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Mr SPEAKER (Hon. T McGrady, Mount Isa) read prayers and took the chair at 9.30 am.

PETITIONS

The following honourable members have lodged paper petitions for presentation—

Labrador Channel

Ms Croft from 61 petitioners requesting the House to recognise the unacceptable noise and impairment to safety in the Labrador Channel and to introduce a six knot speed limit for all vessels using the Labrador Channel.

Chancellor Park Estate

Mr Cummins from 57 petitioners requesting the House to ensure Maroochy Shire Council investigate and mitigate the impacts of all planning processes for Chancellor Park Estate; release all planning reports and documents; and ensure no additional rates, charges or levies are imposed on residents of Chancellor Park.

Port Douglas, Bus Service

Mr O’Brien from 654 petitioners requesting the House to ask the Transport Minister to regulate the bus services in the Port Douglas precinct to return a viable public transport system to residents and visitors.

Bribie Island, Polly Clinic

Dr Flegg from 3538 petitioners requesting the House to investigate the need for a Polly clinic (multi disciplinary medical centre) to be built on Bribie Island.

Port Douglas/Captain Cook Highway Intersection

Mr O’Brien from 462 petitioners requesting the House to refer to the Minister for Transport and Main Roads to lower the speed limit at the intersection of Port Douglas Road and the Captain Cook Highway to 60kph in both directions, and provide a one lane Roundabout at the intersection.

The following honourable members have sponsored e-petitions which are now closed and presented—

Narangba, Binary Industries Fire

Mr Quinn from 101 petitioners requesting the House to release all reports and supporting documents on the fire of 25th and 26th August 2005 at Binary Industries at the Narangba Industrial Estate and to establish an independent investigation into possible links between the fire and any detrimental medical and environmental conditions reported thereafter.

Gold Coast, Train Service

Mr Caltabiano from 799 petitioners requesting the House to provide additional train services between 6.30am and 9.30am from the Gold Coast to Brisbane and between 4.00pm and 6.30pm from Brisbane to the Gold Coast to address current overcrowding.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Western Corridor Recycled Water Scheme

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.34 am): The Western Corridor Recycled Water Scheme is a key component of our water grid and the work being undertaken to battle the drought—the worst drought on record. It is the largest recycled water scheme to be constructed in Australia and will be the largest project of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere. This exciting project has the potential to free up hundreds of millions of litres of drinking water for south-east Queensland residents. Demand on Wivenhoe and Somerset dams will be reduced and it will also stop the discharge of treated sewage into Moreton Bay.

Stages 1A and 1B of the project will pipe recycled water from waste water treatment plants at Oxley, Wacol, Goodna and Bundamba via an advanced waste water treatment plant to the Swanbank industrial area and Tarong Power Station. Stage 2 will incorporate the Luggage Point and Gibson Island waste water treatment plants and pipe the water to other industrial users in the TradeCoast area.

Mr Seeney: Stop talking about it; do it.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Callide, I warn you under 253.

Mr BEATTIE: The size of the pipeline will also allow the delivery of treated recycled water to all major industrial customers along the corridor route. The Western Corridor Recycled Water Scheme is expected to be completed by 2008, eventually freeing up 230 million litres of drinking water every day.
The service provider managing this project is SEQWater. SEQWater is a public company majority owned by south-east Queensland councils. While work has commenced on this project, we are still concerned about slippage. The project is vital to our water grid and I want it finished on budget and on time. That is why I am announcing that the government, through the Coordinator-General, will assume responsibility for the delivery of this project from SEQWater. That will be effective as soon as possible. I have discussed this this morning with the Lord Mayor, Campbell Newman, and he fully supports my decision.

Our government has provided $434.8 million for the project—almost 100 per cent of the funding to date—and the first pipeline section has already been declared a state development area with the Coordinator-General overseeing consultation on the route. SEQWater will continue to manage the project in the interim as new arrangements are put in place and to ensure that momentum is not lost on the delivery of this important project. In addition, we expect to employ key project staff from SEQWater on an ongoing basis to effect a seamless transition.

As part of the Wester Corridor Recycled Water Scheme, a reverse osmosis or high-filtration plant will be built on Gibson Island. Brisbane City Council is also proposing to build a similar but smaller plant and pipeline on the island to provide recycled water to fertiliser company Incitec Pivot. This will be a significant initiative, because Incitec uses roughly 6.5 million litres of water every day—6.5 million litres of drinking water that could be used by the residents of south-east Queensland.

Council has been negotiating with Incitec for several years to use recycled water. Although I understand that significant progress has been made, I want to fast-track the process and provide more drinking water for south-east Queensland as soon as possible. That is why the government will now take over these negotiations with a view to Incitec using recycled water from the western corridor pipeline. Once again, this is a sensible decision. By integrating the Incitec demand into the western corridor project, it will deliver greater economies of scale with one plant on the site instead of two. The cost will be shared across the whole region and more water will be available in Wivenhoe for residential use. I want to make it absolutely clear that nothing will stand in the way of the delivery of this water grid.

### Supreme and District Courts Complex

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.38 am): I am pleased to announce that a design competition is about to open for Brisbane’s newest public building—and it will be advertised in Saturday’s newspapers—the proposed Supreme and District courts complex. When completed, the proposed new complex in Queensland Place, next to the Brisbane Magistrates Court, will be the largest state court building in Australia with up to 50 courtrooms and hearing rooms. Australia’s best architectural firms with relevant experience will be asked to put forward their designs. I seek leave to have more details incorporated in Hansard.

Leave granted.

Queensland wants the best and brightest architects to come forward. We need to get the design of this building right. We want a complex that reflects the importance of Queensland’s highest courts—but also meets the needs of the people. This project will provide a dynamic new legal precinct for Brisbane, and it will revitalise the western end of the CBD.

Advertisements with details of the design competition will appear in newspapers in the next fortnight. The competition is expected to take six months.

### Westgate Development

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.38 am): Last Wednesday I announced a plan for minimal development at Westgate. To make it absolutely clear, I announced each aspect of the development in a media release.

The new Liberal leader got the basics about our plan completely wrong. He set out, in my view, to mislead the public. The new Liberal leader told the public that as part of the Westgate plan we would be building a bridge between Moggill and Wacol—wrong. My announcement does not mention a bridge because cabinet decided that there would be no bridge.

The new Liberal leader said that we will be building a densely populated new suburb in addition to a hub around Wacol Station. This is completely untrue. The hub at Wacol Station will be sandwiched between the motorway and Sir David Longland Correctional Centre. The extent of the development is only about 600 metres by 600 metres—hardly a vast new suburb.

The residential component of the development will include affordable and social housing which is needed in our society. This development will be able to take advantage of the existing public transport system, which is why it is being put there.
If the member for Moggill was under any doubt about any of this he could have clarified this with my office, but he did not. Instead, he grossly misled the public. He ran this fear campaign to create unnecessary anxiety. Queenslanders do not want a political leader who so clearly sets out to mislead people.

The plan we have adopted will include much needed public recreation and open space in the north around Wolston Creek. I am pleased to confirm that there will be little impact on either the Gailes Golf Club or the Wolston Park Golf Club. These two well-established clubs support the local community and will be preserved. I want to say to Julie Attwood, Henry Palaszczuk and Robert Schwarten and all of the other local members who have been lobbying me about this, that we have delivered the open space they have asked for. That is what we have delivered, and I will not have this misrepresented deliberately by the member for Moggill.

To facilitate growth in the western corridor, an improved Progress Road-Ipswich Motorway intersection will be integrated with the new development. The intersection will provide an overpass over the railway—a long overdue safety measure for the local residents and visitors to Wacol.

Other government uses are being investigated for the underutilised land in the area. There are heritage listed buildings that will deteriorate beyond rescue if they are not used, and that will result in a loss of our history. Those facilities for which a use cannot be determined and are no longer required will be demolished. It is also intended to upgrade what are essentially internal private roads, which are being used by the public, to an appropriate standard for the safe use of the community. The design team will now prepare a detailed development plan which will be released to the community for further consideration later this year.

Of the options provided to the government—I want to make this very clear to the member for Moggill—and consulted on with the community, we took the least development option to provide maximum open public space. I want to be absolutely clear about this. I do not believe it is fair to misrepresent what we have done. If the member for Moggill is genuine about this, which I doubt, I am happy to provide him with a full briefing from one of my key staff so that he completely understands the amount of open space available. That offer to him is now on the public record. If he had gone to the trouble to actually call, instead of misrepresenting this, then we would have been happy to provide the information to him.

Mr Caltabiano interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Member for Chatsworth, I warn you under standing order 253.

Yeppoon Hospital

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.42 am): My government is determined to ensure that construction of a new hospital at Yeppoon starts as soon as possible. I want to make this clear because if the local member, Paul Hoolihan, continues to ring my office about it I intend to report him to the police. It got to the stage where he was ringing three times a day, and I think that is enough. I want to make the point that the member has impressed upon me the need for this hospital. Let me tell the member what we are doing as a result of all the nagging he has done.

Despite an appropriate site being identified last year, ongoing negotiations with the owner for the purchase of the land and a formal notice of intention to resume being issued in November last year, the site has yet to be acquired. This is simply not good enough for the people of Yeppoon, and I agree with the member’s representations.

The site—nearly three hectares of land on the corner of the Rockhampton-Yeppoon Road and Hoskyn Drive at Yeppoon—remains the best available site for the new hospital and is ideally located just a few kilometres from the heart of Yeppoon. We made an offer to the owner based on what we believe is fair market value for the land. Unfortunately, the owner has chosen not to accept the government’s offer. That is why we had to issue a notice which allows for a formal response from the owner and objections under the provisions of the Acquisition of Land Act 1967. But still the saga drags on.

Today I am announcing in parliament so that it is on the public record and everyone can see the transparency here—there is nothing hidden—that my government will immediately draft legislation authorising acquisition of this site. We have had enough. I want this saga ended. I want to see construction of the new Yeppoon hospital as soon as possible.

The legislation will provide certainty that the government will acquire this parcel of land for hospital purposes but will not prevent further negotiations proceeding on the price to be paid for the land. If the owner wants to come up with a sensible price as soon as possible that is fine. Let us get the negotiations finished. If it is not resolved, we will legislate. That is it. Some people will think this is heavy handed but let me make it clear that the people of Yeppoon are going to get a hospital.
If, however, agreement cannot be reached on the value of the land then this will be determined in the normal way through the land court. This process will ensure certainty and will allow us to start building a new hospital for the people of Yeppoon without any further unnecessary delay. I concede that this is an unusual step, but it is fair and it is in the public interest and I am happy to defend it. The people of Yeppoon deserve no less.

Smart State Academies; Reading Challenge

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.45 am): I would like to take this opportunity to update the House on the two major education initiatives that support our young scholars that I have been working on with the Minister for Education, Rod Welford. Firstly, I am delighted that the first-round offers have been made for entry into the Academy for Science, Maths and Technology at Toowong, and the Academy for Creative Industries at Kelvin Grove. I understand that there have been more than 1,000 expressions of interest in the academies from across the state. This is a terrific response.

On another initiative, I am delighted to report that the Reading Challenge, which I launched with Rod Welford, the Minister for Education, on 25 May, is also going strong. I am advised 705 schools have registered and, from estimates that have come from teachers, that is around 102,000 students. That is an outstanding commitment in the first year of the Reading Challenge. I seek leave to have the details incorporated in Hansard.

Leave granted.

Mr Speaker, literacy is a critical life skill and a focus of activity for Governments and schools alike. My Reading Challenge supports the efforts being made to improve literacy outcomes for young Queenslanders. Reading is an enriching experience. It allows you to explore new worlds and think of things in new ways. I encourage all students in the Reading Challenge to have fun and enjoy the world of words.

Koala Conservation

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.45 am): There are some matters going to Executive Council this morning in relation to the protection of koalas that the minister for environment has managed to put together in a very constructive and positive way which cabinet has approved. Because it has not been to Executive Council I am not in a position to announce details other than to advise the House that a plan to help reverse the decline of koalas in Queensland, particularly in the south-east corner, will be announced at 1 o’clock by the minister and me.

Cyclone Larry Relief Appeal

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.46 am): I want to update the House in relation to the Tropical Cyclone Larry Relief Appeal. I seek leave to have the details incorporated in Hansard.

Leave granted.

I am pleased to advise the House that the Tropical Cyclone Larry Relief Appeal has collected donations of $21.41 million. The generosity of the Australian public and business community has been overwhelming. There has also been international support, and I thank the Papua New Guinean Government for its $100,000 donation. Under Phase One of the Appeal, emergency payments of $2,000 per household were made to over 1,100 people whose homes were left uninhabitable after the cyclone hit. Appeal Distribution Committee Chairman, the Honourable Terry Mackenroth, has advised that this stage of the Appeal is now coming to an end, with only 45 applications to be assessed by the local sub-committees. Phase One of disbursements has expended approximately $2 million. Phase Two is in full swing to help home owners repair structural damage to their own residences. So far 443 applications for aid have been received with 190 approved at last week’s Committee meeting.

It is important that public donations are not expended prematurely because all avenues of Government assistance need to be exhausted before this occurs. This is about responsibly managing public donations through a coordinated approach.

Mr Speaker, I am pleased to advise the House that recent amendments to the Commonwealth Income Tax Assessment Act 1997 have removed some of the constraints on disbursements from the Appeal Fund.

Last week the Australian Taxation Office approved a new Trust Deed to facilitate wider disbursements from the Appeal Fund. The Distribution Committee has responded immediately by calling for applications from not-for-profit organisations to repair community facilities. Application forms are available from Council offices, one-stop-shops and from my website.

The rebuilding of homes and community facilities remains an absolute priority and this is where the bulk of the Appeal funds are going to be needed.
International Education and Training Industry Showcase

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.46 am): I want to update the House in relation to the international education and training industry showcase. Queensland’s $1.08 billion international education and training industry continues to expand into new areas and attract growing global attention. Last year more than 55,000 international students chose Queensland and, as I have said on a number of occasions, its value cannot be summed up in dollars alone. I seek leave to have the details incorporated in Hansard.

Leave granted.

There’s the academic and cultural contribution international students make to Queensland, our communities and institutions; and there’s the great work being done within the local industry to deliver scholarship and services of world standards.

This is precisely why we are celebrating the Smart State’s achievements in the industry by showcasing examples of best practice. We’ll be doing this at the Queensland International Education and Training Industry Showcase—the first of its kind in Australia—on 7 September 2006.

More than 50 nominations from individuals, universities and schools have been received across 7 categories including partnerships, and innovations in delivering student support services.

The judging panel will be made up of up industry peers.

In effect, this event will set a benchmark for best practice in the industry and demonstrate again that the Queensland Government and the Smart State are leading the way.

Earth Dialogues Forum

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.47 am): I would also report on the outcomes of the Earth Dialogues Forum. I seek leave to have the details incorporated in Hansard.

Leave granted.

The international Earth Dialogues Forum at the Brisbane Festival was a huge success.

Not only was it the first time the Forum had been held in the southern hemisphere, it attracted huge interest, and provided a unique chance to build positive partnerships.

I had the great honour of co-chairing it with President Mikhail Gorbachev, of Green Cross International.

I was surprised to learn during the Forum that Australia was not one of the 30 host nations for Green Cross.

So, along with the Brisbane City Council, my Government has agreed to work with President Gorbachev to change that and establish an Australian headquarters right here in Brisbane.

During the closing of the Earth Dialogues Forum, I announced the aims and ideals of Green Cross International’s Earth Charter will be incorporated into Queensland Education’s environmental curricula.

I have also announced the establishment of a Queensland Youth Environment Council to help young Queenslanders raise their environmental concerns and suggestions with my Government.

Mr Speaker, I would like to congratulate the organisers of the Earth Dialogues Forum 2006, and especially the Brisbane Festival and Green Cross International.

HMAS Brisbane

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.47 am): Mr Speaker, as we have just passed the one-year anniversary of the sinking of the HMAS Brisbane off the Sunshine Coast, I want to provide an update to the House. The local member and then Minister for Emergency Services, Chris Cummins, and the minister for environment and I sank the ship. It has turned out to be to the public’s benefit. I seek leave to have the details incorporated in Hansard.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: I will get the Leader of the National Party to understand what a drought is one day.

Leave granted.

In January 2003, the Queensland Government accepted the decommissioned HMAS Brisbane from the Australian Government. After much preparation, the 133 metre, Charles F Adams Class DDG Guided Missile Destroyer was scuttled on 31 July 2005.

A 35.5 hectare Conservation Park has been established around the wreck to protect the environment and best manage tourism. Mr Speaker, over the past 12 months the transformation of the site has been remarkable. Algae and corals now cover much of the wreck’s surface, and all sorts of marine life call the site home.

Already the “Brisbane” has attracted over 5,500 divers, and I understand commercial dive operators are fielding enquiries from around the world.

The report Wreck to Reef—One Year On documents these first 12 months and is now available online at the Environmental Protection Agency’s internet website at www.epa.qld.gov.au.

With local, national and international divers streaming to the Sunshine Coast to dive the ‘Brisbane’, her future is secured.
Gold Coast Airport Marathon

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.47 am): The Gold Coast Airport Marathon is flying high as a destination for Japanese tourists who want to compete in a marathon. I seek leave to have the details incorporated in Hansard.

Leave granted.

The number of Japanese entrants has doubled since Queensland Events Gold Coast took over management of this iconic event in 2001.

1060 competitors from Japan flew to the Gold Coast this year especially to take part in the marathon.

At a time when tourism numbers from Japan are strengthening after a quiet period, this outcome for the Gold Coast demonstrates the invaluable role events can play in the tourism industry.

This success was due to Queensland Events Gold Coast and Tourism Queensland in Japan, working with Tourism Australia and Gold Coast Tourism.

The Japanese competitors came as teams, as groups, as individuals.

They were led by Olympic dual medallist Yuko Arimori in her role as Japan’s sporting goodwill ambassador for the year of exchange.

This is a 30 year anniversary event commemorating the signing of the 1976 basic treaty of friendship between Australia and Japan.

I am told that while Deputy Premier Anna Bligh put in a strong performance to finish the 21km stretch in just over 2 hours, she was no match for Arimori who finished in 1 hour 26 minutes.

This was the fourth record-breaking Gold Coast Airport Marathon in a row, with almost 14,000 entrants competing.

Five years ago the number of entrants was less than half that amount, and facing rapid decline.

I have full confidence the Gold Coast Airport Marathon will continue to make strong strides under the leadership of Kerry Watson and his team at Queensland Events Gold Coast for 2007 and beyond.

Employment Growth

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.47 am): Recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that Queensland has over 36,000 job vacancies. This accounts for 24 per cent of all job vacancies in Australia and shows again that Queensland is Australia’s engine room for employment growth.

Since mid-1998, job vacancies in this state have grown 70 per cent, and we have also experienced sustained employment growth. Total employment in the state grew from 1,617,000 in June 1998 to 2,039,000 in June 2006. In fact, Queensland produced 28 per cent of the nation’s jobs this June. I seek leave to have the details incorporated in Hansard.

Leave granted.

The State’s trend unemployment rate of 4.7% is also below the national average of 4.8%, and far better than it was back in June 1998 when unemployment was 8%.

Recent interest rate increases have highlighted the lower cost of living in Queensland compared to New South Wales. If you have a house in Sydney, you could sell it, come here, live very comfortably and have the added opportunity of getting the job you want in a growing and dynamic economy.

This coming weekend—11th to 13th of August—the Queensland Government is hosting an exhibition at Sydney Olympic Park to attract skilled workers to the Smart State. The exhibition will feature over 200 Queensland businesses, local authorities and industry bodies who are all keen to recruit skilled staff.

The exhibition will show what a great place Queensland is to work and live.

To support initiatives like this, the Government has set strong foundations with the $1 billion Queensland Skills Plan, along with numerous other targeted initiatives to keep the Smart State delivering for Queenslanders.

Gatherings II

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.48 am): In 2001 I initiated the publication Gatherings, to promote and market both prominent and emerging Queensland Indigenous artists. My intention for the book was to create an official gift of state from the Queensland government and, as such, it has been enjoyed by distinguished recipients throughout the world.

Indigenous art is an expression of an ancient culture’s interpretation of the world around us. Gatherings II includes works by 100 Queensland Indigenous artists and was funded by the Indigenous Business Development Group within the Department of State Development. I want to table a copy for the House and I urge members to read it. It shows how talented our Indigenous artists are.

Tabled paper: Publication titled ‘Gatherings II—Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art from Queensland Australia’.

I seek leave to have the details incorporated in Hansard.

Leave granted.

Queensland Indigenous art has become more widely recognised and my Government strongly supports this international appeal.

We have established the Queensland Indigenous Art Marketing and Export Agency to encourage and increase this attention.

Many of our Indigenous artists now have national and international standing and are able to earn a living from the sale of their work.

Being paid to do what you love is something we all aspire to, and my Government will continue to support more Indigenous artists to realise this dream.
Ekka

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.49 am): As many people would be aware, the Ekka kicks off today. This wonderful annual event has been running for 130 years. This morning I had the pleasure of being there briefly. The Ekka brings city and country together with a vast array of attractions and events. With the worst drought on record affecting large parts of Queensland, in particular the south-east corner, it is time for the city and country to come together.

Many here today, including the Leader of the Opposition, will join the Governor, RNA councillors and my cabinet colleagues at the showgrounds tonight for the RNA annual cabinet dinner. I put on record my appreciation for their assistance. In fact, cabinet will meet formally at a community cabinet at the exhibition grounds on Monday.

Queensland Business Expo

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for State Development, Trade and Innovation) (9.49 am): Tomorrow I will be in Sydney on a mission. I will be there to lure skilled workers to Queensland to fill jobs in the nation’s fastest growing and best state. Our hands-on approach to recruitment is simple. Our government has teamed up with APN News and Media—our foremost regional newspaper publisher—to encourage skilled people in Australia’s largest city to make the change to regional Queensland.

