

The Townsville tennis facility includes 10 new international-standard courts, with high-quality lighting and a new clubhouse. Construction of the courts and the clubhouse is scheduled to commence in July 2010. The estimated completion date is December 2010. The Toowoomba tennis facility includes upgrades of three courts, the construction of nine courts to international standard, high-quality lighting and a new clubhouse. That is expected to be completed in 2011.

Hosting a significant event like the Davis Cup tie is a great win for Cairns in Far North Queensland and definite proof that new regional tennis facilities will revitalise the sport of tennis in Queensland and be great for local economies.

**CHAIR:** Further to the earlier questions that relate to the new suite of Sport and Recreation funding as outlined on page 3-7 of the SDS, can you advise further on the local jobs plan and the purpose of this program?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. The Bligh government has allocated \$159 million in the state budget as part of its very strong commitment to help Queenslanders become Australia's healthiest people. These funds will create more jobs in local communities, build important infrastructure and deliver vital programs that will help Queenslanders become more active and involved in sport and recreation. The \$38 million that is available over three years under the Local Sport and Recreation Jobs Plan, which I announced earlier this year, will support the needs of local organisations to promote and encourage participation in sport and recreation.

Funding of up to \$52,000 per year is available to contribute to the employment costs of a local sport and recreation coordinator. The coordinator will assist organisations with matters such as club administration, creating links and networks in the community and increasing the skills of volunteers to create more sustainable opportunities for sport and recreation. Coordinators can also identify what volunteers can do more effectively in their role, such as developing grants writing or planning skills or undertaking recruitment drives for new volunteers, ensuring fun and safe opportunities for people to be active in their local area. Coordinators will also help local sport and recreation clubs, councils and schools to link more effectively to develop a whole-of-community approach towards children and adults being active and provide a variety of sport and recreation pursuits.

Organisations supported by local sport and recreation coordinators may benefit for up to three years, with ongoing funding that will be provided until June 2013. Coordinator support will be provided to a grouping of organisations, usually between five and seven, so that intense support can be provided to meet each organisation's unique needs. By developing tailored strategies to meet these needs, coordinators can identify opportunities to build capabilities and keep people in these organisations and encourage more Queenslanders to become involved as volunteers in their local clubs.

I am committed to placing these positions in local communities until 2013 so that we will be able to meet the vital needs of volunteers, who are the backbone of sport and recreation in Queensland. By committing \$38 million to employing these coordinators, I believe that the clubs that are struggling today can become vibrant, healthy organisations of tomorrow.

Interest has already been expressed by local, regional or state level organisations and councils employing coordinators in the community. Applications to seek support for coordinator positions can be submitted at any time to the Department of Communities, and regional advisers of Sport and Recreation are more than willing to work with local organisations to discuss the benefits of employing someone in this position.

I look forward to providing you with updates on the progress of the jobs plan in the future. I believe that this funding is one of the Queensland government's key initiatives to supporting grassroots volunteers in sport and recreation organisations, giving all Queenslanders an opportunity to lead active and healthy lifestyles.

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

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Just for clarification of a previous question in relation to page 3-7 of the SDS, No. 3—and this is directed more to the director-general through the minister—in relation to Craig Matheson, did Craig Matheson receive any monetary settlement over and above his leave entitlements?

**Mr REEVES:** As the matter is in regard to staffing, I will hand that to the director-general.

**Ms Apelt:** The separation arrangements for Mr Matheson were pursuant to his contract.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** And were any of those matters over and above his leave entitlements?

**Ms Apelt:** What I said is that the arrangements were pursuant to his contract and obviously that is a confidential matter.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Were there any alterations to that contract in the last 12 months?

**Ms Apelt:** No.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Thank you. I refer to page 3-14 of the SDS which states that you are responsible for Stadiums Queensland. Eight facilities are operated by Stadiums Queensland. Will you table for the committee—I know you are going to say no to this one—the financial statements for each facility, specifically the government grant revenue and operational results for those stadiums? Considering that taxpayers' grant money is going into these stadiums, can you at least, for budgetary purposes, supply the amounts of the government grant revenue?

**Mr REEVES:** What I will provide is what we provide to Stadiums Queensland, which I will get in a minute. I refer you to the answer that I gave before. I know that we still have not got a clear statement from the LNP about whether they actually support Carrara. We do not know where they stand in regard to stadiums. We know that they did not support Suncorp Stadium. They rolled the former minister for sport back in the former government. We do not know where they stand on stadiums. We know that they did not support Carrara. So at this estimates they want to impact on the livelihoods of many thousands of people who work, or get work generated as a result of major events in Queensland, at our stadiums.

A capital grant of \$10 million is used to maintain Stadiums Queensland venues. I should point out that the venues are worth \$1.3 billion and that money is used to maintain Stadiums Queensland venues. Stadiums Queensland gets audited by the Auditor-General. Their annual report is there for you and everyone to see. It is there. If you do not have it I can get it for you, but it is on their website. An operating grant of \$14.375 million is what was paid in 2009-10 to assist Stadiums Queensland to meet its operational commitments for venues. The grant is adjusted on an annual basis to reflect changes in the CPI and will increase by 2.5 per cent to \$14.735 million in 2010-11.

We also gave Stadiums Queensland a grant to build the second Chandler pool. As you would know, being a person who is involved in sport, to be able to host world championships or, in fact, national championships these days you need two full-size pools. So by giving that funding that will ensure they are able to do that. Also, you only have to go to Chandler to have a look at how full it is with the stars of the future. Many of the QAS swimmers swim at Chandler. I should remind the member for Bundaberg that we have a proud record. I think last year we filled 26 per cent of the national side from QAS athletes. We have an unbelievable record. I should finalise that by saying that I am not going to give individual information on individual stadiums that promoters and other interstate venues could use to disadvantage the economic benefit to Queenslanders and jobs.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Minister, I refer you to page 3-7 of the SDS which states that the department will help build infrastructure. If you want to have political shots, as union boss Bill Ludwig stopped the Mount Isa Labor Party branch from meeting at the local AWU hall to discuss the behaviour of the local Mount Isa member, can the minister advise what sporting facilities are available in Mount Isa that could be used to host a meeting of the Mount Isa ALP branch?

**CHAIR:** It is my belief that that has nothing to do with the budget. Could you ask another question, please?

**Mr DEMPSEY:** It is in relation to page 3-7 of the SDS—the department will help build infrastructure.

**Mr REEVES:** Obviously you have been set up with that one. I would think that, as for any community organisation, there are a range of facilities. If a community organisation wants to use a facility, whether it is owned by a community group organisation or whatever, they should talk to that particular organisation and pay their appropriate fee to be able to use the facility. While you have given me opportunity to talk about—

**Mr DEMPSEY:** You would give Bill the tick, would you?

**Mr REEVES:** While you are giving me the opportunity to talk about—

**Mr DEMPSEY:** Would you give 'Big' Bill the tick?

**CHAIR:** Member, the minister is answering the question.

**Mr REEVES:** While you have given me the opportunity to talk about Mount Isa, can I say how proud I am that the member for Mount Isa is absolutely the strongest advocate as an MP for both of my portfolios. She is forever making representations on behalf of all of her electorate. She is forever inviting me to make visits to Mount Isa and I have made a number of visits to Mount Isa talking to the local mayors.

I must say that when I launched the sports funding program on a Saturday morning, we were not expecting the roll-up that we got. We had, I think, three mayors—two of them had travelled a minimum of four hours—and they all rave about the representation that they receive from the member for Mount Isa.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** So you will let Bill—

**CHAIR:** Member for Bundaberg—

**Mr REEVES:** She is a good advocate for her area.

**CHAIR:** The time has expired.

**Mr DEMPSEY:** So you will give 'Big' Bill a—

**CHAIR:** Member, order, please! The time allocated for questions from non-government members has expired. I call the member for Burleigh.

**Mrs SMITH:** Minister, the Gold Coast offers much more than sporting activities, but I am happy to acknowledge the Bligh government's continued investment in V8 Supercars events. Can you outline the benefits to Queenslanders from the staging of these events both in Townsville and on the Gold Coast?

**Mr REEVES:** I would love to, member for Burleigh, because the V8 Supercars events in Townsville and on the Gold Coast demonstrate their ability to bring significant benefits to each community. Both events attract a large number of attendees, create hundreds of jobs, boost the bottom lines of local businesses and broadcast some of Queensland's iconic tourist destinations to the world, all translating into economic benefits worth millions of dollars to the regions and to Queensland in general.

The benefits derived from the Gold Coast and Townsville V8 events represent a great return on investment for the Queensland government. Townsville and the Gold Coast are both great locations for an event. There are always plenty of things to see. Earlier this month I was extremely pleased to join an over-150,000 strong crowd to cheer the V8s as they roared around the streets.

In fact, spectators could not leave their seats because it was such a great fun event. They were glued to their seats the whole day to watch it. The introduction of the V8 event in Townsville has seen a previously unused area of Townsville revitalised with a multiuse event precinct being developed. In 2009 the event brought an economic return of \$19.34 million to the Queensland economy. That was nearly double the estimate. Quotes estimated 266 full-time equivalent jobs coupled with an estimated 130 full-time equivalent jobs created during construction. In addition, events like V8 Supercars are widely broadcast and it is a great opportunity for regions like Townsville and the Gold Coast to reap the benefits from such exposure. In the Gold Coast region, the Gold Coast motor racing event has produced significant employment and economic benefits and broadcast Queensland's wonderful natural and physical assets to the world.

Over the past 19 years there have been 76 event days which have averaged over 63,000 people attending each day. The Gold Coast event has enjoyed the support of almost five million attendees over its life. This has generated an estimated \$600 million since 1991 for the Queensland economy and also been broadcast to millions of people around the world. Outcomes like these are the reasons why this government continues to invest in events. Now called the Armor All Gold Coast 600, V8 Supercars will be the headline act with V8 Supercars Australia as the event promoter. The footprint of the circuit has been reduced by approximately 40 per cent to 2.96 kilometres. The total build and dismantle time is reduced by five weeks. The event will also be run over three days instead of four. These changes minimise the disruption to residents and businesses as much as possible while still delivering massive economic benefits to boost the Gold Coast. Not only will we have international drivers driving in our own V8s; we will have increased off-street activities with impressive performances by Australian and international stars such as Empire of the Sun and the Beach Boys—even the member for Bundaberg might remember them—and improved race formats for fans to enjoy.

The Bligh government is proud to provide support to events like this which are great for the economy, great for creating local jobs and great for Queensland.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** Minister, I note reference to the sport and recreation funding on page 3-7 of the SDS and acknowledge the previous questions about this funding round. As you know, I was very pleased and delighted that you recently joined me—in June, in fact—at the Cloncurry Show to announce the funding to be provided to the Cloncurry Shire Council to develop the new camping area for future equestrian events at their centre. The events that they have up there are the iconic Mary Muster and the Stockman's Challenge. Can you share with the committee any other key projects across Queensland that have been successful like ours?

**Mr REEVES:** I thank the honourable member for the question. It was great to be at the Cloncurry Show. The Bligh government has a proud record of providing more funding for sport and recreation than any other state or territory. In February 2010 I announced a new suite of programs to encourage all Queenslanders to live active lifestyles. I have previously referred to what the four main aims are. Of the \$138 million, \$51.5 million was available for three years for the new Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Program that will help clubs and groups build the infrastructure they need to participate.

The first round of the program was open only to minor category projects. The program generated an unprecedented level of interest. There were 626 applicants. Over \$80 million in funding was requested towards more than \$114 million in sporting infrastructure. The outcome of the assessment and moderation process resulted in 91 approved applications, representing project costs of \$16.998 million for a total of \$11.961 million in grant funding.

In addition to the funding announced for the Cloncurry Shire Council other key projects included \$88,560 approved for the Bundaberg Regional Council to construct a walkway and cycleway at Hughes Road in Bargara; \$239,091 approved for the Maranoa Regional Council to construct skate parks and

multiuse areas for basketball, handball and skateboarding in the communities of Yuleba, Injune and Wallumbilla; \$54,001 approved for the Townsville Rockwheelers Mountain Bike Club to construct two cross country bike trails—I thought the member for Burdekin might be interested in this—at the Douglas Mountain Bike Reserve and Lake Ross Bike Reserve in Townsville; and \$189,525 approved for AFL Cairns Ltd to install lighting.

To address the unprecedented level of interest, I have approved an additional funding round for Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Program minor category projects. Round 2 will open on 1 September and will close on 1 October.

**CHAIR:** That concludes the examination of the estimates for the portfolio of Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport. Thank you, Minister, and your officers for your attendance. For the information of those attending today, the hearing transcript for this portfolio will be available on the parliament's website in about two hours. The committee will adjourn for a short break and commence examining the estimates for the Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women. We will resume at five minutes past four.