We will join more than 200 Queensland businesses, development groups, local councils and industry associations taking part in the three-day @ Work and Play Queensland on Display expo at Olympic Park in Sydney over the next three days. The businesses at the expo cover all the major industry sectors that drive the Queensland economy and cover the entirety of the state, not just the south-east corner. If the expo is as successful as we expect, a similar event will be held in Melbourne next year and possibly even overseas in subsequent years.

Businesses have shown that they realise that attracting skilled workers to Queensland is as much a role for business as it is for government. Our government will be as proactive as it needs to be to ensure growth in Queensland is not restricted by a lack of skilled labour. This expo is a perfect example of how government and private enterprise can work closely together to produce tangible results for the economy.

I said in Toowoomba in January, when APN and I jointly launched this program, that it was a bit cheeky. It is, and we do not hide from that. We are Australia’s engine room and we have to keep the fires burning. Our message is a simple one: regional Queensland offers skilled workers and their families excellent job opportunities and a great quality of life. Regional Queensland is crying out for more people skilled in trades, while many skilled people in Sydney are searching for a lifestyle and a location that has a lower cost of living. Sydney has become one of the most expensive places in Australia to raise a family, while regional Queensland has the lifestyle and the cost of living that is just right for raising a family in a safe and community-focused environment.

For us to realise the full potential of our continued robust economic growth we are inviting skilled people to make the smart move to Queensland. Our aim is to entice 1,500 new skilled workers to Queensland by 2008, particularly those with much-needed skills in industries that we are targeting including health, education, construction, child care, engineering, food, electrical and electronic and many more.

Department of Public Works, Water Conservation

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing) (9.52 am): The Queensland government continues to lead by example in the drive to reduce water consumption. Today I am pleased to announce further measures to reduce water consumption in government buildings.

In two government buildings—at 80 and 111 George Street—the Department of Public Works has launched a pilot project to monitor and evaluate water usage over the next six months. A report evaluating the water savings will be produced at the end of the trials for use in future decision making. Q-Build workers are retrofitting two floors of each building with the latest water-saving technologies such as dual-flush toilets and smart-flush, low-flow and waterless urinals, as well as kitchen and basin taps retrofitted with flow restrictors.

A lot of the water that we use from day to day in our society is wasted, so it is important that we make the most of recent advances in this area. The new fittings used in this trial meet the very latest efficiency standards and should provide significant water savings. On three floors of both buildings, water meters have also been installed to garner further data. The trial also is reviewing typical high water-use areas in buildings, new and emerging technologies and financial modelling processes including incentive and user-pays schemes. These innovations will highlight valuable water-saving information which will be used in future to help cut water usage in government office buildings.
One of the partners in this project, Caroma Dorf, will sponsor the trial to the value of about $36,000. Caroma is a wholly owned subsidiary of GWA International Ltd, an Australian owned company based in Brisbane. A formal agreement has been drawn up between the Department of Public Works and Caroma Dorf, and at a function today it will be my pleasure to sign off on it.

This is yet another example of the Queensland government showing the way in water conservation in buildings. More efficient appliances mean more water saved in government buildings. It is Smart State thinking.

Tabled paper: Copy of ministerial statement by Hon. R Schwarten titled ‘Signing MOU on Thursday 10th’.

Khalafalla, Dr A

Hon. S ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Health) (9.54 am): Last night in federal parliament the federal member for Dawson made a number of allegations against Dr Abdalla Khalafalla. Dr Khalafalla is a deemed specialist surgeon at the Mackay Base Hospital. His qualifications and credentials have been verified by both the Medical Board and the—

Mr Messenger: Are you going to fly him out of the country, too?

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Burnett, 253.

Mr ROBERTSON: His qualifications and credentials have been verified by both the Medical Board and the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons. For the benefit of the House I will briefly outline the facts surrounding this case.

As a deemed specialist Dr Khalafalla worked under the supervision of Dr Farooq, who is a fellow of the college. Two reports from Dr Farooq assessing Dr Khalafalla’s competence in 2004 were noted as satisfactory. However, as a result of concerns raised over his competence last year, Mackay Hospital rightly undertook a review of Dr Khalafalla’s operations. During this time, in the interests of patient safety, senior doctors at the hospital decided to restrict the level of surgery he could perform to more low-risk operations. Twenty-six cases were identified for a further specialist review. This review was undertaken by Dr John Hack, who is also a fellow of the college and a specialist surgeon at Townsville Hospital. Dr Hack identified six cases that could have been handled better. In his November 2005 report, Dr Hack stated—

I think his work practices, particularly surgical technique should be presented to the RACS—

that is, the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons—

for review, I understand his work load has been limited to avoid more complex operations and this limitation should remain until RACS has reviewed his practice.

His report was sent to the chairman of the Queensland Board of General Surgeons. I am informed that Dr Khalafalla has been under constant review by the college and has been adequately supervised by college fellows at the hospital this year and he continues to be kept on limited surgical privileges.

Regular communications have been held between Queensland Health, the Medical Board and the college in relation to this surgeon. To date all parties involved believe he should remain at Mackay Hospital. As recently as 19 July this year, Dr Chris Perry from the college advised that—

The process of review is being undertaken by the appropriate people within the College who are responsible for determining the competence of surgeons working in Australia. While this review process is being undertaken it would be unwise to alter Dr Khalafalla’s work restriction.

Current privileges therefore remain in force. No local action will be taken other than to preserve the status quo pending outcome of the college’s review. Queensland Health will adopt any recommendations emanating from the college’s review of this doctor’s surgical competence.

Decisions made about the employment, competence and performance of a surgeon are not made by me or anyone in this chamber but by appropriate medical bodies and individuals, that being their supervisors, the Medical Board and the relevant college. I believe Queensland Health is guided by these decisions and to date has treated this case appropriately.

Tabled paper: Copy of ministerial statement by Hon. S Robertson titled ‘Hospital beds’.

Office of Fair Trading, S8

Hon. MM KEECH (Albert—ALP) (Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development) (9.57 am): I inform the House that a team of 54 Office of Fair Trading investigators, Queensland police and Australian Federal Police yesterday executed search warrants on a number of apartment complexes managed by S8 Ltd.

The raids, on the Gold and Sunshine coasts, are part of an ongoing investigation into complaints lodged with the Office of Fair Trading by a number of owners of units managed by S8. It has been alleged that the company is charging excessive commissions and not reporting to owners. It has been alleged that companies allied with S8 have been diverting reservations for accommodation complexes controlled by S8 through other entities also controlled by S8.
The investigation began in March 2005. It is rigorous and thorough and has been expanded considerably this year. A team of experienced Fair Trading investigators from the Strategic Compliance and Enforcement Operations Unit are working full-time on the case.

In May, the Office of Fair Trading served notices on S8 and associated entities, including managing director Christopher Scott, to produce certain documents relating to units on the Gold Coast. Similar notices were served on S8 and entities, including Mr Scott, relating to units on the Sunshine Coast. The documents were received in June. We have taken statements from a number of unit owners and continue to make inquiries of guests. Further notices have been served on S8 and some documentation was provided in response to these notices earlier this month. Further documentation is still to be provided.

As I have previously informed the House, the investigation is extremely complex. Given its complexity, Fair Trading is working with the QPS and the AFP. Yesterday’s raids were the latest step in gathering information. The investigation team had previously acquired a large quantity of documents as part of the investigation before yesterday’s raids. All documentation is currently being analysed.

S8 has previously claimed no knowledge of any investigation. The claims came well after their legal team supplied documents in response to the notices of the Office of Fair Trading. And now Mr Scott has accused me of ordering yesterday’s raids. Mr Scott is wrong. This investigation is not politically motivated, nor were yesterday’s raids politically motivated. As minister, I do not direct the Commissioner for Fair Trading in the operation of investigations, and nor should I. The Beattie government accepts the principles of the separation of powers, unlike ministers in the former Bjelke-Petersen government.

This investigation has been prompted by serious allegations, and the Office of Fair Trading is responding appropriately. It is its job to investigate all complaints and it will continue to do so without fear or favour. I support the Office of Fair Trading in doing its job.

Tabled paper: Copy of ministerial statement by Hon. M Keech titled ‘S8 Investigation Raids’.

Gold Coast City Council

Hon. D BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (Minister for Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women) (10.01 am): I am pleased to announce that we will be appointing former Queensland Electoral Commissioner Des O’Shea to be the independent adviser to monitor the decisions of the Gold Coast City Council. Mr O’Shea is indeed an eminent person. He has 40 years experience in the Queensland Public Service. He served as deputy director-general of Justice and was Queensland’s first Electoral Commissioner from 1991 to 2001. His duties as Electoral Commissioner included introducing the electoral reforms recommended by EARC following the most extensive review of electoral laws ever undertaken in Australia. In his time as Electoral Commissioner he conducted four state elections. His other Public Service experience includes accounting, investigations, internal auditing, management of major change programs, strategic planning, project management and management at chief executive officer level.

Since finishing as Electoral Commissioner he has consulted for both the New South Wales and Victorian electoral authorities on significant projects, reviewed the operations of the New Zealand electoral authority and also prepared the strategic and operational plans for the conduct of this year’s Fiji national election. Mr O’Shea also happens to be a Gold Coast resident and is aware of the issues that have arisen as a result of the 2004 election. He is therefore eminently qualified to serve as our independent adviser.

He will provide ethics advice to councillors on conflict of interest issues, ensure that complaints about the council received by me or by the department are fully and properly investigated, and generally oversee the council’s decision making. I spoke to Mr O’Shea yesterday and was delighted when he accepted this important role. My director-general and I will meet with Mr O’Shea and give him a full briefing so that he can take up this role as soon as possible.

In the near future I will also be announcing the government’s full response to the 19 recommendations arising from the CMC’s inquiry into the Gold Coast City Council election.

Tabled paper: Copy of ministerial statement by Hon. D Boyle titled ‘Independent advisor Gold Coast’.

Queensland Rail Network, Public Safety

Hon. PT LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (10.03 am): I recently announced a blitz on risky behaviour on our railways—a crackdown on irresponsible behaviour in and around railway tracks. These tracks carry millions of tonnes of rolling steel. They are dangerous places, not playgrounds. People who walk on tracks are not only breaking the law; they are putting their lives at risk.

The crackdown coincides with an advertising campaign to highlight safety issues around level crossings, rail platforms, corridors and overhead powerlines. We are working closely with the police to get the message across. We are targeting people who trespass, and we are sending a strong message
to people, ‘Don’t do it; you are putting your safety and others at risk. You will be fined $150. There will be no further warning.’ If people complain, so be it. Anyone who gets a $150 fine should count themselves lucky, because it will be the unlucky ones who are hit by a train.

Members of the 50-strong police rail squad are targeting hot spots across the network. QR’s 80-plus transit officers have also stepped up surveillance. It is not just young people we are targeting. One of our biggest problems is motorists and pedestrians ignoring signals at level crossings. Queensland has the most extensive rail network in the country and the highest number of level crossings—almost 4,000—all of which have some form of protection, from signs to flashing lights and boom gates.

Trains on our network travel at high speeds and weigh as much as 400 cars. It could take the equivalent of the length of eight football fields to pull up in an emergency. If a signal is ignored, the consequences can be tragic. In the last four years 10 people have died as a result of trespassing and illegally crossing tracks. Given that 98 per cent of these collisions were found to be the fault of road users, I appeal to motorists, truck drivers, motorbike riders and pedestrians to be vigilant. So many tragedies can be avoided if people do not take risks.

Queensland Transport is also visiting over 160,000 students at 500 schools around Queensland to spread the safety message. Rail safety is everyone’s responsibility. We make no apologies for taking a tough stance in this regard.

Queensland Transport, Sponsorship

Hon. PT LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (10.05 am): A recent incident was reported involving one of the Broncos players. I cannot comment on a matter that is to go before the courts. However, Queensland Transport’s contract is not with an individual player but with the club. I note that the Broncos have announced they have fined a player in relation to a matter, indicating their own view on the issue.

I am advised that the sponsorship agreement with the Broncos allows Queensland Transport to enforce certain penalties in relation to the sponsorship agreement with the Broncos as a result of any disqualification of a driver’s licence in circumstances such as this. This matter has not yet been disposed of by the courts. However, I would expect my director-general in due course to exercise appropriate contractual entitlements should this eventually take place. What has occurred should send a strong message to each and every one of us: when you drink and drive there are serious consequences, and you will feel the full force of the law. No-one is immune, nor should they be.

LiveScan

Hon. JC SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Police and Corrective Services) (10.06 am): This government’s funding of the latest laser fingerprint technology is helping police make headway in unsolved crimes. We have spent $5 million installing new LiveScan devices into 15 watch-houses and police stations this year, and they are helping police crack cases. To date 11,657 sets of prints have been taken from offenders using these new LiveScan systems. Of these, 405 have been matched to unidentified prints taken from crime scenes on the existing fingerprint database.

Before LiveScan there was a one in 80 hit rate in terms of matching an offender’s prints to unknown prints from a crime scene. With LiveScan it is now a one in 29 hit rate. LiveScan represents a 100-year leap in technology for police. It has stopped messy ink fingerprints on paper that can take weeks to match. Instead, police can scan fingers and palms from a glass plate to produce clear, undistorted prints and matches within minutes.

The electronic images are transmitted to the Queensland Police Service Fingerprint Bureau as well as CrimTrac in Canberra to establish a search of the national database that currently holds around 2.7 million fingerprint records. It means that police can more quickly and easily match prints from an offender to a previously unsolved crime scene. In many instances police have been able to lay new charges. For example, an offender was arrested for a break and enter and taken to the Brisbane watch-house where he had his fingerprints taken by LiveScan. These were entered into the CrimTrac database and results came back advising he was wanted for a further five break-and-enter offences. Police then laid additional charges.

A motorist was intercepted by police driving an unregistered international truck. He provided a false name and address and fled the scene. He was apprehended and taken to Richlands watch-house. LiveScan was used to take his prints and a search on CrimTrac not only identified him but also showed he had numerous warrants for his arrest and had been on the run for three years after getting bail for armed robbery. He was subsequently arrested and charged.

This year LiveScan has enabled police to positively identify 582 people who gave false names and addresses in watch-houses. The Beattie government is committed to equipping police with the tools they need for modern-day policing. A further five LiveScan police machines will be installed at watch-houses in Brisbane, Bundaberg, Redcliffe, Sandgate and Cleveland.

Tabled paper: Copy of ministerial statement by Hon. J Spence titled ‘Fingerprint Matches’.
Smart State Academies

Hon. RJ WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Education and Minister for the Arts) (10.09 am): Providing opportunities for our best and brightest students to accelerate their learning opportunities is a cornerstone of our Smart State philosophy. That is why our government has been working to establish the Queensland Academy for Science, Mathematics and Technology at Toowong, and the Queensland Academy for Creative Industries at Kelvin Grove.

These new academies have attracted interest from all over Queensland. Since the marketing of places commenced in May—only three months ago—there have been well over 1,000 expressions of interest. This is an extraordinary response and is a further demonstration that this innovative concept is being well received by Queensland families.

Today, I am pleased to advise members that this week first-round offers are being made to 298 potential students to study at the academies in 2007. Those students have successfully completed a comprehensive and challenging selection process that included an entrance test, an interview and a portfolio or audition for creative industries applicants. One hundred and sixty-five students have been offered enrolment at the Science, Mathematics and Technology Academy and 70 at the Creative Industries Academy. Sixty-three students who have been made offers are yet to state which academy they prefer to attend. Offers have been made to 35 students from regional areas. My department is liaising with those students and their parents about accommodation and family relocation. Students will enter in Year 10 or 11 and will be the first to start at the academies. The numbers represent a very good outcome for the first stage of the academies. It will not be until 2008 when Year 12 commences for the first time that we will have a full intake of students.

Since the first entrance exam, a further 180 students have registered expressions of interest and that number is likely to increase further over the next few weeks. As a result, a second entrance examination will be held on 31 August.

Both academies will offer the world-class International Baccalaureate Diploma program, providing students with a qualification that is widely recognised by the world’s leading universities. The academies will develop links with industry and close relationships with the three Brisbane based universities, the University of Queensland, QUT and Griffith University, to offer students opportunities within specialist programs.

Construction work on the academy at Toowong is currently underway, and facilities are being established for the new Creative Industries Academy on the Kelvin Grove campus of QUT’s urban village. A comprehensive recruitment process is now in place to attract dedicated, innovative teaching staff for the academies. Considerable interest has been expressed by teachers from all over Queensland to join these specialist education facilities. The Queensland academies at Toowong and Kelvin Grove will underpin a new era in state education, boosting opportunities for Queensland’s brightest students and providing a pathway for their future careers.

Tabled paper: Copy of ministerial statement by Hon. R Welford titled ‘Smart State Academies’.

Supreme and District Courts Complex

Hon. LD LAVARCH (Kurwongbah—ALP) (Minister for Justice and Attorney-General) (10.12 am): Earlier this morning the Premier gave details about the design competition for the proposed Supreme and District courts complex. As previously said, when completed the complex will be the largest state court building in Australia, with up to 50 courtrooms and hearing rooms. In fact, the complex will have double the floor space of the Brisbane Magistrates Court, which will be adjacent to the new complex in Queensland Place. Other design specifications for the Supreme and District courts complex include natural light in all courtrooms and public spaces, larger jury rooms, a dedicated jury assembly area and jury lifts to all courts, video links in all courtrooms, a vulnerable witness suite, wireless internet access for legal practitioners, the Supreme Court Library, cells and a cafe.

In June the Beattie government announced that $6.3 million would be spent on the planning and design of the new courthouse complex. This includes the design competition and a detailed design-competition brief. The funding also will pay for the development of the schematic design from the winning entry.

The current Supreme Court and District Court building, built in the 1970s and 1980s, is too small for future needs. Refurbishment or extension of the current buildings in George Street is not economic because of their age, configuration and structure. Details of the design competition will appear in newspapers in the next fortnight. The competition is expected to take six months.

The Brisbane CBD is not the only location getting a new courthouse. New courthouses also are planned for Ipswich at a cost of $75 million, which includes a police watch-house, and Pine Rivers at a cost of $11 million. This year will also see the completion of the Sandgate Courthouse at a cost of $4.7 million. Overall, the 2006-07 state budget provided $32.3 million for court infrastructure across the state.
Mining Industry

Hon. H PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Mines and Minister Assisting the Premier on Water) (10.14 am): I have good news for Queensland.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr PALASZCZUK: I will not be goaded this morning. In 2005-06 royalties from Queensland minerals returned $1.45 billion. That represents a 50 per cent increase on last year’s royalty return and it is $122 million higher than was anticipated. Mr Speaker, as you well know, this truly is golden news for our state.

However, our government is encouraging further exploration and industry development. Our recent announcement in support of the southern missing rail link is evidence of our commitment to ensuring necessary infrastructure for the continued development of our mining industry. This development is vital to ensure that the Surat Basin reaches its full potential as an energy production area.

The most up-to-date estimates of coal resources for the Clarence-Moreton and Surat basins are those reported in the 14th edition of the Queensland Coals publication, published in 2003. At that time, the reported estimates of tonnes of raw coal in situ were as follows: 2,250 million tonnes in the Clarence-Moreton Basin and 4,198 million tonnes in the Surat Basin. The currently identified coal resources in those basins are at depths considered amenable to mining using open-cut methods. Currently, there are 23 mineral development licenses granted for the region and 63 exploration permits for coal granted in the region, 34 of which have been granted in the last two years.

The government’s Smart Exploration program has also identified its first greenfield area ripe for mineral exploration. Of course, it is in the electorate of the member for Mount Isa, west of Cloncurry. We expect public tenders for exploration to be released by the end of the year. Furthermore, we have received 23 tender applications for 12 areas of exploration for petroleum and gas. The applications closed on 4 August and the applications are currently being assessed. Such interest bodes well for further exploration and development in our great state.

Tabled paper: Copy of ministerial statement by Hon. H Palaszczuk titled ‘Mineral and petroleum development’.

Disability Services

Hon. FW PITT (Mulgrave—ALP) (Minister for Communities, Disability Services and Seniors) (10.16 am): In one of his first statements as Liberal leader in this place, the member for Moggill put his foot in his mouth with some misguided claims concerning an important initiative in the disability sector. On Tuesday, he called for action on the issue of young people with a disability being confined to aged-care nursing homes and urged the government to allocate funds so that—and I quote—‘We do not just keep ignoring the problem’. It is absolute nonsense for the member for Moggill to suggest that the government has been ignoring this issue.

The Queensland government has been very actively involved in negotiating a bilateral agreement with the Commonwealth to reduce the number of younger people with a disability residing in aged-care facilities. I helped initiate action on this matter with the original exercise to gather the relevant data that informed the submission that the Premier took to the Council of Australian Governments.

It is worth noting that the formal offer of the bilateral agreement was only received from the Commonwealth in mid-July. Some negotiations on the wording of the agreement were required. I was not going to sign off on something just because it was put forward by the Commonwealth. I wanted to be sure that we were getting the best deal for Queensland. Certainly, detailed negotiations have occurred between my officers and the Commonwealth government, including to correct some errors from the Commonwealth government that had made their way into the bilateral agreement.

I can inform the House that this week I have signed the bilateral agreement. The agreement represents a very positive move to address a complex and pressing problem. This coming weekend, we will call for tenders from organisations interested in developing the Integrated Living Model as the initial implementation phase of the bilateral agreement. Under the agreement, Queensland and the Commonwealth have committed funding of $23.9 million towards this initiative, which runs over a five-year period to June 2011. It is expected that we will reduce the number of younger people with a disability residing in aged-care facilities by as many as 30 people by the end of the first year and by as many as 214 by the end of the five-year period. This is positive news for many Queenslanders with a disability.

Tabled paper: Copy of ministerial statement by Hon. W Pitt titled ‘Younger people with a disability residing in aged care facilities’.
**Department of Child Safety**

Hon. MF REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (10.18 am): Last night in federal parliament, the Liberal member for Herbert launched a viscous and unprovoked attack on the staff of the Department of Child Safety. The federal member for Herbert compared the dedicated Queensland Child Safety staff, who spend every day of their lives trying to protect children, to the Gestapo. He compared them to the horrendous Nazi killers against whom countless Australian veterans fought to ensure a free and fair society for all.

Peter Lindsay should hang his head in shame. This is a desperate ploy to distract people from the cruel and inhumane policies of the federal government in locking refugee children up in far-off detention centres. That is what it is trying to ram through the federal parliament this morning. This same federal government that is comparing my staff to the Gestapo has actually used the Department of Child Safety as a child-minding service for several years to care for a child of an Australian citizen that it illegally and shamefully deported to a foreign country. The staff of my department gathers evidence to protect children, and that evidence is then open to scrutiny and tested in court with the final decisions being made by totally independent courts. To compare this independent process to that of the Nazi regime that so many Australians fought against is a disgrace.

I have seen some distasteful, opportunistic political attacks in my time, but Peter Lindsay has stooped to a new low. Mr Lindsay knows that in our system people have the right to representation. I would encourage any member of the public who has been accused of abusing or neglecting their children to get themselves adequate representation.

Peter Lindsay may want to use neglected and vulnerable children in order to get a cheap headline, but I can give the vulnerable children of Queensland this guarantee: the Beattie government will continue to improve our child protection system and continue to make children our very first priority. Unlike Peter Lindsay and people of his ilk, we will not be there protecting the child abusers. We will be working with and protecting the children who have been viciously, sexually and physically abused rather than protecting the sexual abusers.

I call on the federal member for Herbert to spare a thought for the victims here. He should have some common decency and stand up for the rights of defenceless children and young people rather than try to get an opportunistic headline at their expense. If he has legitimate concerns, he should do the right thing and raise them in the appropriate manner with my department, the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, the Queensland Ombudsman or the Crime and Misconduct Commission.

Today in this parliament I say to Peter Lindsay: put your money where your mouth is. Peter Lindsay has written to me a mere five times in the past three years raising child protection matters. He has not written to me at all in the past year. Abused and neglected children deserve to have their issues handled with respect rather than be the political plaything of opportunistic politicians. The words he has uttered in federal parliament are an absolute disgrace.

_Tabled paper: Copy of ministerial statement by Hon. M Reynolds titled 'Department of Child Safety'._

**Queensland Ambulance Service, Recruitment**

Hon. PD PURCELL (Bulimba—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (10.22 am): I would like to inform the House of the ongoing efforts of the Queensland Ambulance Service to provide this state with a world-class service. Queensland's rapidly growing and ageing population is posing a considerable challenge for the Queensland Ambulance Service. With demand for its services on the rise, the QAS is constantly recruiting more staff to ensure it continues to meet demand. The Beattie government is in the final year of a three-year commitment to put on an extra 240 paramedics to help meet this demand. In addition, we are in the first year of a three-year initiative to appoint 144 extra ambulance officers to boost working conditions for QAS staff.

With these programs in place, I am pleased to report to the House that the latest batch of ambulance recruits has hit the streets in recent weeks. These 31 new student paramedics are in the field after having done their first stint of classroom work. Now they will start to put what they have learnt into practice. They will spend 10 months performing the role of second officer at new stations right around the state, assisting qualified paramedics in the assessment and treatment of patients.

With these recruits hitting the road, it is an opportune time to encourage Queenslanders to consider a career with the QAS. Queenslanders who are interested in a rewarding career and who enjoy helping others in a time of need should consider becoming a paramedic. Paramedics are consistently voted as Australia's most trusted professionals. In times of emergency and distress, paramedics are some of the first people on the scene to help respond. Not only does becoming an ambulance officer provide a rewarding career, QAS staff receive world-class training and become part of a dynamic, progressive organisation.

_Tabled paper: Copy of ministerial statement by Hon. P Purcell titled 'Ambulance recruitment'._
Small Business Accelerator Program

Hon. CP CUMMINS (Kawana—ALP) (Minister for Small Business, Information Technology Policy and Multicultural Affairs) (10.24 am): I am delighted to announce today another $52,000 funding for small businesses on the Gold Coast and in Mount Ommaney, Wilston, Capalaba, Logan and Dalby. The Small Business Accelerator Program, through which these grants are provided, is a Beattie government initiative, introduced in 2004 to help well-managed, fast-growing, small businesses in the Smart State.

These latest grants bring the total funding provided through the SBA program to more than $2 million. That is $2 million that Smart State small businesses have received because the Beattie government understands the importance of the small business sector. The July MYOB nationwide small business survey rated Queensland as the best performing state government for contributing to the development of small business.

The latest state economic forecasts from Westpac and Access Economics forecast Queensland will remain one of the best-performing states. The Westpac forecast finds Queensland’s economic base should maintain a high level of economic resilience, further strengthened by strong private investment and consumption. Nearly 97 per cent of all businesses in Queensland are small businesses. It is great to see those businesses flourishing with strong support from this government.

I had a look at the small business policies from those opposite. The Liberals do not have a policy and there is no mention of the SBA program being continued under the Nationals. So Queensland’s small business sector should be very concerned about the future of the $7 million SBA program if ever, sadly, the coalition is elected.

Tabled paper: Copy of ministerial statement by Hon. C Cummins titled ‘Business grants’.

Electricity Distribution and Service Delivery

Hon. RJ MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (Minister for Energy and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy) (10.25 am): In 2004 the Beattie government committed itself to improving electricity distribution and service delivery in Queensland through the implementation of the 44 recommendations in the Somerville report. I am pleased to report to the House that our government owned energy distribution entities, Energex and Ergon Energy, are on track to meet these long-term goals. As of today, I am advised that 40 of the 44 recommendations either have been completed by Energex, Ergon Energy, the Queensland government and the Queensland Competition Authority or are being implemented as long-term strategies. The four still outstanding, I am advised, are expected to be significantly progressed in 2006-07.

I want to elaborate on the good work being done by Energex. I am advised by the Department of Energy that all of the 26 Somerville report recommendations that were relevant to Energex either are completed or are being implemented as long-term strategies. In short, Energex is on track to deliver on its commitments. Energex has boosted its call centre performance to a world-class standard. It is winning awards for the level of service provided.

Capital investment in the distribution network has been at record levels, with the $643 million of network capital expenditure in the 2005-06 financial year ahead of budget. This investment has resulted in the commissioning of an additional 1,200 megavolt amperes of new substation transformer capacity. Energex is budgeting for more than $3 billion in capital expenditure in the next five years.

Since July 2004, 489 new tradespersons have been recruited. Energex will release its 2006-07 summer preparedness plan on 31 August, further detailing its work in continually improving its distribution network, particularly in relation to the increasing demands of higher energy use over the hot summer months. The Queensland government and my Department of Energy will continue to work with Energex and Ergon Energy to ensure south-east Queensland’s electricity distribution network supplies the most reliable and cost competitive electricity that is driving one of Australia’s fastest growing regions.

Tabled paper: Copy of ministerial statement by Hon. J Mickel titled ‘Energex EDSD implementation’.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Report

Mr FENLON (Greenslopes—ALP) (10.28 am): I lay upon the table of the House the Public Accounts Committee annual report for 2005-06. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who assisted the committee with its work program during the year. I also thank my committee members for their input and support and the committee staff for their assistance. I commend the report to the House.

TRAVELSAFE COMMITTEE

Report

Mr PEARCE (Fitzroy—ALP) (10.29 am): I lay upon the table of the House the Travelsafe Committee annual report for 2005-06. I commend the committee’s annual report to the House.

Tabled paper: Travelsafe Committee Annual Report 2005-06.

PRIVATE MEMBER’S STATEMENT

Gold Coast, Health Services

Mr SPEAKER: Leader of the Liberal Party, you have one minute.

Dr FLEGG (Moggill—Lib) (10.29 am): It is no secret to the people on the Gold Coast that their health service suffers some of the worst neglect in Queensland—the worst access block, the worst bed shortages in Queensland—in an area where there is nowhere else for ambulances or patients to go. Recently I was on the Gold Coast to announce that the opposition will build a new hospital in the Coomera area. The government has no plan within any reasonable period of time to deliver the hospital services that the Gold Coast needs. So one would think that the government, having heard the opposition’s plan, would have some sort of response. Quite frankly, there has not been a word out of those opposite because their own plan has failed the people of the Gold Coast so completely and so abysmally years and years and years before they maybe get a hospital maybe three kilometres away from their existing hospital and close the existing hospital in any case.

Mrs Carryn Sullivan interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Pumicestone, I name you under 253. Before I move into question time, I welcome into the public gallery teachers and students of the Mountain Creek State School in the electorate of Kawana, which is represented in this parliament by the Hon. Chris Cummins.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Khalafalla, Dr A

Mr SPRINGBORG (10.30 am): My question without notice is to the Minister for Health. Minister, I refer to Dr Khalafalla, the latest example of the failure of our once great public hospital system under this Labor government. I could not believe my ears this morning when the minister confirmed that although six patients had suffered from this doctor’s incompetence the minister maintained that there is no problem with our health system. Minister, will these patients be eligible for exactly the same compensation arrangements put in place for those patients butchered by Dr Patel?

Mr ROBERTSON: I reject the assertions put forward by the Leader of the Opposition. What I indicated this morning is that the matters with respect to Dr Khalafalla at Mackay are currently the subject of investigations, both by my department and subsequent to that by the college of surgeons, and quite appropriately so. At all times the concerns that have been raised with the district and then subsequently with my office have been dealt with as quickly as possible in terms of both the response by the district and by the college of surgeons. I hope that the Leader of the Opposition would respect the fact that those investigations are still pending and therefore conclusions that he has put forward should be the matter of appropriate and independent assessment and not political spin, as attempted by the Leader of the Opposition.

Khalafalla, Dr A

Mr SPRINGBORG: My question without notice is to the Minister for Health. Can the minister confirm that deemed specialist Dr Khalafalla had a condition imposed on his registration that he be regularly reviewed by the Royal Australian College of Surgeons? Is it not true that as a result of such a review further conditions were imposed by the college of surgeons and the Mackay Base Hospital failed to inform the Medical Board accordingly? Minister, when did the Mackay Hospital advise the Medical Board about its serious concerns about this doctor’s competence, and will the minister table that advice?

Mr ROBERTSON: Obviously I do not carry that kind of detail around with me, but if I have the sequence—

Dr Flegg: He doesn’t know what’s going on!

Mr SPEAKER: Leader of the Liberal Party, you will soon know what is going on if you continue to interject. I warn you under 253.
Mr ROBERTSON: If I recall the sequence of events correctly, concerns were raised with the district management about Dr Khalafalla just prior to November last year. As a result of that, the district engaged Dr Hack, who is a surgeon at Townsville Hospital, to conduct a review of the operations conducted by this doctor. Some 500 operations, I think, were initially scanned. It was then taken down to about 26 that required further observation. At the conclusion of that review undertaken by Dr John Hack, who is a fellow of the college and a specialist surgeon at Townsville Hospital, he stated—

... I think his work practices, particularly surgical techniques, should be presented to the College of Surgeons for review. I understand his workload has been limited to avoid more complex operations, and this limitation should remain until the college has reviewed his practice.

As a result of receiving that report, the district then referred this matter to the college and following that there has been work undertaken for the college to actually conduct that review.

What that means, in terms of the information provided to me, is that once concerns were expressed the appropriate investigations were undertaken in a very timely way. Those investigations by the college are still ongoing. I have to say that when I became aware of this matter in June following a visit to Mackay and meeting with surgeons both at the hospital and those in the private sector, a subsequent note came from one of my advisers that further particularised those concerns. I sent that note on to the director-general asking for immediate action to be taken to bring forward that review, if possible, by the college of surgeons. But unfortunately the surgeon nominated by the college was on leave and that review was not able to be conducted until he returned from leave, which I think was on 4 August. All the way through, and in terms of the advice provided to the district, appropriate action has been taken. Of course, we await the outcome of the review by the college.

Drought

Ms CROFT: My question without notice is to the Premier. Premier, it is clear that the onset of the worst drought on record and accelerating climate change means that extraordinary measures are needed to ensure that south-east Queensland has a secure and sustainable water supply. Can the Premier please tell the House what support he is receiving for the wide-ranging solution the government has put in place?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable member for the question. As she knows, yesterday we signed an agreement with the mayor of the Gold Coast in relation to desalination. I thank the mayor of the Gold Coast and the council for their support. We are determined to work together to provide this water grid. I have to say that generally the community overwhelmingly has been very supportive of the water grid. This support is demonstrated by the meeting I had with the mayors this week and the document that I tabled in the parliament that was signed by all of the 18 mayors in the south-east corner. What we have is not just the plan, which is spelt out, but we are delivering it with the full support of the mayors. Indeed, that document has the entire 18 mayors listed.

The only opposition that we are getting is from the National and Liberal parties because they do not support the water grid, and they voted against it last night. They voted against it when they had an opportunity to support the water grid because they are not interested in water; they are interested in politics. They are interested in fighting internally, but they are not interested in water. We will deliver this water grid with or without their support. I would have thought that on the vital issue of water we would have been able to get some bipartisan support. But, no. What happened yesterday? The National Party and the Liberal Party came into this parliament—it is on the record—and voted against the water grid. Let us be very clear about this. I say to Queenslanders, particularly those affected by the worst drought on record; it is simply unforgivable to have the National and Liberal Party prepared to put politics ahead of water. That is what this is all about. They are not interested in water. They are only interested in playing politics.

Let me come back to the Gold Coast desalination drill. The geotechnical drilling is underway. The tunnel boring machines have been ordered and site works will begin in September. All members would have seen the drill that is off the coast of the Gold Coast. I hear the Leader of the National Party and his deputy trying to continue undermining the water grid by saying that nothing is happening. Obviously they have never seen the drill. It is quite visual. One of the local members might invite the National Party leader to go down and have a look at the test drilling that is going on. I can tell the Leader of the Opposition that it is a three-pronged structure. It stands up out of the water. It is very visual. So when he goes down there he will not be able to miss it. He might have missed the drought, but even he cannot miss the desalination drill.

In terms of the southern regional water pipeline, the state government has just granted the environmental approval that is required. Over recent weeks surveyors have been on the corridor site. Pump station site works are due to start at Bundamba in three weeks.

In terms of the western corridor—and I made an announcement about this this morning—pipe contracts have been let or are under assessment. Pipe construction tenders are due to be lodged tomorrow and will be assessed over coming weeks. Construction of the treatment plant at Bundamba is due to begin in October.
In terms of other matters, the detailed geotechnical investigations of the dams are now underway. Contractors have been appointed to undertake early environmental baseline work. Design activity is now fully underway. Flood modelling is being conducted. Negotiations with landholders are ongoing. Work on the Cedar Grove Weir will start shortly.

Khalafalla, Dr A

Mr SEENEY: My question is again to the Minister for Health. I refer again to the deemed specialist Dr Khalafalla who has operated at the Mackay Base Hospital. Can the minister tell the parliament specifically when the Mackay Hospital advised the Medical Board of its serious concerns about this doctor’s competence?

Mr ROBERTSON: I have outlined to the parliament the sequence of events with respect to the engagement of the college of surgeons to conduct the appropriate review. I do not know off the top of my head exactly when the district referred—or indeed if they did refer—matters to the Medical Board. However, I am aware of the fact that the Medical Board was to consider the application for registration by Dr Khalafalla but have put his reregistration on hold until the completion—quite appropriately so, I might add—of the review by the college of surgeons.

I suggest to members opposite—although I think it will be a vain hope—that they let the college of surgeons get on with the job of doing what they should do and that is provide an independent assessment of the privileges of this particular doctor in Mackay. The important thing for the people of Queensland is that such a review is being undertaken. That is the appropriate way to determine the future privileges to be applied to this particular doctor.

Liberal Party

Mr TERRY SULLIVAN: My question is directed to the Premier. There is much evidence that the Queensland Liberal Party has been engaged in bitter internal warfare for several years. Is there any evidence that the Liberals have settled their internal divisions? Are they ready to develop policies dealing with the issues confronting all Queenslanders to become part of an alternative government?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable member for Stafford for his question. I want to congratulate him on the work that he did to get the new Stafford Police Station, which the minister and I opened the other day.

The answer to the question is no. The reality is that the Liberals are still so divided. If they cannot govern themselves, they cannot govern Queensland. Let me be really clear about that. Look at what they have done this week. They stabbed in the back the man who had been their leader for five years, the man who had brought them back from the wilderness and who had increased their vote. Both the two new leaders—the leader and the deputy leader—are more unpopular than the former leader. In other words, the Liberals have replaced Bob Quinn with two leaders who are more unpopular. That is the sort of smart strategy that we would expect from the Liberal Party.

Not only that, the Liberals now have a deputy who all the retirees on the Sunshine Coast are appalled has become the Liberal Party deputy leader. An article in yesterday’s press states—

However former investor, Joyce Baker, 70, said she was stunned to learn Mr McArdle had been elected to a leadership position by his colleagues.

‘I can’t believe it,’ she said.

‘What’s the matter with the rest of those Liberal parliamentarians—don’t they know anything about this?’

‘We’re still trying to find out what happened to all that money and now he’s deputy leader—it’s a terrible joke.

Those are the words of 70-year-old Joyce Baker; it is not me saying it.

A government member interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: That is right. I turn now to the other side. We have a leader of the National Party who did not know that there was a drought—the worst drought on record. If we go to the front wage of the Liberal Party’s web site there is no reference to policies at all. Clearly, they should forget about considering being in government; they are not fit for opposition.

As I have just said, yesterday they opposed the water grid. We are in the worst drought on record. We are trying to build a water grid. What are the National and Liberal parties doing? They are just playing politics. They will try to wreck and whinge about everything they can. Not only that, they will personalise and attack any government initiative they can and they will try to personalise it simply for their political objectives.

But that is not all. Let us see where they stand on issues such as industrial relations. We have seen their different views on that issue. What is the coalition’s position on industrial relations? The National Party wants to have one view, the Liberals another. Do they agree with the Prime Minister or do they not? Let us have a clear position. Are they going to stand up for workers or are they not? The
members opposite have no consistent views on IR. Where are they on tree clearing? They disagree on tree clearing and they disagree on IR. Let us hear their policy on daylight saving. Let us see where they are—

**Opposition members** interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: They know where we are. The Leader of the National Party is worried about what recycled water will do to fish. Where do they stand on fish changing sex?

Mr SPEAKER: Before I call the Leader of the Liberal Party, I welcome into the gallery teachers and students of the Mountain Creek State School in the electorate of Kawana, which is represented in this place by the Hon. Chris Cummins.

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**Health System**

Dr FLEGG: My question is to the health minister. I refer to his secret document, the central area health service status report, dated 19 July 2006, which I have and I will table. This document details the extensive cutbacks to vital patient services in a number of public hospitals. Will the minister now release this secret information for all the hospitals in Queensland? Or is it his government’s intention to call an election in the hope that the people of Queensland will not find out until after the election?

**Tabled paper:** Document (3 pages) titled ‘CAHS Weekly Workforce/Service Status Report—19.07.06’.

Mr ROBERTSON: I reject the assertion that it is a secret document. This is information that I regularly receive as minister from—

Dr Flegg interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Leader of the Liberal Party, you have been warned under 253. I am tempted to ask you to leave the chamber. One more outburst from you and I will. I respect the position you now hold; you respect the chair.

Mr ROBERTSON: These are just regular updates that are prepared by the department on the status of hospitals throughout the state. As the member would expect, as the minister I receive them as someone who wants to keep up with what is happening in our hospitals throughout the state.

Quite frankly, I think it is a silly stunt on behalf of the member for Moggill to go down this path. However, what is more important, since the Premier has brought up the issue—

**Opposition members** interjected.

Mr ROBERTSON: Mr Speaker, is there some way that I can answer this question without interruption? Thank you. I think, far more important for the people of the Gold Coast, since the member for Moggill has made such an issue about his recent visit to the Gold Coast—and did that not go well when the local doctors in the hospital made it quite clear that he was not welcome at the hospital if he was going to carry on with the nonsense that he was going to carry on with? I do not know—

Mr Caltabiano interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Chatsworth, you have already been warned under 253. I ask to you leave the chamber.

Whereupon the honourable member for Chatsworth withdrew from the chamber—

Mr ROBERTSON: We have to feel sorry for the people of the Gold Coast. They would be very confused about exactly what the coalition’s plans are for the Gold Coast Hospital. On the one hand the member for Moggill, the Liberal leader, is saying that under a coalition government the $500 million earmarked for the Gold Coast Hospital at Parklands would be used to build a 250-bed hospital at Coomera. He also said that it would not be finished until 2016—the same time that it would have taken to build the hospital at Parklands. But on the other hand we have the new National Party member for Gaven saying on 2 August that the $500 million will give only a medium sized 250-bed community hospital that will not be built until 2016.

So we have the National Party saying that $500 million will get people 250 beds at Southport and we have the Liberal leader saying that it will give people a 250-bed hospital at Coomera. Once again, in terms of policy, we have a split within the coalition. This is an ongoing problem for the opposition. The fact that Dr Flegg was seen off the premises by the doctors at the Gold Coast Hospital was a sight to behold. Then he accuses me of organising it. I was not even in the country.