**Proceedings suspended from 3.50 pm to 4.05 pm**

## ESTIMATES COMMITTEE F—COMMUNITY SERVICES AND HOUSING AND WOMEN

### In Attendance

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

Ms C Whitton, Principal Adviser

#### **Department of Communities**

Ms L Apelt, Director-General

Mr I Fulton, Chief Finance Officer

Mr T Hodda, Director, Financial Services

Mr D Short, Director, Financial Services

#### **Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian**

Ms E Fraser, Commissioner

---

**CHAIR:** Good afternoon everybody. The Estimates Committee F hearing is now resumed. On behalf of the committee I welcome the minister, departmental officers, officers of statutory bodies and members of the public. I am Mary-Anne O'Neill, member for Kallangur and the chair. Mr Howard Hobbs, member for Warrego, is the deputy. The other committee members are Mr Jack Dempsey, member for Bundaberg; Mrs Betty Kiernan, member for Mount Isa; Rosemary Menkens, member for Burdekin; Christine Smith, member for Burleigh; and Steve Wettenhall, member for Barron River. We also have Tracy Davis, member for Aspley, asking some questions today.

The next item for consideration is the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women. The committee will adjourn proceedings for a 10 minute break at 5.20. In the event that those attending today are not aware, the committee's proceedings are lawful proceedings and are subject to the standing rules and orders of the Queensland parliament. Members of the public are welcome to observe the proceedings but may not participate in the proceedings. In that regard, and in accordance with standing order 206, any person admitted to this hearing may be excluded by order of the committee or at my discretion as chair.

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. The committee has resolved in relation to media coverage of the hearing that television film coverage, photographs and sound broadcast will be allowed for the chair's opening comments and the introductory statements of each minister and that television film and photographic coverage will be allowed at the change of organisational units. The committee has also resolved that audio and video of the hearing recorded by Parliamentary Reporting Service cameras and microphones in the Legislative Council chamber shall be broadcast by the Parliamentary Reporting Service via the service's website and receivers throughout the parliamentary precinct.

I ask that all mobile phones and pagers be switched off. I remind members of the committee and the minister that under standing orders the time limit for questions is one minute, answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a double chime will sound at the end of each time limit. 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. Standing orders require that at least half of the time available for questions at today's hearing will be allocated to non-government members. Any time expended if the committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between government and non-government.

Government members and non-government members will take turns asking questions generally in blocks lasting 20 minutes commencing with non-government members. The committee has resolved that non-committee members be given leave to attend to ask questions during the hearing today. To assist Hansard, officers are asked to provide their names and positions prior to responding to a question to them by a minister.

I declare open for examination the proposed expenditure for organisational units within the portfolio of the Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women. The committee will commence with the examination of the estimates for Community Services. 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 of no longer than five minutes. Would you like to make a brief statement?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair and members, last year the Bligh government promised to help Queenslanders through tough economic times and we have stuck to that promise. There is still some way to go on the road to recovery from the global financial crisis. We know many people are doing it tough financially and emotionally. That is why our social priorities are to roll out the biggest ever investment in social housing Queensland has ever seen and expand the range of concessions and rebates available to seniors and low-income people. That is why we are absolutely determined to build a support system that offers a No Wrong Door approach to the public.

The No Wrong Door approach offers one pathway for clients with complex needs who require help from a number of agencies. This is an example of well coordinated government and community agencies working to make sure Queenslanders see even better value for money when it comes to delivering key services. The No Wrong Door approach is the foundation of our new Helping Out Families initiative. The \$55 million investment in early intervention announced by myself and the minister for child safety in June will deliver more help to families where children are at risk of harm if they do not get early support and follow-up. The delivery of the pilot in Logan and Beenleigh this year, and in the Gold Coast early next year, will provide intensive support for families and access to a range of case management and in-home support.

We are also getting on with the job of working with the federal government to build more than \$1.2 billion worth of housing for people who need a hand. The rollout of more than 4,000 new dwellings by the end of 2012 is also creating thousands of jobs right around Queensland. While places like Cairns have seen a 50 per cent reduction in construction jobs since August 2008, our \$90 million building program in the Far North region is keeping 700 workers employed. On the Gold Coast, about 17 per cent of construction work has dried up since August 2008 and we are kickstarting that economy with \$71 million worth of projects creating 370 jobs. In the Wide Bay-Burnett region, 38 per cent of construction jobs disappeared and we are investing another \$62 million to help keep another 380 workers employed.

As minister for women it is important for me to make sure that women get the same opportunities as men to take up the jobs on offer. That is why we have the Office for Women helping more women access job opportunities across a range of industries with initiatives like our highly regarded Women in Hard Hats program. The Office for Women is also working hard to make sure Queensland women possess the necessary skills to take full advantage of investment in infrastructure and mining that the Bligh government is supporting. This month the member for Townsville, Mandy Johnstone, presented scholarships to young Indigenous women who will gain jobs and training through our Indigenous Women in Hard Hats program. I presented 20 certificates to women job seekers in our partnership with the Ebenezer training company to provide them with training in the mining industry. I have also strengthened the Office for Women as an engine room driving change for women across government by outposting some of the Office for Women staff to key government agencies.

Seniors are also getting a better deal out of our latest budget. We are spending \$1.9 million to fund the Seniors Legal and Support Service. We are spending \$1.15 million to fund the Older People's Action Program. Seniors will also benefit from \$1.19 million for the 60 and Better Program. We have also budgeted \$12.6 million to increase the electricity concessions available for pensioners from \$190 year to \$216 a year. We have introduced a \$216 rebate for eligible people with multiple sclerosis and related illnesses to help meet the costs associated with running cooling and heating appliances all year round.

All up the Department of Communities is delivering \$186 million worth of concessions, rebates and subsidies to Queenslanders in need. We have expanded youth homelessness initiatives and youth justice conferencing to get young people at risk of offending back on track. We also continue to expand our highly successful youth leadership programs.

Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to commend the committed workforce in the Department of Communities right around the state. As I have travelled from Burleigh to Barcaldine and Mermaid Beach to Mabuiag Island I have witnessed Department of Communities staff working in cooperation with an equally committed non-government workforce to build a better quality of life for all Queenslanders.

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

**Mrs MENKENS:** Minister, I refer to page 3-40 and 3-43 of the SDS. Why has the number of staff at the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian decreased by 30 while staff expenses have increased by \$3 million? Was there a common job title for the 30 staff, were they regional or metropolitan and why were they terminated?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** In answering the question for the member of Burdekin I will wait on some detail on staffing from the children's commission. As you would understand, it is an independent commission. I do not have a direct role in relation to staffing of the commission but I will certainly get the information

you have asked for. My understanding of the staffing arrangements is that that is possibly the community visitor workforce. That is a large workforce, largely a casual or part-time workforce, and that workforce fluctuates.

The explanation for the lower number of full-time equivalent staff is because the roles of various temporary and project officers came to completion and the need to fund an extra pay period this financial year for existing staff. That is an explanation for the change in the funding and the change in the full-time equivalent positions. If you would like more explanation I can ask the children's commissioner, Elizabeth Fraser, to join us.

**Ms Fraser:** The number of staff that we had, as the minister indicated, is down because of the number of temporary and casual positions that came to closure. We had a number of systems development issues that were on board and we were looking at some other projects around the legislative amendments that went through the House so we had some casual and temporary positions on board for those. They came to conclusion so those staff were not continued on in terms of permanency. That does not include any reference to the community visitors who are employed under a different arrangement. Was there anything else?

**Mrs MENKENS:** My next question is to the commission, yes, thank you.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I will take it through me. Do you want Elizabeth to hang around?

**Mrs MENKENS:** Yes, thank you, Minister. I refer to the new measures introduced in the SDS—page 3-40, 3-41 and Book 5 of the SDS. Why do none of the new measures have any mention of data outside Brisbane? Why are all regional measures now discontinued? Is this a result of drops in areas such as visitable sites visited outside Brisbane and training and awareness activities conducted outside Brisbane?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Do you mind just directing me to the specific issue relating to Brisbane that you mentioned? Are you talking about service standards?

**Mrs MENKENS:** I am talking about the visitable sites. In 2008-09, 97 per cent; down in 2009-10 to 94 per cent; training and awareness in 2008-09, 65 per cent; down to 50 per cent this previous year.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I will speak in general terms again because the commission is an independent commission. On the detail of that work I will invite Elizabeth Fraser in a moment to comment. As I have travelled the state, I hear very positive reports about the reach that the children's commission has around the state. In fact, in the Torres Strait and around the cape it is quite impressive how much the presence of the children's commission is felt in those communities, particularly through the Community Visitor Program. I will ask Elizabeth to elaborate on those specific issues.

**Ms Fraser:** The measures that were discontinued were as a result of the fact that we considered some of them were to be activity based and they did not provide really good information about our efficiency or effectiveness. The new measures that have been established were aiming to provide that information. We do, in a range of our other reports, indicate what we are doing in remote and regional areas. There is quite a bit of information there with respect to the percentage of children who are actually being visited. It is giving information across-the-board. The measures otherwise are just demand driven and where people are is where we are responding, so we thought it was a better measure.

**Mrs MENKENS:** With reference to the non-government sector, as praised on page 3-3 of the SDS, as minister are you committed to the corporatisation of the sector, and will amalgamations and closures be part of the future of the sector in your vision?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I ask you to direct me to the reference in the Service Delivery Statements, because—

**Mrs MENKENS:** It is page 3-3.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I have not seen any reference to the corporatisation of any non-government—

**Mrs MENKENS:** No, but you have praised this sector and I am asking you, Minister, whether you are planning to corporatise and amalgamate the small parts of the non-government sector? It comes under the highlights.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I see where you are. I just wanted to see the reference. As you would know, last year one of the highlights of our budget initiatives was the \$414 million in recognition of the value of the sector and the importance of the sector. That was one of the biggest ever investments made by a government in Queensland to enhance and value the work of the non-government sector. I put that very clearly on the record. This is a critical sector to Queensland. It is a critical sector for supporting young people, families and children around the state. Into the future we need to be working on the sustainability of the sector. The pay rise and supplementary funding to those services has certainly helped their sustainability.

There are no plans for—you used the word—corporatisation. I have never heard that in any discussions I have been part of. I am not sure of the premise of your question. I reassure you and all of those highly valued non-government services around the state that they are here to stay.

**Mrs MENKENS:** Is it not true that many of the smaller community groups are being warned that they may need to amalgamate or become part of larger organisations to receive funding from your department?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Again I seek your clarification on the premise of the question and the use of 'warning'. I am not sure what you are referring to in relation to warnings. Who is providing warnings to people?

**Mrs MENKENS:** I think it is information that is going through to most of the community groups, Minister.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Let me be on record as challenging any notion of warnings, any notion of corporatisation. What we have is a highly valued community services sector. Probably over 2,000 organisations are funded by the Department of Communities. Billions of dollars are being spent in the area of community services and housing. Our position is to support the growth and sustainability of the community services sector. One of the issues that community services is dealing with through the compact that we have set up with the non-government sector is how they can gain efficiencies and how they can strengthen each other in their service delivery. Certainly under our No Wrong Door approach, the whole idea is to be client focused to make sure that people have one pathway and can tell one story; not tell that same story 10 times to 10 different services. That may be where some of the notion you are describing is coming from, but it is a very positive notion about a No Wrong Door approach. If you knock on the door of housing services in the Department of Communities, you will be assisted and referred to other agencies. If you knock on Vinnies door in Ayr, Bowen or anywhere around the state, the aim is that you will be assisted in a pathway and you do not have to tell your story to 10 different services. I can only assume that is the kind of language you are hearing, but let me give public reassurances of the value of the non-government sector.

**Mrs MENKENS:** I appreciate that comment, Minister. On page 3-33 of the SDS it is stated that indexation of grants will be at 3.25 per cent in recognition of the increased cost of service delivery. What assistance will be available this year for those non-government organisations that did not receive funding to cope with salary award increases?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** As I said earlier, the significant investment of \$414 million over four years was to ensure the ongoing viability of the community services sector and to bring welcome pay equity to a sector that predominantly involves women workers. They were way behind and the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission acknowledged that. In spreading the \$414 million as equitably as we could across a very large number of organisations, we had to come up with a formula. Again that was a client based formula. Who are the clients across our service sector that are most in need and which services are delivering support to them? Respite services for people with disability, accommodation services for people with disability, domestic violence services for women and children escaping crisis following domestic violence. Those were the services that generally received 100 per cent of the allocation of the supplementary wages. Other general information and support services will not get the full 100 per cent and I guess they are the ones you are referring to. We have indicated to those services that we would encourage them to talk to departmental officers. If they have no other sources of funding and feel they are under pressure, they may have to renegotiate the services they provide.

**Mrs MENKENS:** Minister, that is disappointing because a large number of community organisations did miss out on that \$414 million. I think that is very disappointing. What further assistance are you offering those groups or are you just telling them that, too bad, you can't offer those services any more?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** One of the approaches we have taken across the state through the compact we have with the non-government services is cutting red tape and moving to output based funding. Previously, many services have felt their hands have been tied. They have been given X-amount of money for wages, X-amount of money for a vehicle, X-amount of money for running costs. In the new regime that we are working on with the non-government sector, they will be given a quantum of funding for outputs and we will be checking on the outputs they achieve against that funding, but they will have flexibility. If they want to add extra money to wages, they will have the flexibility to do that, or if they want to cut back on some of their promotional or printing costs. As you know, sometimes there is duplication of promotional materials and that sort of thing. Some of that is non-essential and we would be asking them to work as flexibly as they can within an output based funding regime as one of the ways of managing within that environment.

This probably goes back to your earlier point, too. In an environment where need does not go away and demands on services remain high, it is important that services in particular locations or across an entity, such as some of the big entities like Mission Australia or whatever, look for efficiencies in their own organisations and service delivery. That is just a natural part of the development of organisations. It happens in the private sector and the community sector needs to be doing that as well. That is where a

number of them will work together to find efficiencies. For instance, in the community housing sector, recently I have attended some launches where smaller groups have joined to form larger groups because they want a larger piece of the action and they know they can only do that if they build strength and expertise across a number of organisations. Recently I attended the launch of 4walls Limited, which was an amalgamation of two small housing companies. They did that voluntarily, of their own initiative. There was no warning, there was no directive, there was nothing that I had heard about from the department and nothing came from me. They saw the sense of being sustainable and being part of the national and state action in the housing front into the future.

**Mrs MENKENS:** I refer to page 3-17 of the SDS and your letter to me dated 11 June, which I thank you for, Minister. I refer to the departmental office you title the Office for Seniors. If you wish to take on notice any details that you cannot provide now, that is okay. Could you tell us, for the past 12 months, the staff numbers, the budget details, how many pieces of legislation or programs have been initiated by input from seniors in the community, how many seniors have contacted the office, how can seniors contact the office to participate in the political process and any budget line item that shows the actual existence of this office?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I thank the member for the question, because I am constantly bemused by her lack of understanding of the role of the Office for Seniors. I am pleased she has accepted my invitation—

**Mrs MENKENS:** It is a case of trying to find it.

**Ms STRUTHERS:**—to join with some of my staff and I and visit the Office for Seniors next month.

**Mrs MENKENS:** I look forward to that.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** The Office for Seniors has a tremendous record of work and activity, which I will go through in a second. I make the point that the member and her colleagues have constantly touted the benefits of the Western Australian approach to government. The Western Australian approach, which they shared, was a three per cent efficiency dividend. Do you know what that has meant for seniors? It has meant a \$17 million cut to concessions in Western Australia in this year's budget. It has meant less services, less concessions for seniors, less of a helping hand. That is the model you support.

**Mrs MENKENS:** I have not.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** In questions on notice and in the parliament you keep raising the question, where is the Office for Seniors? The Office for Seniors is down the road at George Street, but the Office for Seniors is like the Office for Women: it is an engine room that drives change all around the state. Let me talk about some of the achievements of the Office for Women this year: The seniors inquiry line provided 30,132 people—16,000 callers and 13,950 online clients—with information referrals. In fact, seniors aged 65 to 74 years provided the greatest increase in the use of the internet. It is surprising. You seem to have this notion that seniors will only get on a bus and go to a shopfront. Seniors use the internet. There has been a 40 per cent increase in the use of the internet by seniors. The Elder Abuse Helpline is a very important initiative of this government and it has provided support to 1,175 callers. Twelve grandparent support camps were held around the state for grandparents raising children. The Seniors Legal and Support Service, funded and supported by the Office for Seniors, was accessed by 2,076 clients. Seniors were provided with numerous programs to reduce social isolation in 20 locations statewide. I have seen those services in Mount Isa, down the coast and in Cairns. All around the place there are services such as the 60 and Better Program, funded and supported by the Office for Seniors. The Healthy Lifestyle Program operates in 23 locations around the state. We do not want just one office. We have a coordinating office, which is the engine room in Brisbane. It is a few hundred metres up the road. However, we want action for seniors and support for seniors all around the state and that is what they get.

**Mrs MENKENS:** Minister, I note earlier you referred to the Office for Women, but I gather it was the Office for Seniors you were speaking about. You also said it was in George Street.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I likened it to the Office for Women.

**Mrs MENKENS:** Your staff had the same feeling when we booked this visit. The staff rang me back and told me it was actually in Adelaide Street. Does that not tell us something, that neither you nor your staff seem to know where this office is?

**CHAIR:** Was that your question, member for Burdekin?

**Mrs MENKENS:** Yes, it is. Where is it?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** The office itself is in Adelaide Street and there is corporate staff in the building in George Street. In fact, what I have indicated in the response to your question is that the way that this needs to be seen is as a range of senior support services all around the state. At 20 to 25 locations around the state we have a number of programs for seniors. I think the important thing to acknowledge here is that these programs and support services need an engine room. You have confused me with this notion of 'where is the Office for Seniors?' The Office for Seniors has a corporate entity, it has an inquiry line, it has internet access into it and there are services that it funds and supports all around the state. In

fact, one of the very positive things I was able to do this year was to get around and consult with groups all around the state—in Barcaldine, Cairns and all around the place—on our seniors strategies. We have now launched our Positively Ageless Queensland Seniors Strategy. Who did a lot of that work? The Office for Seniors staff.

**Mrs MENKENS:** Good.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I rest my case.

**Mrs MENKENS:** With reference to the Seniors Strategy Action Plan, on page 3-5, do you truly believe that a publication with headings such as 'Hippy hippy shake' and 'Treasuring wise gems' is speaking to seniors in their own language or would you not agree that it is patronising to the point of being insulting?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Labor governments go forward; conservative governments go backwards. Do you know why those terms were used in that publication? Because seniors asked for them. Seniors did not want a boring bureaucratic government document. What did they get? A little bit of 'hippy shake shake'. Are we going to deny the seniors of Queensland a little bit of fun?

**Mrs MENKENS:** I think seniors were a bit insulted by that. From what they have told me, they are.

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

**Mrs KIERNAN:** Minister, in your opening remarks you recognised that across Queensland there are some families out there doing it tough. The financial global crisis has had a negative impact on the household budgets of many Queenslanders. With reference to pages 3-14 and 3-21 of the SDS, what concessions, rebates and subsidies are available to help low-income people to pay their bills?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I thank the member for the question. We know that some people are doing it tough and this government is doing what it can to help. Offering one of the broadest range of concessions, rebates and discounts in the country is only half the job. We are also making sure that people know what help is available so they can access it. Today we have a new website going live that will help Queenslanders find the rebates and concessions that are available. The online portal draws together help from across government so people do not have to waste time searching for it. It is simple to use and for people on lower incomes it is a great help to make ends meet.

It brings together information about a number of concessions including our increased electricity rebate, up from \$190 to \$216; a new electricity concession of \$216 each year for low-income Queenslanders who have multiple sclerosis or related medical conditions, as I mentioned earlier; increased electricity life support concessions; an increase in the reticulated natural gas rebate. They will all be on that website—'Every dollar counts'. We have booklets for those who do not use the internet. The *Concessions made easy* booklet is also another source of updated information.

All this information comes on top of what we did last year. The achievements in the concession area are quite important, providing over one million concession services totalling over \$150 million to eligible pensioners, seniors and veterans throughout Queensland. There is \$10 million for the pensioner water subsidy scheme. This is a subsidy for pensioners who own their own homes. They are legally responsible for their bills. There are situations where seniors as renters might not be charged for water but we do not anticipate changing the scheme. But the information is there on the website and in the *Concessions made easy* booklet. There is \$91 million for the electricity rebate scheme and \$1.2 million for the electricity life support concession scheme. This is in stark contrast, as I mentioned earlier, to the approach the LNP would take if it were running the state—God help us.

The LNP has committed to a three per cent cut by front ending Public Service jobs and making them denecessary and thereby reducing service delivery. Who did they model that on? They proudly boasted and spruiked the Western Australian government. The conservative government is their role model. What happened there? \$17 million has been stripped from pensioner concessions and seniors concessions. Over there they call it 're-cash flowing'; over here the conservatives call it 'front ending'. Apart from the three per cent cuts, which means cuts to services, the LNP has not come up with a concessions policy. The shadow minister has been in the job for over a year and she has not delivered a concessions policy.

**Mrs SMITH:** A 2010-11 budget outcome was the announcement by you and the Minister for Child Safety of \$55 million over four years for the Helping out Families pilot in Logan and on the Gold Coast. I did have the opportunity to question the Minister for Child Safety about this initiative, but could you tell the committee what support this initiative will provide to families where children are at risk of harm?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I thank the member for the question. I know she has been a keen supporter of this initiative. I recently visited the Palm Beach Child Youth and Family Health Service with the member to see those workers in action on the coast. I know the Minister for Child Safety would have been spruiking this program, because he and I and members of our department have been working very closely and cooperatively on this very important initiative. For every dollar we spend on early intervention and support to help vulnerable families, the evidence shows that the government saves

between \$2 and \$19 in future costs of family breakdown and help for children. So we know these early intervention programs represent excellent value for money. That is why the Helping out Families initiative will deliver more help to vulnerable Queensland families early. We know it works and we know it is good value.

The \$55 million pilot will provide intensive support for families and access to a range of case managed in-home support that we know will have impacts now and into the long term. Families in need will benefit from \$4.8 million in intensive family support services and in-home support including parenting, budgeting, home management and meal preparation, and an extra \$1.6 million will provide more domestic and family violence prevention services and support services. A newly created Family Support Alliance will coordinate family and youth support, domestic violence support, mental health and drug and alcohol counselling. You will see the benefits of this on the Gold Coast.

In the first three years of a child's life, mothers and their new babies will be able to access up to six visits from a maternal and child health nurse, and the visits will focus on wellbeing, safe infant sleep and all those very important things that help young parents with young babies. We know that 27 per cent of cases that result in children entering the tertiary child safety system are for general neglect. They could largely be prevented. Earlier this month I visited that centre with you and I saw how well those people—the staff, the child health nurses, the social workers, the paediatrician, Indigenous health workers, and volunteer and support workers—are working to assist people at those very early stages, particularly when they are under a lot of pressure with young children. This is a very important initiative. I am very pleased that we were able to roll it out in the Logan and Gold Coast areas. We will look at the learnings from that and how we might roll it out across the state.

As I said, people do find themselves under pressure. Even the most resourceful parents can find themselves under pressure and at risk of harming their kids. That is the reality of parenting and raising children. We are committed to helping parents be the loving and responsible parents they want to be, and Helping out Families is one of those very important initiatives. I welcome your support.

**CHAIR:** With the expected increase in the number of people over 65 living in Queensland by 2021—it is going to be just under one million—can you explain how the Positively Ageless—Queensland Seniors Strategy 2010-20, referred to in the SDS at page 3-5, aims to improve the lives of Queensland seniors?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I talked a bit about this earlier in response to a question from the member for Burdekin. Let me put on record again that this is a very important strategy. There were over 700 submissions received in that process of consultation around the state. The Premier made it very clear to me when I was appointed Minister for Community Services and Housing that every minister in the Bligh government is to be a minister for seniors, but I was to take the lead role and my Department of Communities would take the lead role in driving change and support for seniors, and that is what we have done through the Positively Ageless strategy. That is what the Office for Seniors does every day.

The Office for Seniors works in partnership with other government departments, seniors organisations and service providers to respond to the needs of seniors right around the state. What we said we would do is coordinate a whole-of-government response and develop an action plan for seniors, and that is what we have done. We launched the Positively Ageless—Queensland Seniors Strategy on 24 May at the Gold Coast, and it came after months of consultation with Queensland seniors. I listened to the good, the bad and sometimes the taboo topics. It was amazing how many people—once given support and an opportunity—talked about incontinence, talked about dying, talked about the later years of life and how frightened many of them are. We had some very in-depth and very useful discussions with people in open forums which to me at times was quite surprising, but it indicated to me how valued these opportunities were, how valued this opportunity was to have their say.

We took all of that on board. The staff from the Office for Seniors and other departmental officers put all of this together into a Positively Ageless strategy. Some of the new initiatives under the first action plan—it will be a rolling plan of action over the next 10 years—include \$335,000 to support grandparents raising children, and we know how many of them are doing it tough; \$75,000 for a campaign to address elder abuse; \$50,000 to promote the seniors inquiry line; more money for the University of the Third Age to provide regional Queenslanders with online learning opportunities. What we said we would do is take action to help Queenslanders doing it tough, and that is what we are doing.

The elder abuse awareness campaign was launched on 15 June. We are helping pensioners by maintaining the highest seniors concessions in the nation, and we have increased the value of some key concessions that I talked about earlier. The Queensland government will invest approximately \$1.6 billion in services and programs targeted towards older people under the Positively Ageless strategy over the next two years. That is the spend across all agencies. As each action plan comes to close, we will be redeveloping the forward plan for the next two years. It has been received very positively. A number of seniors groups—the Council on the Ageing, Older People Speak Out and others—all wanted it lightened up a bit. Hence, we have put a bit of 'hippy hippy shake' into it, and thank God we did. Those boring bureaucratic documents that have been fed out to seniors in the past are a thing of the past.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** Absolutely, Minister. You have just mentioned elder abuse and, like domestic and family violence, it is often hidden and many of the victims are too fearful of the consequences to speak up and speak out. You have just described how people are being more open in talking about what is going on in homes today. With reference to page 3-9 of the SDS, what is the government doing to protect our most vulnerable Queenslanders from this sort of abuse and where can they go to get help?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** As I have said, when I travelled around the state what seniors talked about was some of the hidden issues like elder abuse. Our department has been doing extensive work on elder abuse, as have some of the non-government agencies for a number of years. But this year we were able to launch a new campaign. It is part of the whole program of action we have in relation to domestic and family violence, and elder abuse is part of that.