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**Capital Works Program**

Mr ENGLISH: My question is to the Deputy Premier. The Deputy Premier spoke this morning of the need for skilled labour in Queensland and she detailed lengthy programs for capital works projects in this year’s budget. Can she advise the House of support for the government’s infrastructure program?
Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question and for his ongoing support for the government’s infrastructure program. I wish I could tell members that it was universally supported across the chamber, but, as members know, there is constant harping from the other side about various pieces of needed infrastructure. I was, however, heartened to see one of the first press releases by the new shadow Treasurer on Tuesday when he made this claim—

I am passionate about building Queensland’s future and in my new role of Shadow Treasurer, I have been given the opportunity to work with the business community in Queensland to bring forward many of the big infrastructure projects for our future.

I thought that at last we were going to get some support for the infrastructure that is needed in this state. How surprised was I when 48 hours later—48 hours after saying that he wanted to bring forward the big infrastructure projects for Queensland—he and his colleagues voted against the Traveston Dam, they voted against the Wyaralong Dam, they voted against the acceleration of the western corridor recycled water pipeline, they voted against the eastern connector, they voted against the acceleration of the northern connector and they voted against the raising of the Hinze Dam wall? In fact, they voted against every infrastructure component in the south-east Queensland water package. In the 11 years I have been here I have not seen such a wholesale rejection of infrastructure all in one vote. That is extraordinary. Of course, the member for Chatsworth also opposes the eastern busway and the M1, he opposes public housing in his own electorate—

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Member for Gregory, I warn you under standing order 253.

Ms BLIGH: He opposes the Tank Street bridge. I thought voting against something was a pretty intriguing way of supporting it let alone bringing it forward, but he is an intriguing fellow. I have been intrigued all week about how they could have a leadership ballot in the Liberal Party without the member for Chatsworth. I was similarly intrigued this morning when I read in the Courier-Mail—

... it was understood that Mr Caltabiano was absent as he was seeking help for a medical condition.

Mr Lucas: Pathological lying.

Ms BLIGH: Pathological lying is one of the possibilities. A heart transplant is another.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Withdraw the word ‘lying’, please.

Ms BLIGH: I withdraw. But I thought perhaps it was a phobia. It could have been haemophobia, which is the fear of blood, or hypengyophobia, which is the fear of responsibility. I hope as he is now the shadow Treasurer that it was not arithmophobia, which is of course the fear of numbers. Maybe it was ateaphobia, which is the fear of ruin. But it was not dentophobia, which is the fear of dentists, because of course he had his friend the member for Surfers Paradise backing him all the way.

Mr SPEAKER: I do not know who is next. Your list is—

Mr McNamara: I will give it a go, if you like.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! A list was given to me and I go by the list. If you people decide to jump up independently that is not my fault.

Young Athletes Assistance Grants

Mr WELLINGTON: My question is to the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations and Minister for Sport. The last round of the young athletes assistance grants was popular in my electorate, with 39 young athletes receiving assistance. Will the minister continue this assistance program for young Queensland athletes? If so, when will the minister call for the next round of applications for assistance from young Queensland athletes?

Mr BARTON: I thank the member for the question because the program has, indeed, developed a great deal of interest around the entire Queensland community. The short answers to the member’s questions are: yes, we will be continuing with the program and it is intended that applications will be called for again in November.

I will put a few facts on the table with regard to this program because of some concerns that have been passed on to me. While I have had some letters of concern, I have also had numerous letters from parents and from young people who have been recipients of the grants under the program. Earlier this year I announced a program to provide grants to young people attending sporting events away from home—$500 when they needed to travel between 100 and 500 kilometres, $650 when they needed to travel between 650 kilometres and 1,000 kilometres, and $800 when they needed to travel 1,000 kilometres or more. We announced that there would be $500,000 available for that program. We expected that that would be a great improvement and that it would enable a large number of young people to travel to sporting events that they otherwise would have missed out on.
The only other state that has such a program is New South Wales, which of course is a state twice the size of Queensland in terms of its population base, and they allocated $260,000 annually. We allocated $500,000, but we were absolutely overwhelmed by the number of applications that we received—an unexpectedly high number of applications. In fact, some 3,500 applications were received. We made a quick decision about that. I was able to find some additional funding from within my department. Instead of simply allocating $500,000, which is what was intended, we allocated over $2 million to over 3,100 successful children to engage in sporting activities. There certainly were some who did not meet the criteria, but the criteria had to be set. In terms of the criteria that we did set, because we were overwhelmed with so many applications—way beyond what we thought would potentially be received—we are reviewing that criteria to make sure that we help those people who are most in need of such assistance.

This is a great program. It did come out of the Obesity Summit, which was held here some months ago. It was one of the projects that we put forward for consideration to get young people active and to particularly assist those families who would not otherwise be able to support their children to travel to major sporting events. If the member is interested, I can give him copies of some of the letters that have come in from parents and young people who are absolutely thrilled to have this opportunity—young people who have won gold medals and young people who have captained teams that won events. It is great to see this support for young people around this state. We intend to continue with this program and it will be reopened in November.

Fraser Coast and Sunshine Coast, Patient Care

Mr McNAMARA: My question without notice is to the Minister for Health. Can the minister inform the House of any new health services being provided to improve patient care for people living on the Fraser Coast and on the Sunshine Coast?

Mr ROBERTSON: I can and I will. I am pleased to inform members of two new Beattie government initiatives that will deliver better health care for Queenslanders on the Sunshine Coast and on the Fraser Coast. Yesterday Queensland Health entered into a partnership agreement with a Caloundra based private medical imaging company to provide public patients at Caloundra Hospital access to a local CT scanning service. This deal means in-patients at Caloundra Hospital will no longer have to travel to Nambour or Brisbane to access a public CT scanner. Instead, from next Monday, 14 August, they will be able to access a CT scanner provided through X-Ray and Imaging Caloundra Pty Ltd, which is located a short distance from the hospital. This is another example of Queensland Health entering into an innovative partnership with the private sector to provide improved health services for private patients closer to home.

The new CT service will accommodate approximately 20 public patients each week, both during business hours and after hours. Under the agreement, X-Ray and Imaging Caloundra will also provide experienced staff to operate the service. The new CT service will enable trauma and orthopaedic specialists to locate and fix problems more quickly. It will help save lives and ensure faster diagnosis for patients in the region, resulting in better patient outcomes. That is great news for patients on the Sunshine Coast. It is also about getting more services for Caloundra. I suspect that we will be hearing more about Caloundra in the not-too-distant future.

On the Fraser Coast—and I thank the member for Hervey Bay for his question and his ongoing interest in health issues in his electorate—the government is about to begin construction of a new $1.4 million hydrotherapy pool at the Maryborough Base Hospital. It is a vital piece of infrastructure which will assist patients recovering after treatment at Fraser Coast health facilities. It will provide a supervised environment for hospital patients and residential care facility clients to access hydrotherapy or aquatic physiotherapy. Patients with conditions such as arthritis, back and neck pain, sports injuries, work related injuries, cerebral palsy, Parkinson’s disease, as well as people recovering from orthopaedic surgery and stroke, will benefit.

This new pool will be built to Australian standards and has been designed with the assistance of a consultant engineering firm. The pool will be built by FK Gardiner and is expected to be completed early this year. This is yet another positive demonstration of the value of our $9.6 billion health plan. This is about delivering new infrastructure for growing communities like that on the Fraser Coast.

Health System

Mr McARDLE: My question without notice is to the Minister for Health. I refer the minister to another of his secret documents entitled ‘Central Area Health Service Medical Recruitment Planning for 2007’, and I table a copy of the document.

The document details the expected critical shortage of medical staff in public hospitals which will seriously impact on delivery of medical services to patients. I ask: will the minister now release this information given that he states it is routine and mundane for all hospitals in Queensland or does his government intend to hide this information from the people of Queensland?
Mr ROBERTSON: What we have not hidden is the fact that Australia—as a result of what the member opposite's federal government has created—has a critical shortage of doctors. As a result of that, not only do we have to rely on the recruitment of overseas trained doctors—and we continue to do so—but we have also continued our campaign to increase medical places at universities throughout the state—successfully so, I might add, if you take into account the recent COAG outcomes. Unfortunately, until those extra numbers come through our medical schools and appropriately trained—

Mr McARDLE: I rise to a point of order. I simply ask the minister to advise whether he will release the documents for the balance of hospitals in Queensland.

Mr SPEAKER: Take your seat. There is no point of order.

Mr ROBERTSON: Unfortunately, until those graduates come through our universities and through our specialist colleges we are going to continue to have shortages of clinicians in various specialties throughout the state. We have made no secret of that. We have made no secret of it because we are determined to address it through our vigorous international recruitment campaigns. We have been very successful in recruiting more doctors to Queensland. What we are doing now is moving into a phase of being strategic with respect to filling particular shortages across a range of specialties. We know, for example, that there is a national shortage of qualified specialists in emergency medicine; we know that there are national shortages in terms of specialists in orthopaedics; we know that there is a national shortage of specialists in oncology; we know that there is a range of shortages—

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, I give you a final warning.

Mr ROBERTSON: We know that there are shortages across a range of specialties as a result of the federal government sitting on its hands and freezing the number of places at our universities. That is why we have been so vigorous and aggressive in our overseas recruitment campaign, so that we can build up our services to meet the needs of our growing and indeed ageing population. We will not rest until our $9.6 billion Health Action Plan delivers on the ground more doctors, more nurses and more allied health professionals which is, in fact, what we are doing.

Mr MESSENGER: I rise to a point of order. The minister is misleading the House. Two royal commissions show that he sat on his hands for two years.

Mr SPEAKER: That is not a point of order. Take your seat.

Mr ROBERTSON: I am left speechless by that inane objection.

Ms MALE: My question without notice is to the Minister for Police and Corrective Services. Given that the member for Caloundra appears to have usurped the member for Gregory's role as shadow police and corrective services spokesperson, can the minister inform the House of the Liberal Party's law and order policies?

Ms SPENCE: The Liberal Party is absolutely desperate to whip up a law and order fear campaign prior to the next election. Why wouldn't it? It has worked for it in the past and the Liberal Party has nothing going for it at this point in time. What have we seen? We have seen Liberal Party candidates going around the state putting on law and order forums. We heard from the member for Yeerongpilly that the candidate out that way invited people to a law and order forum and duped them into sitting through a campaign launch instead.

We know that the member for Currumbin likes to put on the regular law and order forum and she will do and say anything to deceive the people of her electorate or even the nearby electorate of Burleigh.

Mrs STUCKEY: I rise to a point of order. I take offence at the comment that I have been deceitful. I ask the minister to withdraw the words.

Mr SPEAKER: There is no personal slight on you.

Mrs STUCKEY: She has accused me of being deceitful.

Mr SPEAKER: Minister, withdraw the offending words.

Ms SPENCE: I will withdraw what she finds offensive. The fact remains, though, that the Liberals are absolutely desperate and they are using law and order as a way to try to get anyone in the state of Queensland to notice them. One would think, then, that the Liberals would have some good law and order policies. I looked up their web site this morning; it has nothing to say in terms of a law and order policy. At least the National Party and the shadow minister, Mr Johnson, have done some work on law and order and the Nationals have a little bit up on their web site as a bit of a law and order policy, and I congratulate them on that. Mr McArdle, sadly, thinks that he is going to take over Mr Johnson's role as the shadow police and corrective services spokesperson and he goes around the state making many comments about the whole issue of law and order.
Mr Lucas: What about mortgage rip-offs?

Mr SPEAKER: What about the minister for transport keeping quiet?

Ms SPENCE: I think we all have to acknowledge that it is going to be difficult for the Liberal Party to keep this going, because what we do have in Queensland at this point in time is a good story to tell in terms of crime and safety. What the people of Queensland have enjoyed for the last eight years is a Labor government that has made crime, safety and the protection of the people of Queensland a priority. We have put more money and resources into our Police Service and into our criminal justice system than ever before. We have an excellent Police Service in this state and they are getting very good results.

One cannot deny the fact that for the last four years we have pushed down crime rates in this state to unprecedented levels. So, as hard as the Liberal Party might try, the people of this state are confident that they have a good Police Service. I think they acknowledge that, although there is still crime in their communities, the incidence of crime is in fact going down and it is not as much of a problem as it was in the past. I think the Liberal Party is on a mission to lose if it continues down this path.

Emergency Call Centre Staff, CPR Training

Mr MALONE: My question without notice is to the Minister for Emergency Services. I refer to the death of a 39-year-old Brisbane man on 24 June this year. Upon his collapsing and having a seizure his wife made a call to 000 seeking an ambulance for her husband. Whilst on the phone to the ambulance operator her husband stopped breathing and she requested advice from the ambulance operator on how to perform CPR. This lady advises me that the call centre staff were unable to provide advice on how to perform basic CPR and, as a consequence, by the time the ambulance did arrive, having initially driven past her property, her husband was deceased. This lady, whose details I will give to the minister privately later, has questioned whether all emergency call centre staff should be trained in basic resuscitation techniques. I request that the minister make available to this House an unedited copy of the 000 call.

Mr PURCELL: I thank the member for the question. I do not know of that particular incident. I would be grateful if I could get those details. One thing I can say about our communications staff is that they do stay on the line if requested by people and they do give information in relation to how to do basic CPR. That happens on a regular basis. There are a lot of stories one hears where young children have rung, the communications operator has taken them through the basics of CPR and told them what they need to do, and they have been able to give that basic CPR. I would be interested to know where that incident happened and find out more about it. I will do that for the member when he gives me those details.

Brisbane Housing Co.

Ms LIDDY CLARK: My question is to the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing. I am acutely aware and fabulously, happily aware that the minister’s initiative of the Brisbane Housing Co. has been a success in providing affordable accommodation for people in need. Can the minister advise of the latest developments regarding the Brisbane Housing Co.?

Mr SCHWARTEN: I thank the Premier for giving up some of his valuable time yesterday to open Dorothy and Moier O’Brien Place—103 units in his electorate in Warry Street. It is a Brisbane Housing Co. product. It is absolutely brilliant. I have here an example of it. That is the standard we build, Mr Speaker, not this rot here that the Liberal Party is out terrifying people about that looks like something out of—

Ms Bligh: Clockwork Orange.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Clockwork Orange, exactly; good point. The reality is that they are like something out of Clockwork Orange. They are not very happy today. They look like an undertaker’s picnic. I was pretty impressed with the member for Chatsworth’s effort this week—

Ms Bligh: What a stunning debut!

Mr SCHWARTEN:—and the way the deputy leader missed that question this morning. He could not organise the ladies lavatories at the Mount Larcom show. What a stellar performance this week from Mr Caltabiano! There was no question to the Treasurer, but he has put out ‘new portfolio role for local member’. In it he says what a great promotion he has had, allowing him to ensure important infrastructure programs for the local area. What does he oppose? Public housing. He is not interested in anything whatsoever that helps people who earn less than $100,000 a year, because as far as he is concerned they do not exist. The reality is that we know how untrustworthy he is. You would rather trust a rabbit with a head of lettuce than give him a go. The Leader of the Opposition was well advised to sneak off after him to make sure he was not on the telephone ringing up to get some numbers against him.
A government member: Billy McMahon.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Well, Tiberius would telephone.

Ms Spence interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Leaving by the back door is the only door he knows. I was also impressed to hear our Deputy Premier announce that the reason the member could not be at the meeting the other day to stab Bob Quinn in the back was that he was getting medical assistance. I understand the medical condition was Bombolas induced diarrhoea—the bottom line being that he is terrified and will do anything, and he is using poor people in his electorate—

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I would be very careful if I were the member for Warrego. Sitting so close to him, some of him might rub off on him, although we would not hardly notice the difference. This side of politics will continue to support poor people. The rabble over there—and we can see what rabble they are—have no policy on housing.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Listen to them.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I used to be good at throwing people out, too, member for Callide.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Yes, that would be very good. I hope he is the next one.

Land Valuation Notices

Ms LEE LONG: My question is directed to the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines. I refer to new valuation notices recently received in my electorate from his department. Constituents have just received three separate valuation notices where previously they received only one, as it is a single block of land held on a single title, and I ask: how does the minister justify placing three separate valuations on various parts of a single lot, arbitrarily putting his own boundaries around these different areas and doing so without any consultation with the landholders, especially when valuations are supposed to be on the unimproved value of land only?

Mr PALASZCZUK: I would like to thank the honourable member for the question. The process that has been put in place this year is no different from the process that has been put in place any other year. If the honourable member has any specific cases of concerns that have been brought to her, for goodness sake, make me aware of them on an individual basis and I will see what I can do to help the honourable member. But things have not changed. Valuations have been conducted in this manner for years.

Drivers Licences

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: My question is directed to the Minister for Transport and Main Roads. Could the minister please update the House on the current status of the project that will deliver a new driver’s licence for Queenslanders?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for her question. The honourable member is an assiduous worker in the interests of her electorate, but she takes a very great interest in state strategic issues—such as the new Queensland driver’s licence—that are critically important to all of us.

The new Queensland driver’s licence will replace the current laminated Queensland driver’s licence, the technology of which is much the same as when I was a student at university in the early 1980s. The current licence is vulnerable to fraud. The current licence is able to be tampered with. It is much like a polaroid photograph. The problem is that licences, even where the face is recorded in other states, are susceptible to incidents of fraud. We will see the first licence in Australia that is a smart card digital licence. It is a quantum leap in the security and integrity of licence information.

The next crucial step in the process, cabinet approval having been given to proceed, is the release of tender documents. They will be publicly released next week, on 16 August. The tender will invite EOI from the private sector for planning, design, integration, financing, delivery, management and maintenance of the driver’s licence. The proposal will be developed under PPP guidelines in accordance with Queensland government policies. The industry has been closely consulted in the development of the tender process including market sounding and public consultation.

I want to be very clear about this as a custodian of taxpayers’ funds: the federal government has announced through Minister Hockey its wish to proceed to a smart card for national health issues. That is a very good idea. This will not be the same card as that, but we are working with the federal government in relation to common platform technologies and common standards. That is very important because it will require significant identification to have the issuing of this NQDL when it is out, and it will be needed for the federal card as well. Why have two transaction costs when people have to front to the feds to identify themselves for the first time and then front to us as well?
All sorts of opportunities come from working together with the federal government in relation to this. We are consistent on this side of the House. We take on the federal government when we need to in the interests of Queensland, but we are also prepared to work with it. This sort of technology could very well have avoided the Cornelia Rau issue. Had she had a Queensland digital driver’s licence when found in her disoriented state, her face could have been matched against the database and automatically a match thrown up showing who she was.

Similarly, because we would have a digitised database with all photographs in it, if someone seeks to get a second licence in the same name, this will then throw up the fact that that person already has a licence in another name. There are tremendous opportunities for the prevention of fraud and, indeed, terrorist activities. Drivers licences were used extensively in the United States in terrorist attacks. It is very useful technology for us to be involved in.

Queensland Health

Mr HORAN: My question is directed to the Minister for Health. I refer to serious complaints regarding an inappropriate relationship between an overseas trained doctor and a vulnerable patient at the Toowoomba Hospital in 2005 which was reported to the Medical Board. Will the minister tell the parliament how long Queensland Health knew about this incident and why the doctor was not suspended but simply transferred to another ward where the alleged victim was a patient? Will the minister also tell the parliament if the police investigation and the Medical Board investigation have been completed?

Mr ROBERTSON: I am aware of investigations that have recently occurred in relation to a former doctor of Toowoomba Hospital. There have been allegations of misconduct in relation to this doctor, and investigations have been carried out by both police and the Medical Board. The matter has now been referred to the Health Practitioners Tribunal for hearing and determination. It would therefore be inappropriate to comment further on the specific allegations before they are heard by the tribunal, but it is important to note that this doctor has been deregistered and is no longer authorised to practise in Queensland. Both the board and Queensland Health are taking a very active interest in this matter to ensure all of the actions that were taken in relation to this doctor were timely and appropriate.

Tourism Industry

Ms JARRATT: My question is directed to the Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development. The tourism industry, which generates $8.4 billion annually for the Queensland economy, is a high priority of the Beattie government and we have a detailed plan for its future. Does the minister know if the opposition has any similar policies for the tourism industry?

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for her question. The member for Whitsunday is one of the greatest advocates in this House for the tourism industry—and why would she not be, with 74 islands and an absolutely stunning mainland? I thank her for her contribution, particularly to the fantastic campaign that is running in the Whitsundays.

The Beattie government is delivering for Queensland and for Queenslanders. Our economy is the envy of the rest of Australia. We have created an environment that encourages investment. We have a plan for health, we have a plan for water and the good news is that we have a long-term plan for growing our tourism industry. We want to bring more tourists, generate more investment and provide new infrastructure and new tourism product. Very importantly, we want to generate more jobs for Queenslanders, particularly in the regions.

The question that the member has asked is a very important one: does the opposition have a policy and, if so, what is it? Sadly, I think opposition members are too busy stabbing each other in the back to even be bothered looking at developing a policy for the tourism industry. That is particularly sad for the member for Currumbin, who is the shadow spokesperson. One would expect that at least she would have some understanding of the importance of the tourism industry, particularly on the Gold Coast.

Therefore, the answer to the question is no, there is no opposition policy whatsoever. I do understand that the member for Currumbin has her own personal policy for the tourism industry. I have been told that she believes that the holiday capital of Australia, the Gold Coast, already has too many tourists and the member for Currumbin does not want any more. I know that all government members will be absolutely staggered to hear this, as I was. I assure the industry that neither I nor the Beattie government share those views.

The Gold Coast government members and Gold Coast Tourism are working very hard to attract more tourists to the Gold Coast, through things such as Indy and the marathon.

Mr Lucas: It should be, ‘Where the bloody hell aren’t you?’

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I warn the Minister for Transport and Main Roads under standing order 253.
Ms KEECH: I am working with Gold Coast Tourism to develop a new event for the Gold Coast, which is a shopping festival. I assure the tourism industry of the Beattie government’s absolute commitment to growing the tourism industry. When the National Party had responsibility for the tourism portfolio it showed tremendous interest in the tourism industry, because it knows that tourism in the outback is the lifeblood of regional towns. Unfortunately, the Liberal Party is not interested in any policy whatsoever.