We are asking people to act as one. In the elder abuse campaign specifically, we are asking that people acknowledge this problem, speak up about it, get support for it, and ring and get help. The Elder Abuse Prevention Unit that we fund through the Department of Communities has a support line. Last year alone I think there were 780 calls specifically related to elder abuse. It is often unpleasant. The posters and things we have launched are not pretty pictures. It is not a pretty story. It is an unpleasant topic for many people to talk about but the reaction has been extremely positive. At seniors forums I have attended in the last month at Bulimba, Logan and other places I have put the posters up. There are images of an older woman looking out a window and the message is that she is going to be evicted from her own daughter's home. There is another of a fellow whose pension has been taken by his son. They all have extremely pained expressions in their eyes. This is a powerful message.

Many of the seniors I have spoken to have not understood or known about the problem. They have said that they are hearing a little bit more about it now in the media, and our campaign will certainly help to promote the fact that this exists. We cannot hide these problems. We cannot keep them under the carpet or keep them behind closed doors. We have to get them out in the open. That is why we are promoting programs like the elder abuse program.

**Mr WETTENHALL:** Minister, I know you visited the youth justice centre in Cairns, as well as centres at other locations throughout Queensland, and met with youth conference staff. I refer to page 3-9 of the SDS. Can the minister provide an update on the success of the youth justice conferencing program and how it gets young people to take responsibility for their actions?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I thank the member for the question. I have welcomed the opportunity he has provided when I have been in his region to talk about these issues and to see firsthand some of the good work that is occurring. I was very impressed with the youth justice centre in Cairns and others that I have visited around the state. We have about 20 of those centres around the regions in Queensland. Our approach as a government is to be tough on youth crime but also be tough on its causes, and that is to focus on early intervention and prevention and get young people back on track before they get into a pattern of offending.

The amount of \$10.1 million in 2010-11 will be spent to deliver the youth justice conferencing program state-wide. That is a good investment. Through youth justice conferencing, young offenders face up to their victim, police and other people affected by their actions. They have to face up to the consequences of their actions. It is a solid process, a strong process, that actively involves victims in deciding an appropriate consequence for an offender. It is a good investment because it is successful. It has been particularly effective with non-Indigenous females. Over 70 per cent of non-Indigenous females did not reoffend after participating in a police referred conference.

Since 2001, more than 97 per cent of victims who participated in youth justice conferencing in Queensland said the process was fair and they were satisfied with the agreements that were made through the conference. Also, 96 per cent resulted in young people, victims and other participants reaching agreement on what the young person should do to make up for the harm they caused. In fact, young people referred to conferences are 15 to 20 per cent less likely to reoffend than those sentenced by the courts. By using an alternative to a court process, some police and court costs can also be avoided.

The number of referrals for young people in 2009-10 was higher than expected—at 2,471—because it is so effective. It has the confidence of the police and the courts state-wide. In fact, I have been on the public record here in the parliament as saying that when I have travelled I have heard stories from police and others who may have been doubtful initially but are fully behind it now. Many of them have said to me that they see how fearful young people are of these conferences. Some have even said that they would rather go to court than go to a conference and have specifically requested that course of action. I have mentioned this before, but it has been so successful that I have met with people from Hong Kong who have been over here training their staff in the methods of our conferencing and our staff have been invited to go to Hong Kong. As you know, they are not soft on crime in Hong Kong. So it has certainly been a very important initiative. We have 12 full-time equivalent—

**CHAIR:** With reference to SDS 3-17, would you provide an explanation for the improvements in completion rates for young people on community service orders? They are 15 per cent above the target set, now at 95 per cent completion for 2009-10.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I thank the member for the question. I have also been to your area where you have talked to me about the issues with young people and the need for the community to feel safe but also the need to get young people back on track. The Morayfield youth justice centre, which operates across Caboolture and into your region, does very impressive work.

As a government, we support jail time when it is needed but we also need to address the high level of repeat offending or serious offending when young people get to that end of their pathway. The Youth Justice Act allows judges to impose a range of sentences for a range of crimes and levels of crime. One of the ways young people face up to their actions is through community service orders ordered by the courts. For minor offences, it may be something like 20 hours in the order or it may be as high as 200. Young people may be ordered to work on projects like landscaping, graffiti removal or other community service activities; it all depends on what the judge sees as a fit punishment to match that crime.

We know that young people are seeing these kinds of punishments through to the end and changing their behaviour. Data consistently shows a successful completion rate of around 95 per cent, which is well above the initial benchmark of 80 per cent. We know that young people are learning valuable lessons from the process and getting their lives back on track, and I have a couple of examples that I am aware of. A young person received a 30-hour community service order this year and was referred to Meals on Wheels. He completed the order in five weeks and gained a lot of experience and he still goes to Meals on Wheels weekly. An Indigenous young man who was expelled from his local high school completed 80 hours of community service within three months. He was involved in landscaping at a local community centre. He is back at school and by all accounts that I have heard he is back on track.

In a local Food for Thought program, which is a non-government program through one of our youth justice centres, young people completing community service prepare meals under the supervision of departmental staff. The prepared meals are packaged and delivered to organisations that cater to the homeless in Brisbane. Six young people have completed their community service through this program in 2010, creating hundreds of meals for Brisbane's homeless people.

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

**Ms DAVIS:** With reference to page 3-16 of the SDS, does the decreasing number of calls to dvconnect, coupled with the government's decreasing funding to organisations such as Bayside Domestic Violence Initiative, mean that domestic violence is no longer a problem or is it just not a priority of this government?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** The premise of the question from the member for Aspley is incorrect. There is not a decrease in spend across domestic violence services in Queensland. In fact, there is a very strong system of support around the state and I will come to that data shortly. In relation to the specific issue of the Bayside Domestic Violence Initiative, they were offering a few hours of court support each week and I think they had a one-off \$20,000 grant last year, so it was just a one-off grant. After discussing the needs of the service, we offered a \$10,000 grant to them for their ongoing support work. I think they have now declined that and we have another service which has taken up that opportunity. It is three or four hours of court support once a week, so \$10,000 seemed to be pretty adequate for that.

Let me tell you about the spend state-wide. In relation to domestic violence, the department allocated over \$16 million to fund 101 services under the domestic violence prevention and support program. The department also allocated over \$17 million to fund 53 services under the Homeless Program Domain to provide crisis accommodation to women and children escaping domestic and family violence. We have the review of the legislation underway. This government is absolutely committed to supporting women and children, who are the primary victims of domestic violence, to deal with this issue and get on with their lives. We want to make sure perpetrators are held accountable and those who will respond to support programs get that counselling and support to get their behaviour under control.

This has been a very important area of government activity and that is why I questioned the premise of your question. We have a very solid record of supporting domestic violence activities. As I said earlier, we have even gone into the area of elder abuse as well. Not every jurisdiction is tackling that in such a public and important way.

**Mrs MENKENS:** In the Capital Statement for 2009-10, \$70.196 million was budgeted for that year's expenditure on the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre. According to page 26 of the Capital Statement, a total of \$31.66 million was spent in this time. Why was the remaining 55 per cent not spent?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I would hope the member was aware of the fact that capital works programs are rolling programs. Capital works do not happen in one financial year in one particular period. There is progress across a period of time in relation to any capital works. I have visited the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre and I have seen the work in progress. We are expanding that centre in Townsville to 96 beds. We are improving and extending the capacity of that service and centre in Townsville. I guess

my message to the member is that that work is on track. There will be additional beds there for youth offenders. I am not sure if you have been to see the programs operating, but the educational programs and support programs are very important for those young people to get back on track, particularly some of the Indigenous young people who have come from remote areas.

In terms of giving you a little more detail, the project is on track to achieve the revised major milestones, including the completion of 48 additional beds by November 2011 and an overall completion in 2012. The major stage of the construction contract, worth \$110 million excluding contingency allowances, was awarded to Watpac in January 2010. Current forecasts for the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre cash flow are currently on track for the 2009-10 and 2010-11 financial years.

**Mrs MENKENS:** I suppose the hard thing is why do you budget that amount if you have no intention of spending it in that year?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Every dollar in our budget is committed. Every dollar that we have allocated is committed to a specific purpose. In our capital works program, that might be for the youth detention centres, some of our housing areas or other facilities. These are rolling programs. These are programs that are scheduled over a period of time. They are programs that begin with the design, planning, approvals, contracts and tendering—all that process takes time, all that is mapped out as much as possible to a forecast and estimate of time, but from time to time things do not go to schedule. As I said, I have been to the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre. I have walked on the work site as well as gone through the main centre. I am very confident we are on track, as I said, and we will have an expanded youth detention centre in Townsville.

**Mrs MENKENS:** Excellent. As per page 3-16 of the SDS and page 26 of the Capital Statement, earlier this year I asked you about the department's refusal to fund SAPH Vision Quest, an organisation needing about \$45,000 a year but which saves the government \$219,000 per child kept out of detention. This organisation has now suspended all of its charitable programs indefinitely. Why do organisations such as this have such difficulty in obtaining funding for programs that genuinely help our young people and save the government money? Also, why is 87 per cent of the capital budget allocated to the Cleveland centre but there is no capital expenditure for any preventive and early intervention initiative in our youth justice system, which is surely the most cost-effective and socially effective investment?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** There are a number of parts to that question you have asked, so I thank you for the opportunity to talk about our youth justice initiatives. Let me go through each of those parts but not necessarily in the order you presented them.

Firstly, I know that you have raised with me the SAPH service you referred to. There are many other services around the state that seek funding. We are always oversubscribed in our youth justice area and other areas of program delivery, and that is a positive thing. That is a sign that people are out there setting up initiatives and trying hard to support people and youth. Not every one will be successful in our funding programs, as they would not be through council or federal government programs. I cannot remember the detail of that program but I am sure it is a very worthy program.

Around the state, we have a massive injection of funding in all regions to support young people and to support them as early as possible. The Youth Opportunity Program operating out of Far North Queensland assisted 22 young people last year and 24 this year. The Youth Bail Accommodation Support Service, YBASS, in Brisbane is a very successful service helping young people get supported accommodation and get back on track with jobs and skills. There is also the Mount Isa Bail Support Program and conditional bail programs that we operate around the state, the Youth and Family Coaching and Mentoring Service operating in south-west Queensland and a number of initiatives all around the state. They do not all require capital. In fact, we have had problems with one of the initiatives, the Northern Outlook, that we have been trying to get up and running in North Queensland. We have had problems there because some people have said, 'We don't want Aboriginal kids in our area.' How sad is that. How sad is it that that view from a few people, not a lot of people, stops us from going ahead and providing very worthy programs—adventure based programs, physical activity and supported and structured programs—to a high-need group.

I know the member for Barron River has been a strong advocate in making sure the need to get on with programs for young people is balanced with the need for me as minister to hear the concerns of some of the members in his community. That is one of the areas where there is capital involved. Most of these programs are support type programs. I have visited services in Rockhampton. The Rockhampton Skills Centre is linked to our Youth Justice Program and the PCYC. I saw young people in action there on equipment doing woodwork and training stuff. They also have Access 10 where they are learning year 10 English and getting their school certificate. These are very important programs.

**Mrs MENKENS:** I refer to SDS page 3-17. Why have successful completions of conditional bail programs decreased both generally and for Indigenous participants?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I am just getting some detail in relation to your reference. Was it page 3-17?

**Mrs MENKENS:** Yes, it is halfway down the page.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** There is a moderate change in the service standards there. My understanding of the conditional bail programs is that police are advised when young people breach the conditions of their bail. In the Youth Justice Act I introduced into the parliament, we have strengthened the powers of the police if young offenders breach their community service order or the agreement out of their youth justice conference. If those young people breach their conditional bail, they will certainly be swiftly put back into detention or end up in detention.

By looking at the data you have referred to here, I note that a successful completion rate of 62 per cent is seen in relative terms as reasonably positive, as this target group is often young people who are at that high-risk end of offending—that group which is in that lifestyle and that pattern of offending. They are what we might call a hard-core group at that stage of their offending pattern or pathway. So 62 per cent is seen in relative terms in the youth justice system here and in other jurisdictions as a reasonably positive rate. We are not expecting that all of them will satisfy the conditions of their bail.

**Mrs MENKENS:** Minister, I refer to page 26 of the Capital Statement and ask why there is a 19½ per cent underspend in multipurpose and neighbourhood community centres. Instead of the budgeted \$20.533 million to be spent last year, \$16.534 million was spent—nearly \$4 million short. This year's budget, less than \$6 million, is only slightly larger than the backlog. Why promise community facilities if you fail to deliver them?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I thank the member for the question. Again I make the point that capital programs are rolling programs. Therefore, a plan is made for the rollout of neighbourhood centres, communities have input into those and they have input into the design of those. I know that a new one is planned for the Marlin Coast. I have been speaking to the mayor in relation to Windorah. I will just check with my Attorney-General: is there a new one planned for Windorah? There are a number of new neighbourhood centres planned—for Pine Rivers, Gympie, Smithfield, Caloundra, Mount Isa and Windorah. I think that is quite a positive achievement in a difficult fiscal environment.

Neighbourhood centres are very important community hubs. But, as I said, capital works are a rolling program. Again, I think we had issues in North Queensland about the location of the new centre, and the member has been communicating with me about that. That all takes time and sometimes it adds to delays. Is my time up? Give me another one. I had some good news about Charters Towers.

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

**Mrs SMITH:** Minister, I refer to the Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 1989 review and the integrated domestic family violence model on trial in Rockhampton. I know the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre on the Gold Coast, coordinated by the indefatigable Donna Justo, is keenly awaiting the results of this trial. However, can you advise what your department is doing to assist people experiencing domestic violence?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I thank the member for the question. I have provided some commentary on this, but I will add to that. We have seen the number of domestic violence orders grow from around 3,000 applications in 1989-90 when the act first came into being to more than 21,000 in 2008-09—a very disturbing growth in this problem. Certainly the problem existed but we are hearing more about it, and we have the legislation and the remedies available for people that were not there over 15 or 20 years ago.

In July 2009 the Bligh government released a five-year strategy called *For our sons and daughters*, which provided a framework for creating strong partnerships across government and non-government sectors. I know that you have great programs operating on the Gold Coast. The breaking the cycle trial is underway in Rockhampton with a \$2.7 million funding grant for 20 months. Since November 2009, courts, police and support services have been working with domestic violence victims to ensure a coordinated response. In 2009-10 this included about \$600,000 for Relationships Australia, Centacare, Anglicare, the Women's Health and Information Referral Service, and Helem Yumbah to provide services as part of the trial as well as their existing services.

As at the start of June, about 100 people have accepted help through the breaking the cycle team. Good on the magistrates and the police in Rocky! They have really got behind this and are leading much of this work. A total of 76 people experiencing domestic violence and 21 perpetrators have been through this program, but that is not all that we are doing in Rocky. That is certainly a new integrated model and one we will be looking to for any learnings from it.

In 2010 the Department of Communities spent about \$34 million on a range of services, and I spoke about some of them earlier. In 2010-11 we expect to spend closer to \$37 million so there is a growth in funding to domestic violence services. There are 101 services under the domestic violence and family support program; 53 services under the homelessness program; and 14 organisations run domestic violence awareness programs.

We said that we would review the Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act, and that is what we are doing. We said that we would establish an expert death review panel to oversee current coronial processes and practices, and that is what we are doing. The Bligh government wants to know what

works and what does not when it comes to protecting victims and holding perpetrators accountable. In March we launched a consultation paper. There have been 22 forums attended by over 360 people, and I know that Donna Justo and others whom you have mentioned have been part of these forums. A total of 212 submissions have been received including 77 written and a further 135 through the Get Involved website.

**Mr WETTENHALL:** Minister, with reference to page 3-5 of the SDS, the Queensland government has committed to lifting our volunteer numbers by 50 per cent by 2020 as part of its Q2 targets. Can the minister outline what the government is doing to assist people wanting to volunteer and to ensure their volunteering experience is a positive one so that they may be encouraged to continue to volunteer into the future?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I thank the member for the question. We talked earlier about neighbourhood centres. I will just correct the record in relation to neighbourhood centres. They are usually a hub of volunteer activity, but I mentioned a new one for Windorah. Sorry, not Windorah; it is Winton.

**Mrs Kiernan** interjected.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Sorry, that is your area. You probably knew I had said the wrong thing. The Department of Communities is the lead agency through the Office for Volunteering. We have a number of offices in the Department of Communities. The Office for Volunteering is an engine room, driving change and supporting volunteering activities around the state to meet our Q2 volunteering target. The Office for Volunteering works with government and the community to increase volunteering and build on the current Valuing Volunteers policy.

In 2009-10, key volunteering initiatives funded by the Department of Communities included around \$250,000, its annual funding for Volunteering Queensland, \$106,000 to support the development of Volbase, \$51,000 for Golden Gurus—a great project which I launched last year at the Mater Hospital and which links skilled older volunteers with community organisations seeking their expertise—\$35,000 for the Queensland Young Volunteer Awards and the young volunteers speaking tour. We have developed yearly volunteering target plans to map our way forward including introducing new initiatives through those plans.

This year our target delivery plan will focus on identifying some of the barriers that organisations are facing and potential volunteers are facing to volunteering. We will certainly be working across government to develop best practice government volunteering programs. A promotional campaign will be introduced. We will be implementing the tourism volunteering portal. We will be running regional volunteering forums to get local ideas about how to address barriers like transport and other practical costs that are barriers to volunteering. The Ready Readers program has been a highly successful new initiative which the Premier announced with the education minister this year.

It is encouraging that the latest Queensland household survey has found that 67 per cent of adults volunteered through an organisation or by helping someone other than a relative. It is the first time in Queensland that informal volunteering levels have been measured alongside formal volunteering through organisations. I think it really shows that Queenslanders are willing to lend a hand and make a difference, and we are particularly keen to get more young people involved in volunteering.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** Minister, I was going to say that it is Winton. As you know, it is a terrific little community, but it is not Windorah; it is Winton.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I went to the Premier's Christmas Concert in Winton.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** You did indeed.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** And what a great day we had there.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** We had a terrific day.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** There was a bit of hippy hippy, shake shake, let me tell you!

**Mrs KIERNAN:** Absolutely there was at that one, yes.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** There was a lot of hippy hippy, shake shake and there was a lot of whip cracking.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** Yes, there was whip cracking. We had a good time. We love Winton. Minister, I refer to 3-5 of the SDS and the Bligh government's commitment to supporting Queensland's vulnerable individuals, children and families. In light of the social, economic and community hardship that many victims of natural disasters are forced to endure, can the minister outline what basic support was provided to Queenslanders to recover from natural disasters such as emergency payments for food, clothing and shelter? I thank departmental officers in the Mount Isa electorate for what they have done for the people of my community.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Thank you for that feedback on the departmental support provided in Mount Isa. I will certainly pass that on, although many of them will be tuning in today, I am sure. Seriously, there has been endless hardship for people through this period of unprecedented natural disasters. People in

St George, in the south-west area and in other parts of the state such as Mackay have experienced significant hardship, but the state government works in collaboration with councils and community organisations to provide practical support, accommodation, financial assistance and much more.

Between January and April this year we certainly had more than our fair share, with cyclones and other disasters. We had six regional councils and seven shire councils across Queensland affected. Our actions ensured individuals, families and communities had the information and support they needed to recover from this hardship. Between 1 January and 30 June 2010 we received over 19,000 calls for assistance and over 10,000 online applications for assistance. We have paid over \$20,000 emergent assistance grants for food, clothing, medical supplies and accommodation, totalling over \$7.7 million.

The government has paid over 880 essential household contents grants totalling over \$780,000, and we have progressed 39 structural assistance grant applications to help repair uninsured residences. We have helped thousands of Queenslanders get back on their feet. We have provided food, water, clothing and shelter. We have provided outreach to affected households. In one example one of our departmental officers who was deployed to Roma—and some of these people have come from Brisbane and other centres and have readily put their hand up to go out to help—purchased baby formula on her way out to Roma and took it with her because there was an instance where baby formula was needed. In another example, families on isolated properties required medication, food, nappies and baby formula, and the recovery centre manager organised these to be delivered via the Emergency Management Queensland chopper. We provided financial assistance to numerous families who lost everything. Financial assistance was used to purchase food, clothing, medication and other essential household goods.

We have recruited and trained a whole-of-government recovery workforce of over 115 individuals from across 11 departments. Over 520 people were deployed to support the response to cyclones and flooding between February and May 2010, and I thank all community recovery staff in my agency and others across government and all the community members who volunteered. Again, they are great examples of Aussie mateship in action around the state.

**CHAIR:** I refer to page 3-16 of the SDS and the support provided to young people. Could you advise how the government's youth programs are supporting young people who would otherwise be excluded from participating, such as youth at risk, Indigenous youth, youth who are disengaged from education and youth from rural Queensland?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I thank the member. I commented on some of these earlier, but this gives me a chance to expand on them. We have funded 30 Youth Week activities attended by over 8,150 young people in regions around the state. When I was in the Atherton Tablelands for community cabinet earlier this year, I met an impressive bunch of young people from Atherton, Ravenshoe and other parts of the tableland, and we talked about a range of issues including housing stress, drug issues and a range of things. I talked to them about our youth programs and particularly our youth leadership programs, and surprise, surprise a couple of them enrolled in the YMCA Queensland Youth Parliament. Just in this room a number of months ago when that was on, a couple of them came up to me and reintroduced themselves and said how pleased they were to get involved. I said to them—because I cannot remember everything—'How did you hear about it?' 'You told us about it,' they said. It was great to see that their youth involvement had been organised through our grants in that region. Through that, they got that next opportunity to come to Brisbane—the big smoke—and be part of the YMCA youth program.

We have certainly funded a range of events right around the state for more than 40 per cent of targeted young Indigenous people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. A multimedia exhibition took on the negative stigma unfairly associated with children and young people in care. That was one of the events that we had at Parliament House.

One of the government's most well recognised youth programs, the Duke of Edinburgh Awards, and I will participating in those in this room in a few weeks time, has targeted some of our most disadvantaged young people. That has certainly been great to see. That included young people in detention. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, young men who have disengaged with education are all encouraged and supported to participate in these awards.

Some \$20,000 goes towards making small sponsorships for organisations. There are many other activities. There is some really positive youth support and youth leadership work underway around the state, supported by our department and often delivered in partnership with non-government organisations.

**CHAIR:** That brings the committee's examination of the estimates for the Community Services portfolio to a close. The committee will adjourn for a short break. At 5.30 pm we will commence our examination of the estimates for the Housing and Women portfolios.

**Proceedings suspended from 5.20 pm to 5.30 pm**

**CHAIR:** The Estimates Committee F hearing is resumed. The committee will now examine the estimates for the Housing and Women portfolios. The committee's examination will continue until 6.30 pm. 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 Burdekin.

**Mrs MENKENS:** I refer to question on notice No. 400 and the nation-building housing program at page 3-6 of the SDS. I seek leave to table some photographs. The first pages are photographs of a squat in Fortitude Valley in the Brisbane central district where at least 250 people are known to be homeless. There are a total of 27 social housing vacancies. The later photographs are Palm Cove and Trinity Park. There is a waiting list of one person in the northern beaches area and a total of 100 vacancies—14 per cent of all vacancies across the state. Where would you build the social housing?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** The member has put a number of components into that question. Let me try to deal with them as best I can to do justice to each part. You have raised issues firstly about Nation Building. So let me talk about Nation Building and then about the location of our projects around the state.

Firstly, let me say that Nation Building is giving us the biggest ever investment in social housing this nation, this state has ever seen. Who opposed that? Who opposed that spend? Who opposed and who has denied Queensland over \$1 billion in stimulus package funding for housing? Let me ask you a question member for Burdekin. The conservatives federally opposed the Nation Building package. You are part of that group; you are part of that team. I did not hear you in the parliament of Queensland calling out for Mr Rudd—

**Mrs MENKENS:** \$90 billion debt.

**Ms STRUTHERS:**—to spend money on an investment stimulus package. I heard your people opposing it. We have the biggest and best investment ever in social housing. Over 4,000 units of social housing are being built now and will be built over the next 12 to 18 months.

They are needed all around the state. This is a new era in social housing. We are not going to concentrate social housing on the fringes of communities. We are going to give kids and families every possible opportunity to get on in life. People in social housing are people you and I know. They are people who might have gone through a divorce or have separated and fall on hard times.

**Mrs MENKENS:** Many good people.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** They are working people. They are people who are unemployed. They are people on pensions. They are young people. There are children in those families. They do not want to be, they do not need to be and they are not going to thrive on the edges of communities. But the legacy of past policies in this country and in this state have been to concentrate social housing on the fringes of communities. This is a new era in public housing and social housing. You will not even be able to identify some of our housing when compared to others because it is some of the best, well designed—

**Mrs MENKENS:** Which is why that Brisbane central district needs more.

**Ms STRUTHERS:**—aesthetically pleasing housing you could ever wish to live in. We are in the process of rolling out this housing right across the state. It is our biggest ever investment. In our Capital Works Program alone some 1,329 new dwellings have been added. That is over and above our original target this year of 993. We commenced construction of 3,223 dwellings against an original target of 1,710.

In our capital grants programs—that is, grants to community organisations to provide housing for people in need—we added 339 units of accommodation to the social housing portfolio, commenced construction of 958 units of accommodation and completed 382 upgrades to Indigenous council dwellings to ensure an appropriate standard of housing. This is a program we should all support.

But who does not support this? Who questions this? Who doubts this? Who mocks this? The LNP in Queensland. Why? Because their federal counterparts rejected the nation-building housing program. Their federal counterparts rejected this in the federal parliament and they are locked in now. They cannot get out there and say how wonderful this is because their leader, the Abbott family, has rejected this.

**Mrs MENKENS:** With reference to the Office for Women on page 3-23 of the SDS, why is there a new measure of cross-government satisfaction yet stakeholder satisfaction has been discounted? Is it really more important to impress your colleagues than your clients? Given the increase in the number of requests for services, why is the Women's Infolink closing as a separate entity?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Can I get you to repeat the last part of the question?