Toowoomba Mental Health Unit

Mr RICKUSS: I refer the Minister for Health to a patient who was admitted to the Toowoomba Mental Health Unit on 11 July this year and discharged on 18 July. The patient then stabbed his ex-girlfriend to death on 24 July in Gatton. What provisions is the minister making for the payment of damages by a negligent mental health system that releases such people into the community, thereby ruining lives? Is this not another example of a failed mental health system under Labor, which the minister will start to fix by admitting its failure?

Mr ROBERTSON: Of course this matter would be appropriately investigated, as all such tragic episodes are in the very difficult area of mental health. If anything untoward occurred in terms of the assessments undertaken by appropriate professionals at Toowoomba then, again, appropriate action will be taken. It is not for me, nor is it for the member, to be the arbiter of such matters. I take these matters very seriously. I do not engage in unfortunate political stunts, as the member just has.

Social Infrastructure, Multiculturalism

Mrs ATTWOOD: I ask the Minister for Small Business, Information Technology Policy and Multicultural Affairs how the Beattie government is building social infrastructure in Queensland communities and how this government’s achievements in multiculturalism compare with those of the Borbidge government?

Mr CUMMINS: I thank the member for Mount Ommaney for the question. Social cohesion is a very important part of the Smart State, just as bricks, mortar and infrastructure are. Building social capital and infrastructure makes sure everyone enjoys the prosperity and the benefits of our growing state economy. That is why the Beattie government has delivered record multicultural funding increases. When we came into office in 1998, the budget for multicultural affairs was $350,000. Today under the Beattie government it is $4.8 million, which is a 1,259 per cent increase. We are spending more than 12 times the amount that those opposite did.

In 1998, this government introduced the first multicultural Queensland policy, which we have since strengthened to include community building strategies. When the opposition was running the state we did not have 16 multicultural workers in Queensland local councils. We did not have 20 multicultural community workers across the state making sure that ethnic communities properly access available government services, which were developed and delivered by this government and not those opposite. Queenslanders did not have the Queensland Multicultural Festival, held at the Roma Street Parkland, or the prestigious photographic awards that promote cultural diversity and offer more than $25,000 in cash and other prizes. We did not have every government department working to multicultural action plans; nor did our CEOs have multicultural deliverables tied to their performance agreements. We did not have much at all in terms of multicultural understanding or vision. Thankfully, now we do and Queensland is far richer for it.

At a time when the world is facing major crises linked to cultural and religious divisions and the Smart State is leading the nation in promoting inclusiveness and cultural acceptance, where does the opposition sit? We have found a brief policy on the Nationals’ web site that sets objectives we are already delivering, but there is nothing from the Liberals. No-one would be surprised by that. One has to ask: when will they swap notes, compare ideas and come up with a cohesive and mutually agreed policy?

Mr SPEAKER: Before I call the member for Cunningham, I acknowledge and welcome to the public gallery the principal, assistant principal and school leaders from Marymount College in the electorate of Burleigh, represented in this parliament by Mrs Christine Smith.

Prep Year

Mr COPELAND: I refer the Minister for Education and Minister for the Arts to the special application made available to parents to enrol their 2001-born children in prep in 2007. Parents were required to submit that application by 20 June 2006, along with considerable detail as to why their child should be allowed the benefit of an extra preschool year in prep rather than be forced into the school system. Concerned parents have informed me that they were to be told the result of their child’s application by 31 August 2006. However, they have only now learned that they will not find out until some time in September. Could the minister explain this delay and why his government is continuing to keep those concerned parents in the dark about their children’s educational future?
Mr WELFORD: Firstly, it is not true that they were required to provide considerable detail in relation to the expressions of interest to be lodged in June. They were able to lodge an expression of interest and provide any information that they wished. They could provide medical information if they wished or a submission on behalf of themselves as parents indicating why they thought it was desirable. They could get the support of teachers from preschools. They could use whatever information they liked and there was no obligation on them to provide any particular information at all. That is the first point I want to make.

In relation to notification, the intention is to notify parents as soon as possible. Obviously, from the department’s perspective it is important that we finalise numbers as soon as possible so that the allocation of teaching staff and facilities to each of the prep schools throughout the state is available for the start of next year. I am not aware that there has been any significant delay in relation to the notification of parents in that regard. However, if it is not provided to them by the end of this month, it will be provided within a very short time thereafter.

Emergency Services Infrastructure

Mr HOOLIHAN: I ask the Minister for Emergency Services to inform the House of the ongoing work by the Department of Emergency Services to provide the infrastructure necessary for ambulance, fire and rescue and emergency management personnel?

Mr PURCELL: I thank the member for the question. The member for Keppel is a very keen supporter of emergency services within his electorate. He did not give me as hard a time as he did the Premier, but he was very persistent in lobbying for an ambulance station at Emu Park. While on the subject of lobbying, I must mention the member for Redlands, who was even more persistent than the member for Keppel in lobbying for a fire station. When I am here I probably run into him three or four times a day and he never ceases to remind me of what they need in the Redlands. I thank him for his help and assistance in that way.

There is a great deal of work going on in the Department of Emergency Services to ensure Queenslanders continue to receive world-class emergency services. To ensure the provision of these services, personnel must have the right infrastructure. This government has a strong record in recent years of providing infrastructure. For example, the Beattie government has built the Queensland Combined Emergency Services Academy—an international centre of excellence for fires, ambos and disaster response personnel—the Special Operations Centre at Cannon Hill and the State Operations Coordination Centre at Kedron. However, the Beattie government will not rest on its laurels.

Currently underway is work on the new or upgraded stations in Atherton, Emu Park, Gympie, Narangba, Forest Hill and, in the Brisbane CBD, at Roma Street. We are also refurbishing the Dirranbandi ambulance facility. The replacement Springwood Ambulance Station was opened recently. In the recent budget $109.6 million was allocated for capital expenditure. This funding will ensure emergency services keep pace with Queensland’s rapidly growing and ageing population. In particular, there will be $48 million over four years to provide Emergency Management Queensland with a state-of-the-art fleet of helicopters to further boost rescue and aeromedical services. The budget also provides almost $20 million for new vehicles and $2 million for the strategic information management initiative, which is a great program to provide state-of-the-art laptops to paramedics to make their job much easier and reduce waiting times.

As I mentioned during the estimates hearings, one of the most exciting developments within Emergency Services is our push to get more bang for our buck from our building budget. Many would be aware of the shortage of tradesmen and the quickly rising building costs. For this reason, the department is looking to use factory built buildings, which is cheaper than on-site construction. The quality of the buildings will mean that our hardworking staff will not suffer, but this innovation allows us to do more with our funds.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The time for questions has expired.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Socceroos

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (11.31 am), by leave: I am happy to inform this House, together with my ministerial colleague Tom Barton, that Queensland has scored a sporting coup with the World Cup Qantas Socceroos to play an international friendly match in Brisbane at Suncorp on Saturday, 7 October 2006. This is a match that will pit our national team, the Socceroos, against South American powerhouse Paraguay.

After many sleepless nights during the recent World Cup we all know how good the Socceroos are. We now have the chance to see for ourselves. Following talks with soccer authorities the Queensland government has secured the match against Paraguay which is ranked 19th in the world. Australia is ranked 33rd. I will come back to that.
This game against another 2006 World Cup finalist will be a vital match in Australia’s Asian Cup preparations. This match comes hot on the heels of the state government’s recently announced $500,000 development package for junior football throughout Queensland. I understand a large contingent of our World Cup Socceroos are expected to play in this encounter.

We were thrilled by their progress in the World Cup in Germany. We all remember that the eventual champions were only able to beat our Socceroos after a diving exhibition which resulted in a penalty goal against us in injury time. Pity they did not have a CMC internationally. They will play one of South America’s top teams, Paraguay, which is ranked 19th. I am a little surprised that we are still ranked only 33rd.

The Football Federation of Australia’s football family initiative will apply for the match, with grassroots players and supporters in Brisbane having the opportunity to preregister for priority access to tickets at myfootball.com.au until 25 August. Tickets are expected to go on sale generally in the first week of September.

I wish to acknowledge the role of the minister for sport, Tom Barton, in negotiating this outcome. I also want to thank John O’Neill for the role that he has played. As we all know, he played a significant role in the Rugby Union World Cup. He now does the same for soccer. He seems to be a champion in whatever he turns his hand to. This is great news for soccer fans.

Unemployment Statistics

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (11.33 am), be leave: There is more great news for Queensland. Unemployment in Queensland is now 4.5 per cent. Remember when they laughed when we said five per cent. It is now 4.5 per cent. Queensland trend unemployment—

Mr SPEAKER: Mr Premier, could you repeat that figure.

Mr BEATTIE: Yes, 4.5 per cent. Queensland’s trend unemployment rate was 4.5 per cent in July 2006 down 0.2 percentage points from 4.7 per cent in June. This is the lowest unemployment rate that we have seen since they started recording these statistics. This is the lowest monthly trend unemployment rate recorded in Queensland since the inception of the current labour force series in February 1978, beating the previous low of 4.7 per cent recorded in both June 2006 and each month from December 2004 to March 2005. What this shows is that my government is delivering for Queensland.

Socceroos

Hon. TA BARTON (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations and Minister for Sport) (11.35 am), by leave: It is great news that the Socceroos have agreed to play a high-level friendly match at Suncorp Stadium. It is great that the Football Federation Australia is bringing one of these high level games to a centre around the country outside Sydney and Melbourne. This follows from the recent announcement made by the Premier committing $500,000 to grow and develop football at the grassroots level in Queensland, in partnership with Football Queensland and Queensland’s own Queensland Roar.

This exciting new package was another key initiative to build participation in junior sport in the wake of the Obesity Summit which highlighted the importance of sport and physical activity in beating childhood obesity. Football is one of the few sports that can truly claim to be a world game. It appeals to a wide demographic including boys and girls, young and old from many cultural backgrounds. It offers something for everyone. The interest in the Soccer World Cup offers a great opportunity to grow and develop junior participation in line with the government’s commitment to help more Queenslanders discover the benefits of an active, healthy lifestyle.

Unemployment Statistics

Hon. TA BARTON (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations and Minister for Sport) (11.36 am), by leave: Mr Deputy Speaker, I also welcome the unemployment figure of 4.5 per cent. As the minister for employment in this state that is a great achievement by this government. It is another goal that I have helped to kick with the rest of this government. Over the year Queensland recorded an increase in full-time employment of 42,200 which accounted for almost a third of all full-time jobs created nationally. Part-time employment in the state increased by 9,200 over the year. I do not feel too bad about retiring from active politics when this term is over, whether at the end of this year or early next year, when figures such as that are on the board.

Tabled paper: Copy of ministerial statement by Hon. T Barton.
BODY CORPORATE AND COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

First Reading

Hon. MM KEECH (Albert—ALP) (Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development) (11.37 am): I present a bill for an act to amend the Body Corporate and Community Management Act 1997 and the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal Act 2003, and for other purposes. I present the explanatory notes, and I move—

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Second Reading

Hon. MM KEECH (Albert—ALP) (Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development) (11.37 am): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

The key objective of the Body Corporate and Community Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill is to improve dispute resolution processes for community title schemes. Importantly, the bill introduces two processes which will not only accelerate the resolution of disputes and minimise the likelihood of future problems but will improve communication between the persons in dispute allowing them to reach agreeable outcomes rather than having decisions imposed on them. The bill also addresses the concerns raised in a private member’s bill introduced by the member for Nicklin, Mr Peter Wellington, by amending the Liquor Act 1992 to allow the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal to require the submission of fresh evidence in particular circumstances.

The amendments contained in the Body Corporate and Community Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill will achieve improved dispute resolution in a number of ways. Firstly, most persons intending to seek formal government intervention in a body corporate dispute must initially make a reasonable attempt to resolve the problem internally within their body corporate. Internal dispute resolution may involve the disputing persons communicating or the intending applicant making use of formal body corporate procedures by submitting matters to the committee or presenting motions for consideration at a general meeting of their body corporate.

It is expected that proper use of internal dispute resolution processes will reduce disputation in a body corporate and limit the need for formal intervention. The importance of this process is emphasised as the Commissioner for Body Corporate and Community Management—the commissioner—will have the power to choose not to proceed with a dispute resolution application until the person undertakes reasonable steps to resolve the dispute and ultimately to reject the application. I seek leave to incorporate the rest of my speech in Hansard.

Leave granted.

Secondly, the Bill provides for Departmental conciliation to be conducted by the BCCM Office. Departmental conciliation will facilitate prompt and informal resolution of disputes; encourage parties to disputes to arrive at their own resolutions and agreements in line with the “self management” focus of the BCCM Act; and improve communication between parties, their understanding of rights and responsibilities under legislation and in turn, minimise future disputes. For most body corporate disputes, conciliation will be compulsory before an application is made for adjudication.

Given the concerns raised by stakeholders in the 2004 review of the community titles sector, a person’s right to access justice has also been given serious consideration in the Bill. Stakeholders were concerned that most complex body corporate disputes are only determined by a specialist adjudicator and that the associated costs are prohibitive. Stakeholders were particularly concerned that the only processes for the resolution of disputes about the adjustment of lot entitlements are either specialist adjudication or the District Court. The Bill extends the jurisdiction of the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal (the CCT) of my Department to determine complex BCCM disputes currently resolved compulsorily by specialist adjudication, or by the District Court. The CCT already deals with a range of complex commercial and consumer matters and is a viable and accessible means of resolving complex BCCM disputes. This jurisdictional change will alleviate stakeholders concerns regarding the current costs of specialist adjudication, and the costs and formality of District Court proceedings.

Additionally, the jurisdiction for hearing appeals of orders made by adjudicators will be vested in the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal rather than the District Court. For some time, stakeholders have contended that the District Court is too formal and costly. Appeals will continue to be limited to those raising a question of law. Adjudicators’ orders warrant a reasonable degree of certainty for those people who have the benefit of the order and questions of law are broad enough to ensure that unsuccessful parties have reasonable access to appeal, if they consider the adjudicator has misapplied legal principles or failed to accord the party natural justice.
The Bill also contains a number of enhancements to the procedures for managing disputes. On occasions, the definitions of ‘parties to a dispute’ cause confusion and obstruct dispute resolution. The Bill clarifies the parties by clearly defining the parties as the applicant and the respondent. The respondent to an application is defined in the Bill as the person against whom the application is made. Additionally, the Bill classifies an affected person as a person who would be directly and materially affected by relief sought in an application. An affected person is not a party to a dispute.

The Bill addresses the uncertainty about when a ‘dispute’ exists for the purpose of dispute resolution. The parties to a dispute must have standing under the BCCM Act when the application is received by the Commissioner. The Bill also provides for the continuation of an application even though a party may cease to have standing before the dispute is resolved, for example, by selling the person’s unit.

To a large extent, the BCCM Office has exclusive jurisdiction to resolve body corporate disputes. This exclusivity has proven to be obstructive where the parties to a dispute would prefer to have the matter dealt with in another jurisdiction such as a court. The Bill allows parties the flexibility to refer their dispute, by agreement, to a court or tribunal having jurisdiction or another process capable of dealing with the dispute and binding the parties. The flexibility to refer the dispute is subject to the agreement of the Commissioner.

The power of an adjudicator to award costs against a person who makes an application that is dismissed on the basis that it is frivolous, misconceived or without substance, is extended to permit an order for costs in favour of an affected person or the body corporate who have incurred costs regarding the application. While the persons able to claim costs have been extended, the maximum amount which can be ordered against an applicant has not been increased. Therefore, the Bill clearly specifies that $2,000 is the maximum amount which can be ordered for an application.

In addition to dispute resolution enhancements, the Bill recognises the importance of community titles schemes to the tourism industry. The secondary objects of the BCCM Act are expanded to encourage the development of tourism potential in community titles schemes without diminishing the existing rights of unit owners.

Most bodies corporate are required to elect a committee with responsibility for the day-to-day administration of the body corporate. Clearly, a committee has a significant and important role in the ongoing management of a body corporate. Stakeholders have expressed concern about the conduct of committees. In particular, it is claimed that many committee members do not understand their roles and do not act in the best interests of the body corporate. Specific problems include committees exceeding the legislated spending limit and chairpersons making unilateral decisions. It is apparent that these issues contribute to the cause and escalation of body corporate disputes.

In response to these issues, the Bill introduces a Code of Conduct for voting members of a body corporate committee. The Code provides guidelines for voting committee members without increasing their existing obligations. It is proposed the regulation modules will be amended to empower bodies corporate to enforce the Code against a voting committee member through the removal of the member from office.

A body corporate manager is a person engaged by a body corporate to provide administrative services, such as secretarial or financial management services. The BCCM legislation includes a number of consumer protection provisions regulating the relationship between body corporate managers and bodies corporate, including a code of conduct for body corporate managers.

Stakeholders have expressed concerns about the competence, performance and conduct of body corporate managers. At present, a body corporate manager is not subject to a specific regulatory or licensing regime. While my Department is currently conducting a separate analysis of possible regulatory options, the Bill enhances the existing statutory Code of Conduct for body corporate managers by including a requirement that body corporate managers must not attempt to unfairly influence the outcome of body corporate committee elections.

Liquor Act 1992 Amendments

The Bill also addresses the concerns raised by a Private Member’s Bill introduced by the Member for Nicklin, Mr Peter Wellington MP, by amending the Liquor Act 1992 to allow the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal to require the submission of fresh evidence in “particular circumstances”.

At present, section 34(1) of the Liquor Act 1992 provides that an appeal to the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal against the decision of the Chief Executive is by the hearing on the evidence that was before the Chief Executive.

The new provision will allow the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal to hear fresh evidence, in circumstances where the party seeking to introduce new evidence did not know or could not reasonably be expected to have known of the evidence on or before the day of the Chief Executive’s decision.

In addition to allowing the Tribunal to hear new evidence, in circumstances where it is deemed necessary, the Tribunal will be empowered to direct an applicant to make a new application. It is envisaged that this will only occur where an applicant provides fresh evidence at a hearing, and the Tribunal decides the new material is sufficiently significant to require re-consideration by the Chief Executive.

Fresh evidence may also be required where the Tribunal considers that an applicant has failed in their responsibility to identify the potential impact on all sensitive sites in the locality as part of the Public Interest Assessment process.

In addition, the proposed amendments will empower the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal to require an applicant who provides fresh evidence at hearings to make a new application to the chief executive. Fresh evidence may also be required where the Tribunal considers that an applicant has failed in his or her responsibility to identify the potential impact on all sensitive sites in the locality as part of the Public Interest Assessment process.

Additionally, my Department is currently conducting a review of the Liquor Act 1992, with a focus on enhancing harm minimisation objectives and improving community consultation processes. In conjunction with the policy proposals being developed by my Department’s Liquor Act Review team, the proposed amendments to the Liquor Act contained in this Bill will establish a forum for improved consultation, more equitable processes and informed decision making.
BACKGROUND

The Body Corporate and Community Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2006 amends the Body Corporate and Community Management Act 1997.

The Body Corporate and Community Management Act 1997 regulates some 33,000 community titles schemes containing over 303,000 lots or units.

It is estimated that well over 500,000 Queenslanders live in apartments or units. At the same time, a significant proportion of Queensland’s estimated 18 and a half million annual visitors and tourists choose to stay in community title apartments and units for the duration of their stay in Queensland, in preference to hotels and motels.

As well as providing affordable accommodation and quality lifestyle options, the community titles sector also supports and underpins a number of associated industries. These include the development and construction industries, body corporate managers, on-site or resident managers, and a whole host of other support industries ranging from travel agents through to tradesmen and sub-contractors.

The BCCM Act is also very complex legislation.

Getting the balance right between all the competing interests is vital. However, the facts are, in the community titles world, sometimes interests, or perception of interests, can be diametrically opposed. While most schemes operate at an optimum level with residents enjoying the benefits of community ownership of common property which would never be available to owners as individuals, there are, sadly, some troubled schemes and some troubled owners.

The Government is also aware that, increasingly, community titling rather than traditional flat land development is becoming the preferred option of developers for progressive development. There is a view that bodies corporate provide better governance outcomes for staged developments than traditional local government. We are also mindful that the South East Queensland Regional Plan will significantly increase the stock of medium to high density housing.

This will place much greater pressure over the next five to ten years on the dispute resolution and information services provided by the Office of the Commissioner for Body Corporate and Community Management (the BCCM Office) if the numbers of lots covered by the BCCM Act increase at their expected rate.

As a result of these factors, the Body Corporate and Community Management and Other Legislation Amendment Bill seeks to improve dispute resolution processes for community title schemes without unduly adding to the already prescriptive nature of the BCCM Act.

The fact is, the community titles sector is a rapidly developing sector. It is also a fact that the sector will need ongoing monitoring. There will never be a final legislative ‘fix’ however; these current amendments will go a long way towards addressing some of the more pressing issues raised through the current review process.

Background—The Liquor Act 1992

The Liquor Licensing Division of my Department administers the Liquor Act 1992 which regulates the sale and supply of liquor through the licensing of business operators and the approval of suitable premises. In addition to the regulation of the sale and supply of alcohol, a fundamental object of the Liquor Act 1992 is to regulate the liquor industry in a way compatible with minimising harm arising from alcohol abuse.

To effectively meet these objectives, application and decision-making processes are governed by rigorous and meticulous principles to ensure full and frank disclosure of all matters relating to applications, the conduct of consultation, the handling of objections and the conduct of investigations.

The proposed reforms for a more flexible approach to the regulation of the sale and supply of liquor contained in this Bill attests to my continued commitment to serve the interests of the community without compromising industry interests.