**Mrs MENKENS:** Why is the Women's Infolink closing as a separate entity?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** The Office for Women is an engine room providing support around the state. We have had a very high rate of satisfaction for those services both from clients around the state as well as clients of other agencies. They are the clients of this engine room. Clients are people in other government agencies as well as the general public around the state. I am very satisfied that there is a high level of satisfaction with the services of the Office for Women.

As I have said many times today, they are doing great things. You have been to some of their programs. I have been to women leadership programs in Emerald. We have had one in Boonah. They are all around the state. I think we have had them in Mount Isa. This is the sort of work that the Office for Women does. They have the Women in Hard Hats program and the Women in Hard Hats website. They do work with the Mining Council and with the Women in Engineering association. I attended an event in Mount Isa with the Women in Engineering association. It is all really good work that they are doing around the state. They are driving change, driving opportunities for women.

I have asked the Office for Women to focus on promoting and advancing women's economic prosperity and that is what they are doing. That is what their work plan lays out. I asked the Office for Women to adopt a hub and spoke model and have some of their staff posted in key government agencies. That is what they are doing. They have regional staff already. I want to build on that by having staff posted in other government agencies to drive change in those agencies.

There is a high level of satisfaction in the Office for Women. I am surprised and disturbed that the member for Burdekin continually undermines the work of the Office for Women. She continually undermines even the need for the Office for Women.

**Mrs MENKENS:** I refer to Nation Building again on page 3-6 of the SDS. An email from the assistant director-general concerning the Trinity Park development states—

Linda Apelt has signed off on the SPA approval because there were no planning reasons why she could refuse the project. We have looked at other options, but we are constantly reminded that this is a stimulus package.

Why did you as minister and the director-general put economic needs ahead of community concerns?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Again, the premise of the question is totally wrong and mischievous. Let me put that upfront. Let me put another thing upfront. Nation Building is a stimulus package providing economic opportunities and housing opportunities around the state and around the nation. Who opposed it? I think we have clarified that in an earlier answer. The conservative governments around Australia opposed this package.

It disturbs me that the member is criticising us for the work we are doing on Nation Building and in trying to roll out housing for people who need it most. It is driving jobs—hundreds of jobs around the state, as I mentioned earlier. It has provided much needed housing for people who need it most.

There are thousands of locations around the state. There are thousands of projects around the state. It is an exciting opportunity to be able to provide this much housing to people in need. Every community has social housing. Guess how many social housing dwellings are in Port Douglas? Give me a number?

**Mrs KIERNAN:** Nine.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Thirty-four. In a tourist city like Port Douglas there are 34 social housing dwellings. How long have they been there?

**Mrs KIERNAN:** A lot of years.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Some of them for 10 years. How many are already in Trinity Park? How many social housing units do we already have in Trinity Park? Ten, and there are more on the way. Every community has social housing.

The member for Burdekin is part of a team that opposes this. She is part of a team where her own leader said, 'Not these people. Not in this location.' Where was he referring to? Surfers Paradise. But how many units of social housing do we have in Surfers Paradise? I actually do not know that, I would have to find out. I thought one of you might know.

The reality is that people need opportunities. The best thing you can do for people is provide a safe and secure roof over their heads, if you have the capacity to do that, and help them with skills and a job. That is what we are doing. This does both. This stimulus package is one of the most significant legacies of Kevin Rudd. He can go out on a big note here because he has introduced some really important programs with the support of his team.

I do not want to be part of an Abbott family. I am sure if you had some good sense, you would start challenging your federal colleagues about their federal decisions. You would start challenging the view—

**Mrs MENKENS:** I don't think so.

**Ms STRUTHERS:**—that you want to model yourself on the Western Australian model.

**Mrs MENKENS:** This is ridiculous.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** As I said early, guess what they have done in Western Australia?

**Mr HOBBS:** Where did Rudd go? Where has he been? He's gone.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** The three per cent dividend cut that you wanted, guess what that has meant? Some \$17 million gone from concessions.

**Mr HOBBS:** If you would talk about your portfolio and not politics that would be great. It would be a start. That is all you can talk about. You know nothing about your portfolio.

**Mrs MENKENS:** We do support public housing and there is a huge need for public housing in appropriate places. That is where it must be put. In February this year an email from the director-general regarding Trinity Park stated—

Do you think we should reassess this project? My sense is, it is going to be more trouble than it is worth.

The assistant director-general added—

I think we should get rid of this project.

Why did this project go ahead after this advice? Could you answer that question please, Minister?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** The project that the member is referring to in Trinity Park is a very important project. We already have social housing in Trinity Park and we are continuing to build some more. The reality is that there is always robust debate over locations. We had over 30,000.

**Mrs MENKENS:** This is a totally inappropriate area, with no housing need.

**Mr WETTENHALL:** You don't even know where the location is.

**CHAIR:** Please no more interjections. I want the minister to answer the question.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Under the nation-building housing program we had over 30,000 units of accommodation that people tended for—

**Mrs MENKENS:** This is an inappropriate area.

**Mr WETTENHALL:** You don't even know where it is. You put the wrong location on the map.

**CHAIR:** The minister has the floor.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** We had the opportunity to debate and discuss many hundreds and thousands of locations. Over 30,000 requests were put forward under the tender process. We could only choose, because we only had enough money—a billion dollars plus—for about 4,000. We picked those that met value for money criteria. We picked those that are in areas where they are needed most. That is what we have done it. These areas in the northern beaches of Cairns need social housing. There are people doing it tough in Cairns.

**Mrs MENKENS:** There is one person on the waiting list.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Fifty per cent of the construction industry has been in decline. There has been 12 per cent unemployment.

**Mr HOBBS:** What is the wait list?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** As at the end of March the numbers given to me—

**Mrs MENKENS:** Not in northern beaches area—there is one person.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Not on the register in northern beaches of Cairns.

**Mrs MENKENS:** With reference to 3-10 of the SDS and the Indigenous housing national partnership why was Queensland the worst performing state to the extent of losing \$3.1 million for failing the deadline by 19 houses. With Western Australia, New South Wales and the Northern Territory all managing to exceed their requirements, what is so difficult about building houses in Queensland other than the poor planning of this government?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Again, I reject the notion underpinning this question. This department of housing is to be commended for the massive rollout of housing across the state. With the remote Indigenous housing program we are dealing in Queensland with 34 communities and around 16 councils. Each of those communities has tenure over that land. We do not have freehold land on those remote communities. So that is part of the difference.

New South Wales is dealing totally with freehold land. So they can say, 'Who wants the houses?' The hands go up and they roll out the housing. We said that we have a partnership with the federal government, a remote Indigenous housing rollout—\$1 billion over 10 years; the biggest ever investment—and asked 'Who wants to be part of the action?' They all put up their hands. When they heard that there were 40 year leases as a requirement of that program—that requirement put by the federal government—they said, 'Hang on, a land grab.'

**Mrs MENKENS:** The Northern Territory can do it; why not Queensland?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** The issue in Queensland is that we negotiated in good faith with the mayors, with community leaders and with traditional owners. Do you know what happened? When the first lease was signed with Kowanyama in February 2010—in that four month period—46 houses were rolled out. We could not put a brick, a slab or anything down on a piece of land until we had secured tenure.

You just cannot ride over these communities and their land rights. I cannot explain it any better than that. I am absolutely disappointed that we were penalised. It is a small penalty given the scale of the program. My message to the federal minister is this: you told us the rules. We knew the rules, so it was not a surprise. But she understands as well that we did not have freehold land. She understands that, but the rules were there.

No community will be disadvantaged. We are rolling out a massive program. In fact, as at the end of August I think we will have 83 houses—well in excess of the target. We had more than 70 on the ground before the end of June, but not all were connected to electricity and sewerage. Essentially, I want to say publicly in this forum that my department did a massive job. Good on the mayors and the community leaders. They did their job, too. They were going to stick to their guns. They were not going to let us sign up to 40-year leases until they had read the fine print and until they had got the lawyers on the job, and we now have a great outcome. The member for Mount Isa, the member for Barron River and others who have been involved in these negotiations know how tough they were, and we had this silly fellow with his cowboy hat and his boots stalking me around the state, scaremongering on 40-year leases. How shameful that is!

**Mrs MENKENS:** Minister, let us go back to Trinity Park and Palm Cove housing, then. Could you tell us what client type is being planned for these projects? Is it low-income workers or people with disabilities, as stated by the CPP; targeted transfers, as named by the social housing project; small families, as stated by the Nation Building manager; bus drivers, as named by the director-general; or high-needs clients, as on the actual register in Cairns?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** We might tick a number of those boxes. Social housing clients, as I said earlier, come from all walks of life. I have met with residents in that Trinity Park area. I have been to the site. The director-general has met with residents. Let me say that we have given an undertaking to this community that we will allocate tenants and support their tenancies as much as we possibly can, and we certainly do a good job in that. We will be allocating primarily people with jobs—working people, key workers for the tourism, hospitality and health industries in North Queensland. We will be allocating the houses—

**Mrs MENKENS:** But that is not the criteria in the stimulus package. It is not for workers; it is for homeless people.

**CHAIR:** Order, member! The minister is answering the question.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** There will be people with disabilities. Some of those units are fully adaptable—

**Mrs MENKENS:** But they are trying to—

**CHAIR:** I would ask the member for Burdekin to allow the minister to answer the question.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Let me tell you a little bit more about the face of, as the member referred to them, these people or these clients. 'Andrew' is a bus driver. 'Andrew' is a 60-year-old grandfather of three who lived with his family until his wife, 'Sandra', was diagnosed with cancer. Difficulties occurred in that family with his wife gone. He was on a disability pension from an injury he received. He could not continue with his bus driving, was suffering from grief and was almost suicidal. He went to the local housing office and was placed on our register of need. A guy who had been mostly independent throughout his life in a time of need went to the department of housing. He is the sort of fellow that may be allocated to Trinity Park. I have used a different name for anonymity, but these are people whom we all know. These are people in our families and communities whom we all know. Why can't bus drivers, taxidivers, new workers and apprentices live in Palm Cove or Trinity Park? They already do. That is the reality. Trinity Park and Palm Cove are beautiful parts of the world, but they are mixed communities. I have walked around them. I have been there. I am not sure if the member has, apart from attending a public meeting.

**Mrs MENKENS:** Yes, I have been there several times.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Social housing is in communities everywhere around the state, and that will continue. As I said earlier, people need to be part of resourceful communities. They need to get their lives back on track, and that can be any one of us at any point in our lives.

**Mrs MENKENS:** Thanks, Minister. Let us go back to the Office for Women, shall we, for a change? With reference to the Office for Women on page 3-21 of the SDS—and, Minister, given the time and the detail you could perhaps take this on notice if necessary—why has the Mason report never been publicly released? How many successful collaborations have resulted from the hub-and-spoke model that you have spoken about? What is the current status of the hub-and-spoke model? How many programs have been rolled out in the last year under this model?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Again, I thank the member for the question. I have met with Carolyn Mason, and she did a very good report of the Office for Women. In her report she found that there could be a lot more work done to drive change for women for the benefit of women across other agencies, and that is what we have done. The hub-and-spoke model did not come out of the sky; I am not that clever. It came from an evidence based report that essentially said, 'You need to drive more change in other agencies across the government.'

**Mrs MENKENS:** So what has happened with it and what has developed out of it?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** As an engine room, that is what the Office for Women is doing and has been doing. We have staff outposted to key agencies of government. For instance, one or two officers are located in the department of industrial relations. They are driving change to improve pay equity for women. They are driving change to ensure work/life balance for women. This is critical work—good work—and I am very satisfied that the Office for Women is involved in rolling out excellent programs such as women's leadership programs. Hundreds of women have participated in those around the state. It has held 10 Indigenous community leadership programs attended by around 407 women across the state.

**Mrs MENKENS:** Will we see the Mason report?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I would need to check whether it has been released, but there was nothing controversial in it. In fact, I have talked it up at public events. So I will check for you and I will get some information before the end of the session.

**Mrs MENKENS:** Excellent.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** If it has not been released, it certainly will be. It was a good report, and Carolyn Mason and her team are to be credited with good work. I feel satisfied that we have really taken their recommendations forward.

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

**Mrs SMITH:** Minister, the Department of Communities manages a large portfolio of properties, 50 of which are under construction in the Burleigh electorate—and I would welcome more. There are an increasing number of support options for people experiencing housing stress, including bond loans. One new product offered by the Bligh government is the RentConnect service. Can you report on the success of the RentConnect program in regions throughout Queensland?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I thank the member for the question. I am pleased to talk about the range of products that the Department of Communities offers to support people in housing stress. Many applicants will be housed in social housing, but many others who have a lower level of need may be seeking other forms of assistance. One of those new products that assists people to get into the private rental market is RentConnect.