BUDGET ENHANCEMENTS

These legislative amendments have been complemented by a $1.6M increase to the Commissioner’s and CCT budget to implement these enhancements. This process has already commenced with the recent launch of a range of improved information products, the most noticeable of which is the online training module for new and existing body corporate members and elected office-bearers.

In addition to these proposed amendments, as I have mentioned, my Department is examining regulatory options with respect to body corporate managers. There is also ongoing research and consideration of the need for some new thinking about the governance of large and mega scheme developments. I am also aware that there are varying views about the management rights industry and we will continue to monitor that sector.

The BCCM and other Legislation Amendment Bill provides important immediate and constructive improvements to the BCCM Act. The amendments significantly improve dispute resolution services and continue to position Queensland as a world leader in flexible governance arrangements for community living.

CONSULTATION

Finally, I would like to thank the 177 respondents to the call for submissions made through the 2004 Discussion Paper. I would thank the Community Titles Institute of Queensland, the Unit Owners Association of Queensland and the Queensland Resident Accommodation Managers Association, particularly Tim Carrigg, Gary Maynard and John Anderson who have been a important source of authoritative and welcome advice. We have also listened to many individual unit owners and wherever possible sought to ensure that their best interests were represented and accommodated in these vital reforms.

I commend the Bill to the House.
Mr WILSON (Ferny Grove—ALP) (11.40 am): The Beattie government is putting a lot of effort and resources into significant improvements in public transport in the Ferny Grove area. I want to draw particular attention to a number of matters that were in fact addressed in the Estimates Committee C process relating to this area. One is a duplication of the Ferny Grove railway line between Mitchelton and Ferny Grove. Stage 1 will take it up to Keperra and stage 2 will take it on to Ferny Grove. The second is the additional bus services to be provided in the hills district to assist people with night-time services, weekend and public holidays. They are two items that were examined in this estimates committee hearing.

However, there is an item that is not there because it is still being developed and just about finalised, and that is a very complex, highly detailed plan for the major upgrade of the Ferny Grove Railway Station car park. This initiative deals with a very large number of complex planning and public transport issues surrounding and associated with the terminus of the Ferny Grove line. It will significantly increase parking with no less than 1,000 car parks for park-and-ride commuters. It will also, in its conceptual development, assess the commercial viability of the site to attract a range of different tenants, both residential and commercial, to that area with the appropriate developments to do so. That will help guarantee a sufficient cash flow for a joint public-private investment opportunity and underpin our desire to build this car park of no less than 1,000 car parks.

There are many other things that have happened in the recent past under the public transport heading in my area—for example, the CityTrans buses from Upper Kedron and Ferny Grove into the Ferny Grove Railway Station, the new Samford bus service from the village to the railway station, the extra 50 car parks to the existing car park, the later adoption of another 150 car parks into the elongated car park that has been developed and just opened with $1.2 million being spent there and the redesign of the existing car park to create two kiss-and-ride facilities. These are just some of the illustrations of how the department of transport and its respective agencies are putting a great amount of resources and effort and a high level of commitment into developing the public transport opportunities at Ferny Grove.

Mr CHRIS FOLEY (Maryborough—Ind) (11.44 am): I firstly want to congratulate Simon Finn for his very competent running of Estimates Committee C along with deputy chair Michael Callabiano and also MPs John English, Jason O'Brien, Jann Stuckey and Geoff Wilson. I also want to thank Lyndel Bates, who did a great job as research director, and Tamara Vitale as the executive assistant. I am always very pleased when it comes time for Transport in the estimates committees. The minister for transport, Paul Lucas, has become the patron saint of Maryborough with all of his rail contracts. Minister, keep ‘em rolling!

Mr Lucas interjected.

Mr CHRIS FOLEY: Keep ‘em rolling into Maryborough. There are a couple of issues I want to raise. We discussed Traveltrain operations. I would like to see the tilt train restored to its normal operating speed. A lot of money was put into that project. It provides an absolutely brilliant service, but it is running on slow because of the safety considerations. People can see how well trains are built in Maryborough and how well they have survived impacts, because that certainly saved a lot of lives. With respect to rail freight, I have also made known to the minister my annoyance that the rail freight operation will be moved to Nikenbah. The land at Maryborough West would have been such a logical place for it to go.

On the positive side, the minister has given the Howard rail bridge a reprieve, and that is a good thing. I have spoken to the minister a number of times personally and written and sent photos and met with the locals, and that is a good outcome. I deviate slightly with regard to the boat ramp at Howard. Enertrade has now given that a reprieve and I am very pleased and hope that that can be worked out in the long run. I also note that the Ferry Street and Alice Street intersection in Maryborough is to be upgraded. I am pleased to report that we do not have a particular problem with gridlocked traffic in Maryborough, not like Brisbane. However, having said that, I look forward to that intersection, which is somewhat of a bottleneck, being sorted out.
With regard to trade training places in Queensland and apprenticeships, I would urge the minister to make sure that Maryborough TAFE continues to be an engineering centre of excellence because that is a natural fit in our particular location. A couple of other things that I mentioned during the hearing were the problems with heavy-handed licensing when we had our World’s Greatest Pub Crawl. As I said, I am not much of a pub crawler, but this is an event that brings a lot of money, a lot of hospitality and a lot of input to our area. I will leave it at that and thank all participants in the committee.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Wallace): Order! Before calling the member for Charters Towers, I ask members to welcome into the gallery students and teachers from Stafford State School in the electorate of Stafford represented by Mr Terry Sullivan. Member for Charter Towers, two minutes.

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (11.47 am): In speaking to the estimates report in relation to Transport, I want to raise a serious issue in relation to the shocking state of the Clermont-Alpha-Tambo road and the lack of funding provided in this budget. For more than 20 years residents of the mining and rural communities have lobbied governments to completely seal this road, but these pleas have fallen on deaf ears. In the last 10 years numerous accidents have been reported and at least 12 accidents have involved government employees attempting to do their jobs. One constituent involved in an accident 25 years ago stated that after all these years the condition of the road is worse than it has ever been, yet traffic has increased and it is a frightening experience when passing triples on the highway. Every day students attending the Mistake Creek State School travel in excess of 100 kilometres each day on a road that even seasoned travellers decline to use. Their safety is in jeopardy and should be of the utmost priority.

The road is deeply rutted with loose stones and pebbles and any slight veering will see a car end up down an embankment or into a tree. There are quite a number of families with young children living along the road who travel it each day. This is seen as a positive for the Mistake Creek community—a positive in terms of primary production and a positive for the future of the school. Recently a local resident and her 11-month-old son were returning home in their four-wheel-drive when they hit a large rut, causing the vehicle to roll. Fortunately, while they were shaken up, no serious injuries were sustained. The accident served to remind all road users that the road is dangerous. The Clermont-Alpha road is used by livestock carriers, general suppliers and by locals and tourists. It is also a major trucking route for companies from as far south as Adelaide. It is a part of the type 2 road train route that links the west to the north and the south and home to the magnificent Narrien and Drummond ranges. Sealing the road makes plain common sense. It would relieve transport pressure on the coastal highways, increase tourism, save lives and provide a much-needed boost to the local communities of Clermont, Tambo, Alpha and Jericho.

Time expired.

Hon. PT LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (11.49 am): The Beattie government will spend a record $3.98 billion on transport and road infrastructure in 2006-07. An amount of $2 billion has been set aside for Queensland Transport rail and ports capital and $1.98 billion for Main Roads and Queensland Motorways Ltd capital works. Spending on transport infrastructure is up by 27 per cent, or $418 million, and on Main Roads capital works by a massive 58 per cent, or $727 million, compared to 2005-06.

I welcome scrutiny of the budget as there are many good-news stories to tell. The Beattie government has delivered an historic boost to Transport and Main Roads infrastructure, which is a tremendous investment in our future economic growth and wellbeing. This budget ensures that transport infrastructure and services are funded to keep pace with the rapid population growth that is occurring throughout the state. Transport and road infrastructure projects under SEQIPP total $27.7 billion. Major projects funded for the 2006-07 budget include the Gateway upgrade project; the Tugun bypass; the Inner Northern Busway; the Boggo Road Busway; bus priority measures for Redcliffe, the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast; advanced planning for the eastern and northern busways; and the CAMCOS rail link on the Sunshine Coast.

We are also taking socially responsible measures such as boosting funding for road safety and public transport. As well as the Safer Roads Sooner program, which is administered by Main Roads, where $183 million has been provided over the next four years, the Beattie Labor government is providing an extra $4 million on top of recurrent road safety funding to fast-track the implementation of initiatives arising out of the Road Safety Summit, which was held earlier this year. As well, across the state there is a $472.7 million capital investment in public transport infrastructure—up $109.5 million on last year—to provide better bus and rail services. Yesterday I indicated that patronage on our Citytrain network and buses under TransLink was at record levels—52 million passengers on Citytrain in 2005-06 and 98.9 million passengers on buses.

My portfolio will be boosting export and economic growth with $837 million for rail infrastructure and rolling stock this financial year, including funding for a major expansion of QR coal freight services. We are also spending $360 million to expand Gladstone’s RG Tanna Coal Terminal, including three new stockpiles and a third outloading stream. This ongoing work will eventually lift capacity to 68 million tonnes a year. There is also an allocation of $270 million towards a $972 million project to provide an...
initial 35 coal locomotives and 1,150 coal wagons and to upgrade 84 coal locomotives to support increased haulage of coal through central Queensland’s ports. There has been an allocation of $130.4 million for an expansion of the Cairns airport, seaport and city port and $130.4 million for the stage 2 expansion at the Abbot Point Coal Terminal. Trade and local jobs will be boosted with an allocation of $856 million for port and airport development, including $661.9 million to develop regional airports.

Roads capital funding in the state budget was increased by a massive 58 per cent to nearly $2 billion next financial year. For every $1 million spent on our roads, we are providing 17 jobs in road construction and related industries. Queensland is delivering road projects from Tugun, across Brisbane, on the Sunshine Coast, in western Queensland and all the way up to the cape.

Since December 2003 the Beattie government has committed an extra $3.2 billion to Queensland roads on top of the usual road funding sources over a six-year time frame. The federal government’s commitment to roads pales in comparison. The new leader of the state Liberal Party should make his No. 1 priority the need to get a better deal for Queensland. The federal and state coalition members peddle the myth that Queensland is sitting on federal roads money. They say that to mask the federal government’s paltry funding level to Queensland. In five years—from 2001-02 to 2005-06—the federal government allocated $1.25 billion to Main Roads. This department has expended 95 per cent of that funding. We get only 17c of the dollar from their fuel fax.

I note that yesterday the former opposition transport spokesman repeated the claims that Main Roads had underspent its capital works program since 1998. Clearly, the new shadow minister still has his training wheels. He has a lot to learn because he does not know the difference between capital and recurrent expenditure. Briefly, by comparing the expenditure in the five-year roads program with capital expenditure in budget paper No. 3, the former opposition transport spokesman is making the sort of error that would see a year 11 or year 12 accounting student fail an exam. The five-year roads program includes funding not only for capital works but also for maintenance, operations and corporate and technical staff support—that is, all capital and recurrent expenditure.

The capital allocations outlined in budget paper No. 3, at page 114, are a smaller number than the five-year total for roads projects and operations detailed in the roads program. That has not changed since the roads program was first published in the mid-1990s. Each year Main Roads receives money for its capital works and for recurrent expenditure, such as wages and corporate and technical support. That is self-evident. For example, the total capital spending in the Main Roads budget in 2006-07 is $1.98 billion, which includes funding for the Queensland Motorways projects. But the total Main Roads budget for 2006-07, including recurrent expenditure, is $2.2 billion. In reality, the Queensland government has delivered roadworks and services equivalent to an average of 102 per cent of the roads program forecast for each of the three five-year roads program cycles completed between 1998-99 and 2004-05.

We are building on the state’s economic strength by providing a strong and diversified economy through efficient and effective transport. The federal government is taking from motorists’ pockets and not returning its fair share. For example, $330 million per year in fuel tax on the Gold Coast is not returned.

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (11.54 am): In addressing this estimates committee report, I want to speak about three road issues in Toowoomba: Ruthven Street, the second range crossing and James Street. Firstly, with regard to Ruthven Street, I acknowledge the courtesies and interest that have been shown by the minister and the staff of the Department of Main Roads in endeavouring to address what is a fairly difficult issue. The Ruthven Street section that I am talking about is the section between James Street and Perth and Long streets, where work is being planned to deal with the increasing and expected increase in traffic along this road. Basically, it is an extension of the CBD. The western side of the road is almost entirely commercial interests, such as motels and shopping centres. The eastern side of the road is mostly schools. So there are some difficult issues there, particularly with regard to access.

The particular issue I want to talk about is that, in coming up with a plan for the road—it is currently a four-lane highway and part of the New England Highway—all of those big, iconic, beautiful and magnificent trees that are on either side of the road will be removed and instead some trees will be planted down the centre of this new road. The reason for all of that is to try to provide some widening of the road for entry and exit to the schools, or the side roads that lead to other small businesses in the area, or to one of the major shopping centres that is located in the area.

It is quite sad to lose these trees. I wonder whether the design could be looked at again. That design indicates that there will still be a four-lane road, we will lose the trees and we will lose access to a major shopping centre—it has been there for 30 years and employs 106 people—and in return basically all we get are two slip lanes in the middle of the road that are protected by new structures in the middle to make them safer. I can understand the dilemma that the Department of Main Roads is facing, but it seems a tragedy to lose these magnificent trees. If those trees are going to be replaced by trees in the middle of the road, I think it is important that we maintain access to important structures.
As I said, the shopping centre has been there for 30 years and employs 106 people in the various businesses there. It is also used by many other people simply to access an area on the fringe of the CBD that is difficult to access. There are lots of little narrow streets and dead-end streets there where there are many small businesses, such as motor vehicle related businesses. As late as May this year the shopping centre was given an indication that a right-hand turn into the shopping centre would be maintained. There was a letter to that effect subject to council approval and subject to the shopping centre undertaking works on their entrance, which they have agreed to do. I have discussed the matter with the department and with the minister. I am hopeful that we can get a good, sensible outcome. It is important for the business owners and the citizens of Toowoomba to be able to access this major shopping centre in a reasonable way. They are prepared to give up the exit that allowed people to cross the highway.

In relation to the second range crossing, I want to talk about James Street, which is the Warrego Highway—the major east-west road through Toowoomba. It is the heaviest freight-carrying road in Australia, with some 20,000 or more vehicles a day, 3,000 of them B-doubles which have to go through 16 sets of traffic lights as they go through Toowoomba to go either south to Melbourne and New South Wales or north to Darwin.

In addition, a huge number of coal trucks come through, because Queensland Rail is unable to carry the coal that is being mined on the Darling Downs. Also, a number of cattle trucks go through. Most of that cattle goes to AMH at Dinmore and Teys Brothers down the range. Those road trains have to be broken up west of Toowoomba. So James Street through the city is becoming badly damaged, particularly the lane next to the footpath. I know that we desperately need some funding from the federal government for that, because it is a federal highway.

With regard to the Toowoomba range crossing, since 1992 there have been 12 deaths and 153 casualties on the range crossing, and since 2002 there have been 159 closures of that section of the highway to Toowoomba. So we desperately need a second range crossing. The federal government has provided $10 million for a business case study of a public-private partnership, which I know the minister and the department are working on. It seems a shame that the cost of that road has blown out from when it was first mooted in 1996 for $300 million to about $650 million and that we now have to have a PPP, which is the only way to fast-track it. Hopefully it will get the money from AusLink, too.

Time expired.

Hon. TA BARTON (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations and Minister for Sport) (11.59 am): It is a pleasure to participate in this budget debate. In fact, this will be my last debate on budget estimates, regardless of when the election is called, despite the speculation. I hope that it is not for another six months because I would like to do a bit more before I go, particularly if I can continue to have days like today. I am a pretty happy minister today.

I have had a long involvement with the budget estimates process. In fact, I chaired the very first budget estimates committee in 1994, Estimates Committee A. I have been involved in every budget estimates committee since then either from the perspective of being a backbench chair, a minister, a shadow minister or a minister again on many occasions.

I want to put it in this context: this year is a unique experience particularly for me and I think for all of the other ministers, although I have not checked all of the other reports. This is the first occasion that I have had my budget expenditure unanimously supported by the committee without a dissenting statement, without a statement of reservations, without anything. I must admit that I am absolutely thrilled that for my last budget estimates debate here in the parliament my proposed expenditure has received the unanimous endorsement of the committee without so much as a squeak about any problems with what I propose to do. That augurs well for the rest of my term as a minister and whoever follows me into those three portfolios that I have the great privilege to hold on behalf of this government at this point in time.

I make the comment that there were some general reservations, some criticism, by two members of the committee, not about my proposed expenditure but about the process itself. I want to remind people that I remember the process very well prior to 1994 when this estimates process was put into place: there was no process at all for the proper scrutiny of the budget. Indeed, we should remember that prior to the election of the Goss government in 1989 there was no process for any committees in this parliament, let alone for the budget itself. I find it quite annoying, frankly, that we have a couple of Liberal members on Estimates Committee C wanting to complain about the process that was determined by this parliament. They would do far better to concentrate on the things that matter rather than the things that they can do nothing about. I think that simply says that come the election they are going to be sitting back on that side of the House again for a very long time, because they have not learnt the lessons of opposition, let alone how to be an effective alternative government.

Returning to my budget, I am thrilled about the expenditure on employment and training because that is the most important agenda that we have as a government at this point in time—to develop people’s skills, to train them for jobs to meet the skills shortage. This budget is the first down payment on the massive $1.1 billion Queensland Skills Plan, which the Premier and I had the privilege to launch earlier this year.
On industrial relations, the funding is there in this budget to protect Queensland workers and their families, through the Department of Industrial Relations and the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission. Sadly, that is not the position that the Queensland Nationals and the Queensland Liberals have taken. I have had a look at the policy that the Nationals have put up on their website recently. It looks like a pale imitation or shadow of John Howard’s WorkChoices policy, and that is not in the interests of workers in Queensland and their families. That is why I am so proud that I have the funds, while I am still here—and my successor will have the funds—to look after the interests of Queensland workers from an industrial relations perspective.

On sport, what can I say? Queensland leads Australia. We have proved it again today—the massive numbers of dollars for local sports through the minors program and the majors program, the dollars for the juniors that I spoke about in question time, the dollars for elite athletes through the Queensland Academy of Sport and its support of games athletes. Quite frankly, at the recent Commonwealth Games had Queensland been a country in its own right we would have come second to Australia and had the Queensland Academy of Sport been a country in its own right it would have come fourth to Australia. That says something about how good we are with sport, whether it is for a junior who is kicking their first football or for elite athletes playing at Suncorp Stadium, which we have spent money on—as well as the new football stadium at Robina, the completion of the Woolloongabba stadium and the extensions to the Dairy Farmers Stadium in Townsville. From tennis courts to covers on basketball courts in Aboriginal communities, we are doing well for sport.

Mr HOPPER (Darling Downs—NPA) (12.05 pm): I am very pleased to have this opportunity to comment on the report of Estimates Committee C insofar as it deals with the proposed expenditure of the vocational education and training portfolio. At the time of the committee’s deliberations I had just assumed responsibility as the shadow spokesman for this portfolio. Although I now have responsibilities in other portfolio areas, I very much enjoyed the challenge of researching the issues in depth which currently face our vocational training system.

What I discovered was that this portfolio has some amazing things in common with other portfolio areas thanks to the mismanagement of the current Beattie government. What are these areas of commonality? In yet another area of government we have a crisis and a shortage. Instead of a water crisis and a water shortage, we are faced with a workforce crisis and a skills shortage. We have not heard the minister talk much about that.

Mr Barton: You are faced with a skills shortage, Sunshine.

Mr HOPPER: The crisis has been building for many years without any effective strategy to address this problem, and the minister knows that. There is no effective strategy to address this problem, and the minister is very well aware of that. So the minister can retire knowing that he has left Queensland with this crisis on its hands. The crisis has become so severe that the government has been forced to cobble together another glossy brochure which it is promoting as its solution to the problem.

Vocational education and training is one of the basic services of good government and is a high priority for the coalition. So much of our young people’s futures depend on having ready access to high quality, relevant and affordable vocational training services. The proper functioning of our society depends on the community having the right numbers and mix of skills within its workforce to meet the changing and evolving needs. This has not been delivered in recent years under this government and certainly not by this minister.

In the short time I had dealing with this portfolio I had numerous representations from disillusioned students, teachers and employers associated with our current TAFE system. I have had letters from demoralised TAFE instructors who are disillusioned with the continual winding down of the system and the imminent retirement of many experienced TAFE teachers. It appears that very little is being done to stem the exodus of senior TAFE staff from the system. The government has not provided any proper incentive or thought to the future workforce requirements within TAFE to meet the growing need for vocational skills training.

I have had correspondence from students who are frustrated that courses they wish to pursue are no longer available to them at convenient times or locations. The concept of ‘flexible delivery’ is one to which only lip-service is being given in the current TAFE system. Most frustrating of all for me is that I had approaches from employers who are keen to support and to subsidise additional training for their employees but who find that they are faced with a rigid system which will only offer relevant courses at times which are suitable to its own bureaucratic needs and not geared towards the requirements of students and their employers. These are just some of the issues which I came up against in the few short weeks in which I was dealing with this portfolio. The minister is very lucky that I have been given another portfolio because I was really getting my teeth into this and he knows that I was.

Mr Barton interjected.
Mr HOPPER: Here is the good part: to give the government its due, it has started to realise that there is a problem. In March this year it released its white paper, the Queensland Skills Plan. My theory is that this will be just another well meaning, glossy brochure.

Mr Barton interjected.

Mr HOPPER: We have got you stirred up, old mate. Just hang in there, you are nearly finished. This is typical of the kinds of responses we have seen in other areas in which this government has found itself in crisis, such as health and water. Of particular concern to me was the minister’s response to a question I asked him about the level of funding to be provided under the Queensland Skills Plan. The government’s press release in March this year trumpeted the plan in typical Beattie style as a billion dollar skills plan. We just heard the minister speak about it. He announced there would be $542 million in new recurrent funding in a four-year period. When we came to examining the ministerial portfolio, it will be just $26.31 million. When I questioned the minister about this during the hearings his answer was quite dismissive.

Time expired.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (12.10 pm): I rise to speak to this estimates committee report and in particular to raise a couple of matters in relation to transport. We have an ongoing problem with funding for the extension of Kirkwood Road to Benaraby Road. This would keep a lot of the large transportation out of the city of Gladstone.

I have already raised, and I thank the minister for his response today, the relocation of boom gates from Callemondah Overpass to Mercury Street. The minister said that he has put an urgent inquiry into his department to see where that issue is and will get back to us as soon as possible. Those gates would add a measure of safety to that crossing, which is used particularly by urban commuters and more particularly by students accessing Kin Kora School. Boom gates were put on a parallel street, Whitney Street, some time ago by the Gladstone City Council. However, Mercury Street really is the responsibility of the Department of Transport.

There is an urgent need in Gladstone for the Department of Transport office to be extended. The wait time is around 22 minutes and on one occasion, Thursday at the end of July, about 15 people waited 50 minutes to be served. We need some more customer outlet sites and that can only occur if the building is extended. The location is excellent because it is very central and there is room within the precincts of the current building for an extension to occur. However, it has to be a built extension. I look forward to consideration of that matter.

I think there continues to be a high level of concern in the community about the federal industrial relations laws. More particularly, in relation to certain aspects of it—that is, the unfair dismissal laws applying to businesses of 100 employees or more, which are not considered to be a small business, and also concerns about the loss of the no-disadvantage test. These are matters that remain in people’s minds as far as their continuing job security is concerned.

Transportation corridors in my electorate are of continuing concern given the growth that we are experiencing. I look forward to continued investment in Gladstone. The duplication of the Moura line will affect a small number of people, and I look forward to thoughtful consideration of these matters. The issue of resumption of railway land for the duplication of the Moura line affects three or four families in particular. Their houses are either going to be completely resumed or relocated. That will have a significant effect on them. There are one or two people who are directly affected who have a diminished ability to communicate. I put on the record my appreciation of the Queensland Rail representative who appears to have a very sympathetic view towards these people. At this point in time he has given an undertaking to ensure that whenever he has a meeting with these affected people they have associates with them who will be able to guide them through the process.

In relation to the extension to the Department of Transport, I re-emphasise the need for that building to be expanded. Many people go to the Department of Transport during their lunch hour and the wait times they are experiencing at the moment mean that for many the ability to pay their accounts in time is undermined, and not because of anything that they do.

I reiterate the issue of the boom gates on Mercury Street and I look forward to the relocation of the redundant boom gates at Callemondah to the Mercury Street crossing to enhance safety.

Hon. MM KEECH (Albert—ALP) (Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development) (12.15 pm): I begin by thanking all members of Estimates Committee C, especially the chairperson, the member for Yeerongpilly, for the professional and fair manner in which he conducted the hearing. I also thank the member for Ferny Grove, the member for Cook and the member for Redlands for their contributions.
I always enjoy estimates and have done so since 2001 when I was given the privilege of being a member of this House. The estimates process is an extremely important part of the Beattie government’s commitment to being open, transparent and accountable. I was very happy to be able to highlight some significant achievements of my portfolio. This year’s budget to the portfolio of Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development again highlights the Beattie government’s commitment to industry, jobs and protecting people’s rights.

As minister I am very proud that the Beattie government has always been the leader when it comes to support for tourism and that support was delivered again in this year’s budget. We have another record base budget for Tourism Queensland. Special purpose funding took the total TQ budget to $46.1 million. I was very pleased to report that an additional $4 million over four years has been provided for a regional tourism organisation. This equates to a well-deserved 30 per cent hike for these groups of hardworking people who contribute so much to our tourism industry. We will now be delivering $4.1 million annually to our 14 RTOs. This is the first instalment of my Queensland Tourism Strategy. I am incredibly proud of it being Queensland’s first long-term blueprint for the industry.

Whilst referring to tourism, I have to respond to the member for Currumbin’s statement of reservations. I found her comments yesterday in the House and also in her statement of reservations very negative and very personal and I am forced, unfortunately, to set the record straight when it comes to my record in the portfolio. The member complained about everything, as usual, from the estimates committee set-up to the time allocated for questioning, as she did last year. She complained that she did not have time to understand and research my responses to her questions on notice. Perhaps she should have been putting more time and preparation into estimates rather than preparing to stab in the back the member for Robina.

I make no apology whatsoever for talking up my department and Tourism Queensland. I am very proud indeed of the hard work that my department is doing. The member’s conduct yesterday as well in the estimates showed not only an appalling disregard for parliamentary etiquette but also a complete lack of understanding when it comes to the standing orders. She also says she was extremely disappointed to learn of the process we followed for licensing of Sunlover Holidays. I have to tell the member that this process was spelt out in this very chamber by the Premier and that was way back in November, not 2005, but November 2004. The member really should get up with it and be across the portfolio. The member has a very short memory. Maybe she is feeling very guilty about the Liberal Party’s sell-out of the Gold Coast when it cruelly dumped long-term leader Bob Quinn this week. Whilst they whinge, the Beattie government works.

I want to thank not only my ministerial staff but also the Office of Fair Trading, the Liquor Licensing Division, Executive and Corporate Services, Body Corporate and Community Management, the CCT, Wine Industry Development and Queensland Tourism for their outstanding efforts and dedication in preparing for estimates. I also thank my department, Tourism Queensland, for its continuing work for Queenslanders. I am very, very proud of them.

Report adopted.

Estimates Committee D

Report

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hoolihan): Order! The question is—

That the report be adopted.

Mrs REILLY (Mudgeeraba—ALP) (12.20 pm): It was my pleasure this year to chair Estimates Committee D, which examined the portfolios of Energy, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, and Emergency Services.

At the outset I want to thank the research director, Ian Thompson, and assistant Tania Jackman for the stirling job they did in supporting the work of the committee as well as the Hansard staff and attendants on the day. I also want to thank all members of the committee, both government and non-government members, for the way in which they conducted themselves on the day. Everyone was courteous and polite, and we did our best to stick to the standing orders, albeit with a bit of minor meandering from some of the non-government members. There were a couple of times when the opposition members struggled to understand standing orders. The member for Callide repeatedly asked questions of the energy minister that were not related to his portfolio. In fact, the member for Callide was so repetitious that in 1½ hours of questioning he effectively asked only three questions, but he did ask them over and over again quite persistently.

At least he turned up and asked questions, albeit as a visiting committee member at his request and at the request of the National Party. The Liberal Party could not even be bothered turning up at all. There were no requests made by the Liberal Party for leave to be given for any one of their members to
question the government on the portfolios of Energy, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy or Emergency Services. There was even a spare chair on the non-government side of the committee for the entire afternoon given that—

Mr Wilson interjected.

Mrs REILLY: The deputy chair did not return after lunch, and for the entire period of questioning on emergency services the non-government side comprised two members—one was the Independent member for Nanango and the other was the very capable and very busy member for Mirani. Let the record reflect that the Liberal Party has no interest whatsoever in these portfolios—Energy, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, and Emergency Services—because if they did they would not have left it up to the member for Mirani and the member for Nanango to question the government’s proposed budgets in these vital portfolios completely alone.

The Liberal members can come in here and bleat about fire stations, ambulance officers, Indigenous communities and energy, as they have over the last 2½ years as much as they like, but this coalition can barely pull a team of three together to turn up to estimates. The Independent member for Nanango showed more interest, more commitment and more research, staying for the whole day and asking some targeted and well-considered questions when the opposition did give her a turn even though she is not in the shadow cabinet. Perhaps she should be.

Had the Liberal Party bothered to turn up, it might have learnt something. As well as exercising its right as an opposition to put the government’s budget under scrutiny it would have heard, for example, that the Beattie government is implementing a $12 million program to reduce demand and dependence on alcohol and other substances in certain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and is providing funds to support harm minimisation initiatives in several Cape York communities. It might have learnt that a further package of initiatives at Palm Island was announced to coincide with the introduction of alcohol restrictions in June 2006—a total of $593,373 was approved in one year for Palm Island. But the Liberals have no interest at all in these matters.

But what of energy? Would you think that the Liberals might have an interest in this portfolio area? Again, you would be wrong because they have no interest at all. Even though this year the GOCs will invest $2.85 billion in capital works—a record investment two years in a row to keep up with the phenomenal growth in demand driven by our population boom and nation-leading economy—the Liberal members of the coalition of the ho-hum did not have a single question to ask about matters such as Energex’s record spending, energy distribution, gas-fired generation or the introduction of full retail competition, nor did they show any interest in the Emergency Services portfolio. They could not be bothered seeking a spot on the committee to ask the minister—the member for Bulimba, facing an estimates committee for the first time as a minister and most professionally and competently so—a single question about the delivery of ambulance, fire, rural fire and SES services across the state.

Once again, the Beattie government has shown its commitment by providing a record Emergency Services budget in 2006-07 of $744.1 million. That is a rise of $76 million, with $357.6 million to boost ambulance services, capital works funding for five new ambulance stations and a further 18 to be replaced or redeveloped, and $4.7 million for the replacement of ambulance vehicles. We also increased spending for firefighting in the rural-urban interface iZones to $3.7 million—a welcome boost for electorates like mine where urban style development has been established in rural and formerly agricultural areas.

I take this opportunity to congratulate all departments involved but especially the Emergency Services and SES for their prompt and professional response to cyclones Larry and Monica which hit Queensland earlier this year. I congratulate all departments on their work.

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (12.25 pm): In speaking to the estimates report in relation to Energy, I would like to raise an important issue. On Tuesday on behalf of the residents of Jericho shire, I tabled a petition from residents who are fed up with the substandard electricity supply. The petition calls on the government to find a solution to the ongoing power crisis that the residents of Jericho shire have endured for years. I would like to acknowledge the work of Ergon in installing a new generator, but alone it is not enough to resolve the ongoing problem.

An interrupted power supply is part of the daily life for the residents of Alpha and Jericho. The installation of a generator by Ergon is considered a bandaid measure and does not adequately solve the issue. While the generator has improved the supply, it is a draconian solution to a modern problem. The long-awaited proposed substation at Moonstone would alleviate current issues, and residents would not have to rely on generator power to service the towns of Alpha, Jericho and surrounding districts.

The lack of a reliable power supply has caused great stress for families. Regular blackouts hit during peak hour, such as dinner time, and residents and businesses have lost electrical equipment such as freezers and fridges, and cold and frozen goods are regularly thrown out for fear of contamination.

At present, electricity runs from Clermont to Barcaldine and then is distributed back to Jericho and Alpha—a system that results in extremities, with Alpha being subject to power surges or losses. The power is effectively doing a full circle in order to serve the residents of Alpha and Jericho. It would be
more appropriate if the plan for a proposed substation at Moonstone, halfway between Clermont and Alpha, were brought forward. This would feed electricity directly through to Alpha and Jericho. This would eliminate the need for power to run across old worn out lines between Barcaldine and Jericho. This inadequate electricity supply and consequent blackouts or dips in supply have been continually experienced by residents of the shire. Residents are not asking for much, just the same as metropolitan areas, that is, a reliable electricity supply.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT (Woodridge—ALP) (12.27 pm): It was once again an interesting process to review the expenditure for a number of government departments. This year as a member of Estimates Committee D, with Di Reilly in the chair, we reviewed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, Energy and Emergency Services. I must say that the member for Mudgeeraba has very succinctly outlined the lack of commitment on the part of the opposition. I think many of us found that quite amazing.

Mr Wilson: Disappointing.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT: It was terribly disappointing when they had such an opportunity.

The Treasurer, Anna Bligh, and her staff in Treasury must be commended on such a forward-looking document as this year’s budget as well as our Premier, Peter Beattie, for his leadership. It has often been said that governments plan only to win the next election. This government has well and truly shattered that myth. The SEQ plan, along with the infrastructure plan, with its clearly delineated footprint and detailed plans for the future, gives certainty and a master plan to ensure a prosperous future for this state and ensure that all service delivery will not only cope with growth but will deliver first-class services into the future. I must say how wonderful it was to hear our latest unemployment figure of 4.5 per cent. That is a spectacular result.

The estimates process requires a great deal of planning and effort from ministers, their staff, departmental officers as well as parliamentary staff and members on the committee. I believe all should be congratulated for a smooth process. It enables us all to gain greater understanding of the complexities of government and highlights much of the good work happening throughout our state.

I enjoy a great relationship with the Aboriginal and Islander people in my electorate of Woodridge, and I have toured a number of remote communities on a number of occasions. While some issues are common to all, the remote communities have huge issues relating to health, housing, education, skills training, accessing employment, and alcohol and substance abuse. It is true to say that all fair-minded, empathetic people wish to see all of those issues improved for our remote people.

As we examined issues, it was clear that much is happening to improve services. Alcohol management plans are progressing at various levels with positive results, while non-sniffable Opal fuel is being trialled. While service delivery is under a Commonwealth-state bilateral agreement, I believe that the state is committed to playing its part. Of significance is the number of apprenticeships and traineeships available through the Partnerships Queensland corporate engagement strategies.

We turned to Energy and it became clear that the future energy requirements of this state will be secure. Energy is a very large budget item and much has been accomplished in additional infrastructure. The magnificent work that was done in the wake of Cyclone Larry should be noted. Following storms and disasters, our energy workforce is often on the scene while the weather is still very severe. Restoring power is vital and, with so much of the infrastructure damaged and taken out, it was a huge undertaking. It is clear that our future energy needs will be augmented by many varied sources such as gas and solar power, and several trials are underway.

The emergency services minister, the Hon. Pat Purcell, handled his first estimates like a veteran. Once again I must say how valuable I find the estimates period. I thank all the parliamentary staff.
Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (12.32 pm): It is a pleasure to speak on Estimates Committee D in relation to Emergency Services. Firstly, I turn to the comments of the member for Mundingburra about the attendance of a National Party person on the panel during the afternoon session, when the estimates of the Department of Emergency Services were examined. My colleague the member for Beaudesert represented the National Party when the committee examined ATSIC issues. I assure the House that I can represent my party and ask questions on emergency services. I did not need the service of another National Party person on that panel to present questions on emergency services.

From the outset, it was a pleasure to be on this committee again and to be a part of the process. However, I certainly have some reservations about a lot of aspects of the process. I have always supported and will always support the hard work of emergency services people on the ground, both full-time employees and those people who give up their time and money to work as volunteers in this magnificent service. Volunteers work on rural fire brigades, local ambulance committees and so on, and they make our communities safer. For example, the Rural Fire Service controls 92 per cent of our state. That represents a huge workforce that receives very little recompense from the government.

I am not totally satisfied with a couple of the issues that I raised during the estimates committee. Firstly, I refer to emergency services accommodation that has been built in recent times. More and more relocatable buildings and Titan sheds are being built in rural communities. I wonder how that would work if they tried to do it in urban communities. It is almost as if those in the rural communities are becoming second-class citizens, even though this is happening in communities that are not that far outside the capital cities. In Mackay, a major ambulance facility was relocated into a relocatable building and a Titan shed. I am not saying that those buildings are not serviceable or functional, but in terms of government buildings they leave a lot to be desired.

The community ambulance tax is totally unfair, because some people have pay it more than once. Some have to pay it up to 15 or 20 times. An issue that was highlighted in the estimates committee is that local ambulance committees have to fundraise in their communities through chook raffles and the like, and they apply to the gaming machine fund to buy very essential equipment such as defibrillators. On the other hand, the director’s reserve provides quite considerable amounts of money to pay for things such as the $41,000 basketball court at Cowan, and there are similar examples. It seems incongruous when we have an unfair community ambulance cover and local ambulance committees being forced to raise funds within their committees, and on the bureaucratic side large amounts of money are being spent on what I believe to be inappropriate infrastructure which should not be a part of the core expenditure of Emergency Services.

The issue of WorkCover for volunteers, particularly in the fire service, has to be addressed in a more fair dinkum way. Self-employed people do fight fires and, obviously, sometimes they have accidents. Effectively, they are not properly covered under WorkCover. For example, they do not receive funding for operations. Indeed, throughout Queensland there have been cases where volunteer firefighters have lost their businesses, simply because they were unable to support themselves following an accident.

Time expired.

Ms MALE (Glass House—ALP) (12.37 pm): It is my pleasure to rise in support of the Estimates Committee D report arising from the estimates debates that were held in July. I place on record the great achievements that have occurred within the portfolios that we explored in detail, the departments of Energy, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Emergency Services.

With a budget of $70 million, the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy has a commitment to ensure that it is the pivot department to oversee the implementation of whole-of-government policies and programs to work through the issues of violence, alcohol and substance abuse, which has been identified as one of the major causes of harm and violence in remote communities. The Beattie Labor government is progressing demand reduction and harm minimisation strategies for these communities through the implementation of the Alcohol and Other Substances Demand Reduction Program. This program and associated activities will be designed so that they provide a meaningful alternative to alcohol and substance abuse.

It was pleasing to hear about the continued implementation of Partnerships Queensland, which is about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities forming partnerships with government and the private sector to ensure that their communities have access to services, as well as make it easier for the corporate sector to work within those communities to provide economic and development opportunities.

Minister Michel’s other portfolio area is Energy. I was pleased this past week to host the minister and senior officials to see the work being done at the Landsborough substation, as well as plans for the future expansion. At estimates the minister detailed how the next year in the energy sector will be one of the most significant, with regulatory and structural changes and opportunities for growth driving record investment in infrastructure by the Queensland government owned corporations.
I see this echoed throughout my region with another announcement that the Sunshine Coast has received a $20 million-plus major electricity boost. The new Landsborough 33/11kV Energex substation and associated powerline upgrades will boost the capacity and reliability of the power supply to about 5,000 homes and businesses in the southern parts of the Sunshine Coast and hinterland areas. Additionally, Energex will build a new regional support centre in Landsborough which will stock vital electrical equipment to quickly service the Sunshine Coast network.

Electricity usage in the Sunshine Coast and hinterland region is growing at an average of six per cent a year. To meet this growth in demand in the next few years Energex plans to spend approximately $150 million on new electricity infrastructure for the area. Energex has also commenced work on a $3.8 million upgrade of the electricity substation and the associated distribution network to increase capacity and improve reliability for the Caboolture area. Almost 6,000 residents and businesses in suburbs including Caboolture, Caboolture South, Morayfield, Beachmere and Burpengary will benefit from the upgrade. Energy minister John Mickel, Mrs Carryn Sullivan and I inspected the progress of works at the Morayfield North substation site which, when complete, will double the capacity of the substation and include the commissioning of a 25MVA transformer and associated switch gear, increasing the capacity from 25MVA to 50MVA. The successful completion of this work demonstrates Energex’s commitment to the safe delivery of a reliable electricity supply. I congratulate the minister on his forward planning in this important portfolio area.

The minister also detailed the significant changes happening in the retail arena, with full retail competition in both electricity and gas due to commence on 1 July next year. The sale of the retail business of Energex, the contestable part of the Ergon Energy retail business and the Allgas network will also open the market to new players and healthier competition while fully retaining public ownership of the electricity network.

The Minister for Emergency Services detailed budget spending in 2006-07 of over $744 million to ensure that the Department of Emergency Services continues to focus on reducing risk in the impact of emergencies and disasters throughout Queensland. The minister rightly noted that today’s emergency services are operating in a rapidly changing world and rapidly changing environment that are placing greater demands on staff and volunteers. He highlighted the significant capital investment in all of our emergency services, and particularly the enhanced bushfire response capability in urban-rural interface zones and enhanced training and communications infrastructure.

It was particularly pleasing to hear about the support for departmental staff and volunteers through improved working conditions and facilities, new equipment and improved training. I see this reflected throughout the Glass House electorate as well as across the state. The minister noted that it is important that Emergency Services personnel are better trained and better resourced than ever. Once again, the Beattie Labor government has shown its commitment by providing a record Emergency Services budget to meet these challenges. I commend the Estimates Committee D report to the House.

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (12.42 pm): I rise to address the House on the report of the Estimates Committee D hearing on 14 July which examined the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of the Minister for Energy and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Policy and the Minister for Emergency Services set out in the Appropriation Bill 2006. I had the opportunity to be part of Estimates Committee D and to hear the responses of the ministers.

I have to say at the outset that, although I understand the need for such a process, I have over the past eight years questioned whether or not the estimates process actually achieves its purpose. After the recent amendment to allow legalised lying, as it was referred to in an article in the Courier-Mail on 9 July, my reservations and my scepticism about the entire process are intensified.

A budget for any major business can be a difficult thing to plough through, but I believe the format of the government’s budget which was given to members to pursue is deliberately designed to make it virtually impossible to decipher where funds have been allocated. The groupings are so inappropriate it is impossible to make a valid judgement on any part of the budget. I would readily admit that I am no accountant and therefore have some difficulty, but an accountant has told me that he believes the budget is produced in this particular format to confuse people.

Committee members are told they cannot ask questions on notice that have several subparts. I give the Minister for Energy his due: he endeavoured to answer the questions I put to him when technically he did not have to. There are many questions that need several subparts to ensure we get the full response we are looking for. Answers to those questions are often returned less than 24 hours before the estimates hearing takes place. With our outside commitments it is very difficult to plough through the weightier answers in time. It might suit party members because they often have staff who can assist with that. For those without any help, such as me, it can be nigh on impossible.