Some 27 per cent of people live in private rental accommodation and many people will need support to actually break into the market, particularly young people who do not have a rental record or references. Some people are discriminated against on the basis of culture or family size, for instance. Sometimes larger families find it hard. RentConnect is based in our housing offices around the state. It assists people in our community who may be having difficulty finding a home to rent and may not necessarily qualify for social housing. So our department can offer a range of products along this continuum of need. As I said, large families certainly find it difficult, and we have been getting success through the pilot we commenced in Rockhampton and the one in Caboolture. We started that in 2008 and we have now expanded to 14 locations throughout Queensland including locations in Brisbane, Caboolture, Cairns, Robina on the Gold Coast, Mackay, Townsville, Ipswich, Toowoomba, Maroochydore and Bundaberg. Some 1,117 people had been assisted up to 30 June 2010.

Again, I think case studies can illustrate a point, so let me give you a case study. I will call this woman 'Sue', but that is not her real name. She was a young woman—a homeless woman—living in a car. She needed a place where she could stay. She had a young partner I will call 'Tom'. Neither of them had rented before and they had no rental history and no references. She had certainly been sleeping rough and was very vulnerable at a young age. She searched websites and scanned newspapers to find a suitable rental home. She fronted our housing office. We assessed her as someone who may benefit from RentConnect. She was then assisted into a private rental. So not everyone in our department is seeking or needing or will receive long-term social housing. We have a range of other products, and RentConnect has been a highly successful one. The Real Estate Industry of Queensland has had staff attending launches with me around the state and has been very supportive of this initiative.

**CHAIR:** Page 3-21 of the SDS reports that the total average concession available to social housing tenants is \$7,253. Minister, can you explain how this housing concession helps people with cost of living pressures?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Again, I thank the member for the question. When I attended her seniors forum in Kallangur recently the value of social housing was certainly recognised by seniors in that group, and I think you had 120 or so people there that afternoon. As I said, we have certainly been doing what we can to help people through tough times, and social housing tenants benefit from paying only 25 per cent of their household income in rent. It is calculated by the Department of Communities to be equivalent to an average benefit of around \$7,253 a year. That average is calculated by comparing social housing rents to rents for similar properties paying full market based rents. Obviously there will be

some people who receive a benefit worth more than that, but it clearly shows how valuable social housing is to people—how valuable it is to actually get that level of benefit by being in a social housing dwelling.

It is certainly significantly higher than payments made by Centrelink for rent assistance for those in private rental. Centrelink payments vary from around \$2,948 per year for a single pensioner to \$3,917 for a pensioner with three children. Also, the Service Delivery Statements show that we expend through the department an average of \$3,235 per household in maintenance. That is what we will expend on average this year. If you calculate that with the \$7,000, essentially the benefit of social housing to people exceeds \$10,000 a year. For some they are on a pension only getting \$13,000 or \$14,000 or less a year. Social housing is so important, and what disturbs me as housing minister is the extent to which this is undermined. It is such a valuable support to people. It is so important that we extend and expand social housing throughout the state and that we spread that through communities rather than go back to the old days when people were concentrated on the fringes of communities. I thank people—good advocates—such as Fred Morris in Cairns. He bails me up every time I am in North Queensland to let me know what the public housing tenants group is doing there. He is very proud and very keen to promote tenants and how important social housing is to people.

**Mr WETTENHALL:** Minister, I refer you to the Capital Statement at pages 23 to 29, which outline the activities of the Housing and Homelessness Services office in your department. These references illustrate the record spending on new housing and homelessness services and other programs. The global financial crisis has impacted heavily on regional Queensland and especially the Cairns region, where unemployment has reached over 12 per cent. I welcome the massive injection of stimulus funding provided to assist local economies. It has provided welcome relief to those whose jobs were at risk due to the global financial crisis. Can the minister explain to the committee how the stimulus package has benefited Queenslanders and especially the Cairns region?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Again, I thank the member for the question and acknowledge that he has spoken to me on many occasions and invited me to his community to talk with people about social housing projects in his community. He has certainly been a strong advocate not only for public housing but also for ensuring that people have a say, and I thank him for that.

In partnership with the Australian government, we are delivering over 220 new dwellings across 33 projects in Cairns. We are on track to deliver more than 3,200 new social housing dwellings by the end of this year across Queensland. The building program will also provide approximately 400 people with employment in the Cairns area. As I have said, across the far north we are looking at more jobs—about 700 jobs—across that region. The Bligh government said that we would provide jobs, and that is what we are doing. This is particularly important in a region like Cairns where, as you have acknowledged, the construction industry has suffered a 50 per cent downturn—probably the worst of any region. The Gold Coast I think has had a lower downturn of around 20 per cent but certainly a downturn nonetheless. I know that the latest employment figures show an improvement, but there is still a long way to go.

Of course, the other advantage in our housing role is the opportunity that we are providing for people who are doing it tough to gain secure, long-term accommodation. We are instigating tenancy management arrangements and programs to help a range of people in a range of circumstances to sustain their tenancies. We are working to ensure that our tenants get the support they need and we are also working to ensure an appropriate mix of tenants to achieve the best outcome for communities.

Social housing tenants, as I have said, come from all walks of life: seniors, people with a disability, key workers on low incomes, bus drivers, tourist operators, health workers, aged care nurses. They are across all walks of life—people who have been involved in accidents. For instance, some of the allocations to the Trinity Park project may be people out of the spinal injuries unit from the Cairns Hospital. We are absolutely determined to offer people who are doing it tough a chance to get their lives back on track. I think I have been making it abundantly clear how valuable social housing is across all of our communities.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** Minister, Queensland has a large number of remote Indigenous communities, mostly throughout the gulf, Cape York and the Torres Strait. I refer to pages 3-6 and 3-7 of the SDS. I know that through your many statements in parliament a lot is happening in these remote communities and I know that from my own experience, especially with the significant allocation of funds through the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing to help reduce overcrowding and to improve economic opportunities. I also again recognise and offer my thanks for the strong leadership both in Doomadgee and Mornington and the work that was done. Would you explain how remote Indigenous communities are benefiting from the injection of funds for new housing and upgrades?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I thank the mighty member for Mount Isa, because I know she has been in those communities—Mornington Island and others—supporting the community leaders to understand the 40-year leases. She has played a really important role in helping us move through the concerns and issues around those leases. Certainly, the job opportunities that will come from housing is something that I know you have been explaining and talking about and the mayors have spoken very positively about your role.

Our government is absolutely determined to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage. As I have said, one of the best ways to do that is to reduce overcrowding, give people housing and the economic opportunities that come with that. Remote Indigenous housing—the national partnership that we have with the federal government—will deliver 1,141 new homes and around 1,216 upgrades over 10 years. That is on top of the state allocation that we have to Indigenous housing. This amounts to over \$1 billion in investment in those remote communities over the life of that program.

It provides also a guaranteed revenue stream to councils through lease and rates payments. That is the other thing that we had to take time to negotiate. Unlike other jurisdictions, we sat around the table with the community leaders and said, 'Look, we weren't successful with the Commonwealth in saying we don't think we need 40-year leases on your land but that is what we had to do as part of the deal. But what we will give you in return is rates-equivalent lease payments.' Through leasing and rates payments, that will certainly provide an income stream to councils. They were happy with that generally and that helped us secure their confidence in the 40-year leases and get the go-ahead on the program.

It has been a very important process of negotiation across those communities. They know and they want the economic development and the jobs and we have a 20 per cent Indigenous employment target on these projects. That is all part of the work of our remote Indigenous housing program office operating out of Cairns and our departmental staff in working with communities to get the jobs—the economic activity—as well as the housing. Twelve councils under the national partnership agreement have agreed to the 40-year leases I mentioned earlier. Kowanyama signed up first in February and what a massive undertaking and what a wonderful undertaking this department achieved in a matter of four months—46 dwellings in four months.

As I said earlier, we could not put a brick down, we could not put a slab down until we had signing on the dotted line. So I commend the mayors and please pass on my good wishes to Fred and others. I know that they have done it tough explaining this to their communities. The traditional owners and others had to have a say in this as well. In addition, the Bligh government will spend over \$102 million developing an extra 112 dwellings and upgrading 472 dwellings in the coming year for Indigenous housing across the state.

**Mrs SMITH:** Minister, in March this year, together with the federal minister for housing, the Hon. Tanya Plibersek, you announced a new concept to help house the chronically homeless in the inner city of Brisbane. Page 3-6 of the SDS mentions that the national partnership agreement between the Queensland and the Australian governments will assist people who are homeless. Would you tell us how the supportive housing project will help those people who have been living rough for many years move into accommodation and access the support they need to get back on track?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I thank the member for the question. Just before I answer that, I might just respond to an earlier question from the member for Burdekin about the Office for Women and the Mason report. The Mason report was used to provide me with advice. It has not been publicly released. I can certainly make it publicly available. Carolyn Mason in her report did not specifically refer to a hub-and-spoke model—give it that title—but she talked about that process of driving change across government agencies, the need for gender analysis across government agencies in the work that we do. So, therefore, when we are running employment programs we make sure that women's needs are taken into account in those. So it is very important work. I am happy to make it publicly available.

In relation to your question, again with the support of the Labor federal government we have an innovative National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness. The Bligh government and the Australian government have committed more than \$200 million over four years to reduce homelessness in Queensland. The commitment will build on Queensland's successful \$235 million Responding to Homelessness initiative that was already in place. Brisbane Common Ground is based on the successful model developed in New York to accommodate and support the homeless people in that area. It is about more than putting a roof over people's heads; it is about giving long-term support to help address chronic illness, alcohol and substance abuse, mental illness and other underlying causes that many of these rough sleepers have experienced. So this is targeting that specific group of people. This is not the more general group I spoke about earlier; this is a specific group of people that this model will work with to provide accommodation and support.

We have provided \$1.24 million to the well-regarded non-government organisation Micah Projects to provide street-to-home services and support people within this new initiative. The Common Ground project will see over 270 tradies working to build the accommodation. Certainly, our government is doing again what we said we would do: we are creating jobs. Our commitment to reduce homelessness is providing services across the state, including street-to-home initiatives, providing assertive outreach to chronically homeless people, HomeStay to support people at risk of homelessness remain in their own home—so that is helping people who may be suffering or experiencing domestic violence—and programs to help young people exiting care or detention get secure accommodation and get settled back into their own communities. We cannot reduce homelessness if we do not have somewhere for people to live. That is why these funding programs and partnerships—the NPA on

homelessness, the NPA on social housing, the stimulus package—are all such important initiatives. Who drives these? Labor governments. Who rejects them? Who wants us to go backwards? Conservative governments.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** Minister, as you are aware from your many trips to my electorate of Mount Isa and our visits to community organisations, public intoxication and homelessness is a real concern in our community. I refer to page 3-6 of the SDS and ask what the Queensland government is doing in my electorate of Mount Isa and other regional centres to help those often vulnerable members of our community. Can I ask that in your response you also provide an update on the plans for the new Mount Isa Youth Shelter and their service?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** As the member knows, people become homeless for many reasons. It can be illness, disease, something out of their control, changing personal circumstances, family breakdown, losing a job. All of those sorts of things can impact on any one of us. This government is certainly recognising that homelessness is a complex issue and there is no one solution, no one size fits all. That is why we have a range of programs around the state to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

As I said earlier, in 2005 we committed over \$235 million to the Responding to Homelessness Strategy in Queensland and the NPA on homelessness with the federal government has come on top of that. So there is a great commitment from both levels of government to really make an impact in this area. We have established a coordinated and integrated approach to responding to issues of public intoxication and homelessness. There are hot spots around the state and I have visited these communities and talked to police, service providers and others to see how we can improve our responses.

In 2009-10 in Rockhampton, Townsville and Mount Isa, over \$16.5 million was allocated to support homeless programs, including early intervention programs, accommodation support and post-crisis support. Programs are also there to specifically target young people and a range of others, as well as those escaping domestic violence, with an additional \$6.37 million allocated in 2009-10 to address public intoxication. We also have initiatives like in your area, the Jimaylya Topsy Harry Centre that you took me to—a great initiative, a residential based response to people who have been enduring housing stress, periods of homelessness, sometimes substance abuse, family violence and other issues. It is a great service. Our department is very supportive and running that model with the local community.

This week I know that you have announced the new \$1.062 million over three years for the Youth Housing and Reintegration Service in Mount Isa. We call that YHARS—the acronym—and that will provide individual case management to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, who are exiting care or detention. So some of the young people coming out of Cleveland will be case managed through this process to get support when they arrive back in Mount Isa or in their remote community and be given a range of supports, including housing support, skills development, crisis support and counselling—those sorts of things. The new youth shelter to be constructed in Mount Isa will be at a cost of \$1.8 million and it is due to be completed—

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. That is your time. The time allocated for government members has expired. I call the member for Burdekin.

**Mrs MENKENS:** Thank you. Minister, I will go back to women and one of the very first questions I asked you. Can you guarantee that the Women's Infolink line is going to remain open as a separate entity?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** My understanding of the way we are doing business in government now is giving people ready access. We are aiming over time to move to one entry point, one government, one number rather than having to look up a whole lot. We have Smart Service Queensland as the agency that delivers services on behalf of other agencies. So we all contribute funding to that. I mentioned some of the numbers for calls to the Office for Women—77,000 requests for information—

**Mrs MENKENS:** Sounds like it has been swallowed in the power generator.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Sorry?

**Mrs MENKENS:** I said it sounds as though it has been swallowed by the power generation.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** The power generation?

**Mrs MENKENS:** That you are doing throughout your offices.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Please explain.

**Mrs MENKENS:** I am quoting you, Minister. Keep going.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** The power generation?

**CHAIR:** Perhaps if you answer the first question.

**Mrs MENKENS:** Or engine room.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** An engine room.

**Mrs MENKENS:** That generates power from the office.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Sorry, I just did not understand what you were referring to. Seventy-seven thousand requests for information referral or advice were responded to by the Women's Infolink telephone service. So people will access a number. It will say 'Women's Infolink'. In they go. It is Smart Service Queensland that is the behind-the-scenes operator. Each of our agencies fund the component of our service delivery. Essentially, it is remaining open. It is open for business and it does a lot of business.

**Mrs MENKENS:** Good. Thanks, Minister. With reference to the Nation Building Program at page 3-6, how much is allocated to the forward budget for maintenance on housing built under the program? Why is responsibility for maintenance given back to Project Services? Does that not equate to the government giving itself a cheque of \$120 million—enough to house another 500 families?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Which part of the budget estimates are you referring to there?

**Mrs MENKENS:** Page 3-6, the Nation Building Program. I am just asking about the forward budget for maintenance. Why does it go back to Project Services because, as you know, the money does get swallowed there.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I cannot actually see the reference that you are making, but let me just comment anyway.

**Mrs MENKENS:** No, it is a general comment on the maintenance for the new homes built within the stimulus project.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I might just seek some advice specifically on the reference that you are referring to. But let me say generally that we have a very high standard of maintenance in our public housing. Our department has a very good record in maintaining properties around the state to a very, very high standard and that will continue. As we add additional stock, properties will be maintained. We have a schedule of programming works. We have staff out assessing the condition of properties and we have repairs done particularly as properties become vacant and new tenants move in.

The capital grants we provide to NGOs, where they then build housing and manage housing, they are responsible for maintenance on their own properties. My understanding is that QBuild outsource about two-thirds of that maintenance work. As I said, specifically in relation to remote Indigenous housing, we are absolutely determined to make sure as much of that work, both in maintenance and construction, is done locally and sourced locally.

I have visited Aurukun and other communities where I have talked to community leaders about dusting off some of the old workshops and getting them geared up again because this program will give them the rolling program of works that they have needed. It has been difficult in the past to sign up apprentices, it has been difficult in the past to sign up tradespeople because of the lack of continuity of work. This program, both the Remote Indigenous Housing Program and the nation-building program generally, gives us opportunities to train people. The scholarships I mentioned in Townsville that the member for Townsville provided last week, Indigenous Women in Hard Hats, is giving young Indigenous women opportunities to work with QBuild to maintain our properties. They will be builders, carpentry apprentices, cabinet makers, painters, whatever—I am not sure of the exact trades they have ticked the box for. They are the sorts of opportunities being given. We are not only on about maintaining to a high standard, we are also keen to generate jobs particularly for local communities and particularly the remote Indigenous communities. Last year alone our record was 18,171 maintenance jobs completed.

**Mrs MENKENS:** I refer again to Palm Cove and Nation Building, 3-6 of the SDS. Given comments from local area and departmental staff, including—

The purchase of a complex this size would not be supported at a local level. Consideration should also be given to the fact that Palm Cove is also not close to schools or other amenities, such as shopping and medical services, and I would strongly recommend not building or purchasing that number of units on the one site either at Palm Cove or anywhere else in the Cairns region.

Again I ask you: how did this development attain ministerial approval when these emails are coming from within your department?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Member for Burdekin, as I said earlier, it is not unusual to have robust debate about where to locate these sites. Firstly, they are highly competitive. People want them, mostly—not you necessarily, but most people want them. As I said, we were oversubscribed—well oversubscribed. More than 30,000 units of accommodation were requested through this program. They were private builders and developers putting forward bids.

Again just to explain the program, it is a stimulus package. It was there to support a building industry in decline. In Palm Cove, in Trinity Park, all around the state, under Nation Building most of these sites already had development approvals. These sites that you refer to, Palm Cove for instance, was already going to have a multidensity building there, but my understanding is that the builder did not proceed.

**Mrs MENKENS:** I query robust debate within your department, why not robust debate amongst the community?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Who is providing the answers here? Madam Chair, I seek your protection.

**CHAIR:** Minister, you are entitled to answer the question.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I have an answer to give here and a very plausible response. We have debate about these issues. I ask my staff for frank and fearless advice and thankfully that is what I get. We put all that into the pot and we come up with a schedule. On this program we are required to develop a schedule.

**Mrs MENKENS:** Then you overrode them.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** We were required to develop a schedule with around 4,000 units of accommodation picking from 30,000-plus. We could pick those that provided value for money, those that were in locations that provided jobs, those that needed the construction industry given a boost to. The North Queensland area had a big tick for that. They needed it and still need it. In relation to Palm Cove, I have met with residents who had concerns. We had a very constructive meeting. I went to the site. I have given my undertaking, as has the director-general, that we will manage those tenancies successfully. We will have a contact point for the community to be part of that housing. Any concerns they have with any ongoing tenancies or tenant problems we will be straight onto it.

We have said that we will allocate to that housing people with moderate housing needs. They were concerned about high needs people being part of that community. I do not necessarily agree with them, but I have heard them and listened and conceded that we will allocate and manage for success in that community. The last thing we want is public tenants living in that community and being hounded by locals. I would urge you to get behind these programs and build harmony in these communities instead of fuelling the conflict that some of these communities are experiencing. That will not auger well for the community or the tenants when they move in.

**Mrs MENKENS:** If that is the case, with reference to the Trinity Park development, why were CCTV cameras installed before any other action was taken on site? Can you tell me on how many occasions the department or its representatives have called the police to the site?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Again I will say to the member that there is already public housing in Trinity Park. This is yet another project for that area and a very important project.

**Mrs MENKENS:** Why CCTV?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** The builder is responsible for that job and responsible for the security of his workers. He reported threats to the police and it was suggested that he put up cameras. That is the decision of a builder who wants to protect his workforce. It is unfortunate that that has occurred in that community but every community around the state has social housing. Every community has people in need and mostly people get behind others in need, mostly people welcome the opportunity to give a helping hand.

**Mrs MENKENS:** There is no demonstrated homelessness in that area.

**CHAIR:** I ask the member to cease interjecting.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I would urge you to build harmony. Trinity Park is a community. It is not a gated community. There is not a fence around it.

**CHAIR:** The time allocated to non-government members has expired. I call the member for Burleigh.

**Mrs SMITH:** Minister, as you know, the Gold Coast region has one of the highest levels of housing stress in Queensland. It is a highly mobile population with the population growing dramatically over the years. Despite its reputation as a tourist destination, the Gold Coast is home to many retirees, hospitality workers, couples raising children and the like. Can the minister advise how much new social and community housing is being added to the Gold Coast?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Again I thank the member for the question and her efforts in representing her constituents in seeking more public housing. I think it can be credited to her that we have not had a lot of community issues. She works with her local community, as does the member for Barron River and others in their areas. We are certainly getting from members on the Gold Coast—the minister, Peter Lawlor, and others—'Give me more. Give me more.' We are rolling out a significant housing program on the Gold Coast.

The Gold Coast has fared well in this budget: over \$30 million to complete 143 units of accommodation for social housing; an extra \$49 million to not-for-profit organisations to complete 121 dwellings and commence 185 more. I saw a great program recently, partnering with St Vincent de Paul, called the Families Back on Track project. It is like a little village in Arundel in the middle of the Gold Coast where families will live. There is a community centre within that complex as well so there is support on hand for those families. I met a single father with a young boy who thought he had just gone to heaven. He was just so pleased to have this opportunity that Vinnies had provided through the funding through the department of housing.

We had many applications to build dwellings on the Gold Coast. It was far above what we could actually provide with the funding available. The ones that we chose represented best value for money. It has been a real boom for the building industry and tradies on the coast as well. It is a total of almost 450 extra dwellings on the Gold Coast. The majority of this has gone to the non-profit sector. The funding has been provided to Churches of Christ, FSG Australia, Uniting Church, Youngcare, Y-Care, the Gold Coast Housing Co., and I mentioned the Vinnies project earlier which is another important non-government initiative. As you know, since its formation in 2006, the Gold Coast Housing Co. has certainly been a very important provider of affordable housing on the Gold Coast. It is now the largest housing provider on the Gold Coast and amongst the largest provider in the state. They will deliver 219 dwellings under the Nation Building Program at a total cost of just under \$50 million. They already manage over 250 units of accommodation in tourist areas right across the Coast—Burleigh, Currumbin, Mermaid Beach. All those wonderful parts of the world, like in North Queensland, have social housing and are getting more.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** Minister, I have to say that I celebrate the work of the Office for Women right across government because I see these as real initiatives that are coming out of the Roma Women's Symposium that we had a couple of years ago and the Mount Isa symposium and it is what women are actually asking for. On page 3-7 of the SDS it states, quite rightly I have to say, that the Department of Communities will support women to achieve economic and financial security. What important role does the Office for Women play, not necessarily the physical Office for Women but the work that the office is doing, to improve economic security for women?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Again I welcome the opportunity to talk about the work of the Office for Women. As the member for Mount Isa has said, we have had some great initiatives out in her area. It was a pleasure for me to meet women from the mining companies and other associated areas who are working in what we would generally call non-traditional hard hat occupations. They had some great stories to tell, particularly about how times have changed since they were first engineers on projects and how companies are much more welcoming of women into these non-traditional areas.

It is through the work of organisations like the Office for Women, working in conjunction with the Women in Mining group and others, that these changes occur. It is so important that we maintain the momentum of organisations, offices, whatever you want to call them. The engine room activity of the Office for Women is vital. I am very, very keen, particularly on the Women in Hard Hats program. At the Tertiary Expo last year I was in my civvies, it was a day off, but I was there with some friends who were looking to study as mature-age students—women looking to take on a new career path—and lo and behold who was there on a Sunday at the RNA showgrounds handing out the Women in Hard Hats information but the staff of the Office for Women. They were inundated. They were extremely busy. In fact, I was three back and one of the young women, as I went up to get the pack, spoke to me and said, 'Are you looking for a job?' I said, 'I've got a job.' They do a great job. These programs are so important. I commend the Minerals Council and others who are getting behind these programs to support and advance women's economic security.

As I talked to the 20 women who were job seekers who I met at the Construction Skills Training Centre at Salisbury last week and presented them with their certificates, their story was a pretty common one. They were saying to me, 'I need a new opportunity. I am a single mum with three kids living in Ipswich. I actually want to get out into the regions. I want a new life. I want to earn some bigger bucks and this will provide me with some opportunities.' They had the opportunity to sit in a simulator. I do not know what you call those big vehicles at the mines. You would know this.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** Loaders.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Whopping big things. They sat in the simulator, as I did. They were driving it on the mine in a simulated way and loving it.

**Mrs KIERNAN:** Dump trucks.

**Ms STRUTHERS:** It is certainly important that we continue to support that. While I am at it, I have the Office for Women review by Carolyn Mason, Fiona Guthrie and Walter Robb and I am happy to table it.

**CHAIR:** You are seeking leave to table that, Minister?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I seek leave to table the report

Leave granted.

**CHAIR:** Pages 3 to 10 of the SDS outline the level of spending on social and community housing construction in 2009-10. Current state spending includes the Queensland Future Growth Fund to expand social housing and it has been bolstered by the Nation Building and Jobs Plan. I ask how many new social housing dwellings will become available across Queensland in 2010-11 and in the Moreton Bay Regional Council area?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** Again, I have referred to some of this, but I am happy to expand, particularly on our own state government activity and spend, which is continuing in this area. As I have said, the Nation Building jobs program alone has a target of over 4,000 dwellings by June 2012, with a target of

75 per cent completion by the end of this year. That means that we expect to complete the construction of over 3,200 dwellings this financial year. We will also purchase an additional 118 dwellings for social housing. All up, \$679 million will be spent on these projects and, as I have said, they are located right across Queensland.

In the Moreton Bay Regional Council area, of which your electorate is part, the department will complete the construction of around 157 dwellings and commence or continue to construct a further 128 dwellings. All up, around \$41 million will be spent. In your own electorate, my understanding is that about 16 two-bedroom apartments will be built at a total cost of \$3.4 million. As you know, we have an increasing need for one- and two-bedroom dwellings to meet the needs of social housing clients. That is why multiunit developments are very much needed in our programs. This project will greatly assist with housing people in need in your area. I commend the way in which you have embraced and supported that. That was evident to me when I met with your seniors group recently.

**CHAIR:** That concludes the examination of the estimates for the portfolio of the Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women. I thank the minister and the officers for your attendance. The committee has also concluded its 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. On behalf of the committee, I thank the Hansard officers, the time keepers and the parliamentary attendants for their assistance today. Minister, did you want to make any comments?

**Ms STRUTHERS:** I want to thank you and all the committee members. This is an important accountability process and I have been very pleased to respond to your questions and put on record the achievements of the Department of Communities. Again I thank the staff of the department for their preparation for the estimates process. Thank you.

**CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. I declare the Estimates Committee F hearing closed.

**Committee adjourned at 6.31 pm**