Let us talk about the answers to questions. We all know that in any given situation there are three sides to a story—his, hers and, ultimately, the truth. But when it comes to answering questions there are several ways to answer them. I can assure everyone in this House that I have heard them all in this
place. Often the whole truth is not among the choices. Mostly the tactic used is avoidance. Some ministers might claim that they misunderstood what was being asked. If the situation gets too tricky, avoidance works very well when they only have to eat up a few minutes. Too many times ministers go off on tangents and when the standing orders state that ministers can answer the way they want rather than the way they should—that is, give the whole truth—we find the crux of the problem.

The time during estimates is allotted and divided equally between government and non-government members. One would expect that this is the way it should be. I have been on many estimates committees, and at every one of them I have listened to government members ask questions which have allowed the minister to blow the government’s trumpet and use the estimates process merely as a propaganda tool.

I am not saying this did not happen in the past under the coalition government, because I am pretty sure it did. It would have taken that opportunity. In the future if it is in government it will also take the opportunity to use estimates in the same way. The estimates process has been put in place to scrutinise the budget and not waste time on media stunts and self-praise. Ministers can do that nonsense outside. They can send out press releases ad infinitum, but they should not treat the public like fools by making a mockery of the budget scrutiny process because they see right through it. While the opposition asks questions the minister and staff are ready and alert, but once government members begin their questions attention drops, the minister and the staff know the script and they make their prepared statements to fill in the time.

As to the performance of the ministers during Estimates Committee D questioning—my remarks are particularly to the Minister for Energy and his responses to the questions concerning Tarong Power Station—the minister displayed a confused and flummoxed attitude to my questions and a totally out-of-touch attitude to the portfolio. The fact that he was caught off guard showed he had not twigged that he might have had a problem almost six weeks before when I had asked questions in parliament about the theft of water. Whilst the Premier was doing battle over water and he and south-east Queensland mayors were featured daily dealing with water issues, and while south-east Queensland residents suffered level 3 water restrictions that threatened to go to level 4, this minister did not have the foresight to see a looming problem when it was handed to him on a plate.

This minister has shown no real aptitude for this particular portfolio and I believe he should not be in charge. I found the Minister for Emergency Services, although new to his position, displayed a willingness to communicate as accurately as possible. I hope that with time and experience he will not suffer level 3 water restrictions that threatened to go to level 4, this minister did not have the foresight to see a looming problem when it was handed to him on a plate.

I acknowledge the work of the chair of Estimates Committee D, Dianne Reilly, and deputy chair Kev Lingard, who ensured the smooth running of the process. I thank everyone else involved.

Time expired.

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (12.48 pm): I am pleased to be able to make some comments and reflect on the conduct of this estimates committee. Many members, in consideration of the estimates process, have made some comments about the worth or otherwise of the estimates committee process. Once again this year it was well and truly demonstrated that the process only works if the minister involved is prepared to participate in the process.

Over the time that I have been involved in the estimates process we have seen some ministers who have approached the process in the right spirit and have been capable enough to participate in the process in the way that they should. Former Treasurer Terry Mackenroth was a great example. This year we saw some great examples of ministers who were prepared to make a mockery of the process in order to cover up their own incompetence and their own inability to understand and answer questions about their portfolios.

I joined this particular estimates committee as the shadow minister for energy and took a short period of time to ask some questions of the Minister for Energy. Unfortunately, the Minister for Energy was, as the member for Nanango indicated in the previous contribution, found by the estimates process to be completely lacking in any ability to address the portfolio. I believe the minister treated the whole process with an absolute contempt and made a mockery of the estimates committee that he and his staff appeared before. Anyone who doubts that should read the Hansard record and make a judgement for themselves as to the extent that the minister did not even go close to answering the questions and the number of times that the minister resorted to personal abuse of the questioners, primarily me, simply because he could not answer the question. Because he could not answer the question, he resorts to personal abuse. It is the best indication of someone who is completely out of their depth that when they are asked a question they seek to abuse the questioner rather than address the issue that has been raised.

What the Hansard record does not record is the long embarrassed silences that the committee had to put up with—had to endure—between when the question was asked and when the minister was able to provide any sort of a response at all. These were long periods of time during which his staff
scurried around the room trying to find a public servant or one of the officers who could provide some information to allow the minister to respond to the question that had been asked. The questions that I asked were, I believe, very appropriate given the government's announced expenditure on its infrastructure program, particularly its water infrastructure program. The focus that I took at this year's estimates committee was to ask the Minister for Energy about the preparedness and involvement of his department in providing that infrastructure. It would seem very obvious for a minister in charge of the Energy portfolio to be prepared for such questioning, to be prepared to be able to explain to a budget estimates committee the expenditure that his department was planning to ensure that the government was able to meet its plans to provide that critically needed infrastructure on time. The minister was totally incapable of doing that. For example, it was obvious from his answers that he did not even realise that Powerlink had infrastructure that needed to be relocated because of the government's dam infrastructure.

We went through a period of time where the minister tried to waffle and frustrate the efforts of the committee to determine whether his department had done anything or had been consulted at all about what was required in terms of its role in delivering the government's infrastructure program. I would congratulate, if you like, the efforts that were made by the CEO of Powerlink in the end because he acknowledged that the government owned corporations had not been consulted. Likewise, the CEO of Energex was put in a very difficult position in having to acknowledge that his organisation too had not been consulted and had only just begun to make those considerations on an officer-to-officer level. It demonstrated the extent to which this minister had been left completely out of the government's planning processes. It demonstrated the extent to which the government's planning processes were shallow and were more about building perceptions rather than building infrastructure. It demonstrated the extent to which the government is totally unprepared to deliver that critically needed infrastructure.

Hon. KR LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (12.53 pm): I wish to thank the other members of the committee. This was the third committee that I served on, because obviously opposition members are required to do that with the short numbers that we have. Again, I do thank the other members of the committee. I believe that it worked very well. It is a concern that when we get to issues like Aboriginal affairs the opposition gets only 30 or 35 minutes to go through questions, and quite obviously it is very difficult to develop a pattern and develop a theme. One of the concerns that I had about this committee—and we must make sure that it does not happen again next year—is that the minister demanded we refer to the MPS with each question. Whilst the minister might be able to demand that, the committee could have gone into adjournment and discussed whether that was right or wrong. But in the very short time available that is probably impossible, because certainly opposition members do not want to waste any part of their 30 minutes. The minister has to remember that the budget is not just a statement about whether the Auditor-General finds that the accounts match up as far as the invoices and the payments are concerned. Surely all of these budgets must be on performance. It is not just a matter of asking, 'Why is that money spent in MPS No. 1?' The opposition surely has a right to ask, 'Why didn't you spend money in this particular section?' Clearly there may be no reference to that issue in the MPS.

If one looks at the budget papers, it says that the budget papers are the Budget Speech, the Budget Strategy and Outlook, the Capital Statement, the Budget Highlights, the appropriation bills and the Ministerial Portfolio Statements. It says that the Ministerial Portfolio Statements are the primary source of information and that the MPS forms part of the state budget. It does not mean to say that every question has to relate to a specific MPS. If it is that we are going to base questions on performance as far as the budgets are concerned, surely we should be able to ask, 'Why isn't there anything done in this particular area of this particular budget?', and there might not be an MPS page to refer to. Quite obviously standing orders do not state that the questioner must refer to an MPS and state the MPS page number before the minister is prepared to answer the question. But that is exactly what we had in this particular committee and it became very difficult if members were not referring to a particular MPS.

With regard to Aboriginal affairs, the opposition is concerned that the 65 recommendations of the inquiry into Palm Island have not been completely implemented. We certainly are concerned about areas like Yarrabah, where this year there is a $2 million turnover and the people there have no idea where the cash has gone and $65,000 is missing from the ATM float. Having been a minister in Aboriginal affairs myself, I believe that sooner or later we have got to say that these communities must have true administrators and trained administrators. Whether those administrators come from outside the settlement or whether they are built up through a career pattern within the settlements, we have to say that self-determination has gone too far and if we continue to allow the communities to run their own money then clearly we are going to get problems such as where $65,000 goes missing. That is terrible.

We know from being on those communities that they virtually are little towns, and they have just as many responsibilities as some of our smaller towns in our rural areas.

Ms Boyle: More!
Mr LINGARD: And more. These communities do not have administrators with specific and proper training who have the ability to go into settlements and train other people to have a career path within that community. Quite often we have put a trained administrator into these settlements but because they are upwardly mobile they often leave that community and there is absolutely no-one left with the experience to run their accounts. I believe that, yes, self-determination is something that over the last 10 to 15 years we have tried to do, but we have gone too far because we do not have trained people within those towns and within those settlements.

Debate, on motion of Mr Lingard, adjourned.

Sitting suspended from 12.58 pm to 2.30 pm.

LEGAL, CONSTITUTIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW COMMITTEE

Reports

Dr LESLEY CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (2.30 pm): I lay upon the table of the House report No. 54 of the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee, the annual report 2005-06. I also lay upon the table of the House report No. 55 of the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee, Voices & votes, a parliamentary committee inquiry into young people’s engagement in democracy in Queensland.

Report No. 55 is a report on the inquiry by the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee of the 51st Parliament into voices and votes, young people engaging in democracy in Queensland. It contains the committee’s recommendations to the parliament on issues relevant to the inquiry. The voices and votes inquiry has provided the members of the committee with rewarding opportunities to listen to young people and to hear and discuss their experiences of democracy and their views and concerns about their roles in our system of representative democracy in Queensland.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the many young people—some of whom are in the public gallery today—who gave their time to meet with the committee. I thank them for their openness in sharing their thoughts and ideas, which are represented in this report. It was clear to us that young people are passionate about a wide range of issues and that they want their voices to be heard and acted on by government. But it was equally clear that they do not feel well equipped to achieve this or have confidence that the government will listen and respond to them.

The committee believes that its recommendations to the parliament reflect young people’s voices. The ministerial responses to the recommendations will be a powerful demonstration that young people’s voices are important to our system of representative democracy. I urge the government, the parliament and the Electoral Commission to consider and act upon the views of young people contained in this report and to implement its recommendations. For the government and the parliament, it will provide an opportunity to demonstrate respect for the role of young people in our democratic processes. The implementation of the recommendations will also demonstrate that young people’s voices were heard and that they can make a difference, which is the key to fostering the greater engagement of young people in our representative democracy.

The committee has resolved to inquire further into two issues that were considered important by young people with respect to our electoral system. In March the committee announced its intention to conduct an inquiry into certain contemporary electoral matters, including proportional representation and/or mixed member electorates for state and local government elections, and electronic voting with regard to improving access to democracy for rural and regional Queenslanders and Queenslanders with disabilities.

In conclusion, I consider this report to be one of the most important reports of this committee, because I hope that it will lead to a strengthening of representative democracy in Queensland to the benefit of not just young people but all Queenslanders. I thank the many people who so generously assisted the committee’s voices and votes inquiry. The belief in and respect for the young people of Queensland demonstrated by each of them affirmed the importance of this inquiry. I am indebted to my fellow committee members for their dedication to the voices and votes inquiry and to the various staff in the committee’s secretariat for their assistance and support throughout the inquiry. I commend this report to the House.

Tabled paper: Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee Report No. 54, Annual Report 2005-06.

Tabled paper: Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee Report No. 55, Voices and Votes, a Parliamentary Committee Inquiry into Young People Engaging in Democracy.
Hon. PD PURCELL (Bulimba—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (2.34 pm): It is with pleasure that I rise to speak to the estimates committee report. It is a dynamic time for emergency services in this state. As I told the estimates committee hearing, today’s emergency services are operating in a rapidly changing environment. Global warming, Queensland’s growing and ageing population, the threat of terrorism and flu outbreaks are placing greater demands on staff and volunteers. In this environment it is important that our personnel are better trained and better resourced than ever. The Beattie government has provided a record $744.1 million for the Department of Emergency Services for 2006-07. This funding will ensure that the department continues to provide all Queenslanders with a first-class emergency prevention, preparedness and response capability.

The Beattie government has a proud record of providing the funding and commitment to ensure that our emergency services personnel have the training, equipment, funding and infrastructure they need. This year’s budget, which represents an increase in funding far above any increase in inflation, certainly shows that. For example, the Beattie government is investing $48 million over four years to provide emergency management in Queensland with a state-of-the-art fleet of rescue helicopters. The government has also committed more than $100 million over three years to boost the working conditions of ambulance staff. This year’s budget also includes just under $110 million for capital works.

However, I can assure the House that the government will not be resting on its laurels. We will continue to pursue a positive agenda. The Beattie government will ensure that the department has the resources and the whole-of-government commitment to continue caring for the safety and wellbeing of Queenslanders.

The Department of Emergency Services is an organisation that is committed to ongoing improvement. The process of the lessons learned from Cyclone Larry and several business excellence awards is proof of that. As we say, there is no such thing as good practice, just better practice.

In his statement of reservations in the Estimates Committee D report the member for Mirani expressed concern about several matters. I do not accept the concerns that were raised. These issues were addressed during the estimates committee hearing. Therefore, I reject the member’s comments that my responses were unsatisfactory.

In closing, I would like to thank the chair of the estimates committee, the member for Mudgeeraba, for her involvement and courtesy. I would also like to thank the other members of the committee, including the members for Mirani and Nanango, for their courtesy and the manner in which the estimates hearing was conducted on the day.

Mr ROWELL (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (2.37 pm): It is important that I speak to some of the issues raised in the Estimates Committee D hearing. I did not have the opportunity to attend the hearings in which a number of extremely important issues dealing with electricity were raised. I am pleased to see the minister is present. I think he knows what I will be speaking about.

There is no question that far-north Queensland, from Tully to Innisfail, needs additional electricity. About six years ago Powerlink proposed a new coastal route to take the 275 kV line up there, because we need that additional power. Unfortunately, this proposal will affect some 200 properties. There will be a loss in the value of those properties and there will be obstruction to intensive farming industries and operations. Consequently, there is an enormous degree of angst among people in that region about this powerline going through.

The existing 132 kV line route could have been used. After this line is removed—it is located in a World Heritage listed area—we could simply put in this 275 kV line. That line route has been there for 50 years. It took power from Kareeeya down to Innisfail. Certainly, this line was no impediment whatsoever to this region getting World Heritage listing. It has been 20 years since that listing occurred. The line has been there for 50 years. It is a well-established route. There is no reason whatsoever or any impediment in terms of the area’s World Heritage listing that that line could not been reinstated as a 275 kV line.
The cost of this new coastal route has shot up to $42 million. Previously it was in the order of about $20 million. But there are some aspects that are yet to be addressed which will need to be addressed before the dedicated route is finalised and construction begins, such as compensation, bridges and all that sort of thing. If the existing route is used, with overcanopy conductors, the estimated cost in 2000 was $40-odd million. From 2000 to now there is very little difference in having overcanopy conductors and a tower line put on the already cleared World Heritage area route. In fact, when the 132 kilovolt route is dismantled they will have to go into the World Heritage area to pull the towers down. So it would not have been very difficult to put new towers up. They could have done half of it from one end at one time and the other half at the other end perhaps the next year.

The big concern of course is line security. Cyclone Larry’s wind speeds were 290 kilometres an hour. In fact, in some areas they were recorded at 300 kilometres an hour. The line security for the new coastal route designed by Powerlink is only rated at 220 kilometres an hour. So there is some 25 per cent deficiency in the ability of those towers to withstand wind speeds that were equivalent to Cyclone Larry’s wind speed. It was not that long ago—some 20 years ago—that we had Cyclone Winifred. That was a very disturbing cyclone with similar outcomes to Cyclone Larry almost in the identical position, right along the length and breadth of this new route.

Cyclone wind speeds generally reduce as they go inland. As the cyclone moves inland we see a reduction in wind speeds, and that was evident with Cyclone Larry. Those wind speeds reduced to 200 kilometres an hour in the Atherton region. But it was rather fortunate that the cyclone travelled laterally at a very fast rate, which is unusual—some 25 to 50 kilometres an hour. Had the cyclone travelled slower, which is not abnormal—around eight to 10 kilometres an hour—the devastation would have been absolutely horrendous, not that it was not already.

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Time expired.

Hon. RJ MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (Minister for Energy and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy) (2.42 pm): This process is all about accountability—accountability for the government for sure, and we accept that. I congratulate the member for Hinchinbrook on what I suspect is his swan song. At least, unlike all the opposition members, he spoke about electricity. I also want to pay tribute to the honourable member—and this relates to my other portfolio—because the honourable member was a model of gentlemanliness when I visited his electorate. He has shown an ongoing passion for the honourable member—and this relates to my other portfolio—because the honourable member was a model of gentlemanliness when I visited his electorate. He has shown an ongoing passion for Aboriginal people, and I congratulate him for that. We wish him well should our circumstances change and our paths not cross again. Far be it from me to predict the future, of course.

As I said, this is an accountability process. With corporate Queensland and the energy sector wanting to talk about full retail contestability, the 13 per cent gas scheme, gas market reforms, the sale of Energex retail, the sale of parts of Ergon and the Allgas business—all of these things that corporate Queensland wants to engage in—what did opposition members do when they had their chance? They went to water because all I got for two hours was questions about water infrastructure. When the great moment arrived yesterday for the member for Callide to vote on all of those things that he spent the entire estimates process quizzing me on, what did he do? He backed away from it entirely. He walked away from the infrastructure that he questioned me about. So when it comes to accountability, there should also be accountability for the opposition. This is the laziest and best resourced opposition in Australia. I have not had a question in question time from the member for Callide since June of last year. What we find with the opposition is that when it comes to the big economic issues—the issues that are driving Queensland forward—it has nothing to offer either in this estimates process or in this parliament.

It was clear when the member for Callide was trying to make a point that he does not understand the planning processes. This is a huge worry for somebody who is the Deputy Leader of the National Party. He could not understand the essential processes that are needed to bring infrastructure on in south-east Queensland and in Queensland as a whole. The opposition in recent days has tried to say that we do not have enough electricity generation in Queensland, that we are going to have a power price spike. That shows how out of touch the opposition is with the analysts who look at the energy sector. We only have to look at what Standard and Poor’s said. It said that Queensland is generating excess amounts of electricity and that is what is causing a lowering of the pool prices. In other words, the opposition’s argument is shot to ribbons.

The member for Callide goes back to the dozy old days of the National Party when we had a little regional grid system that led to power insecurity and unreliability. Prior to having a national electricity market, we had 110 instances of undergeneration of electricity. It was the National Party that opposed us joining the national electricity market. Now what do we see today? We see full interconnection. As a result of full interconnection, we have the best transmission system—in spite of what the previous member told the House—and the best generation system when we look at the capability and the projects coming forward. The challenges of population growth and of economic growth remain—and aren’t they great challenges to have, particularly when we see unemployment at 4.5 per cent—and we also have challenges brought about by lifestyle.
In closing I want to say this: I have been involved in this estimates process now as a minister for two sessions. Those opposite have not laid a glove once on anybody in my departments, either in the Department of Energy or the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy. That says everything about the professionalism, the integrity, the dedication and enthusiasm of those staff. As their minister, I want to thank them. I want to thank all of the people involved in the preparation of this estimates process. It is a worthwhile process of accountability for the government and equally of accountability for the opposition, and the opposition failed that test.

Report adopted.

Estimates Committee E

Report

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Male): Order! The question is—
That the report be adopted.

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (2.47 pm): I rise to participate in the debate on the report of Estimates Committee E. I think this is the fifth or sixth time I have been involved in the estimates committee process. I agree with the Minister for Energy when he said that this is an important accountability process both for the government and for the opposition. I do agree with him on that. I think it gives both the minister and the shadow minister an opportunity to get across the details of the expenditure within the portfolio.

I thank the chairman of the committee, the member for Indooroopilly, and the other members of the committee. I think the estimates committee hearings were held in good spirit. We did not have any particular problems. Some interesting things happened but there were no particular problems. I also thank the members of the relevant departments that we examined in this hearing—those being the departments of the Minister for Education and Minister for the Arts and the Minister for Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women.

It again proved to me that at our early committee hearing meetings we should probably put a bit more time into the break-up of the timing for each portfolio, particularly for those ministers with multiple portfolios. I think it proved a little difficult with some of the areas, particularly for the Minister for Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women. I do not think we had the breakdown quite right for those areas. Indeed, the same could be said for the Minister for Education and Minister for the Arts. We could easily have spent more time on the arts. Having said that, there were a lot more questions that I would have liked to ask in relation to education.

The other thing it illustrated is that, when it comes down to it, the estimates committee does not have a lot of power. We passed a resolution in our committee requesting the Minister for Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women to table all the documentation regarding the environmental impact of the Traveston Dam that her department had provided to both government agencies and outside consultants. When it came down to it, after all was said and done, the minister, within her rights and under the standing orders, said, ‘I do not have to provide you with any of that information.’ She subsequently did provide a small amount of information regarding the Traveston Dam, but it was obviously not all of the information that was available to her department that she would have provided to all those agencies.

That probably displays some of the shortcomings of the estimates committee process. When all is said and done, the committee does not have a lot of power to get information. As we see in question time, the ruling is that the minister can answer a question in whatever way he or she sees fit, which does not necessarily mean that one always gets an answer. Having said that, it means that we have to try to probe the minister on whatever the issue is that we are examining.

As I said, there were a lot of questions I would have liked to ask but did not have time to fully explore. I guess that is the nature of a big portfolio like Education and the Arts, which is the one that I shadow. I obviously spent a lot of time asking questions about the prep year and the investment and planning that is being put into prep, because that, as most members would agree, is the major reform that is happening within this financial year for the government. As I said in the debate on the education bill on Tuesday, I remain unconvinced that everything that needs to be done has been done for the rollout of prep for the 2007 school year. I think there are issues regarding teacher aide hours that are unresolved and that will prove to be a problem next year. There is also the issue of the flexibility of the starting age. Those issues are not new to members.

One thing of interest is that the minister took on notice a question from me regarding the number of assaults within our schools because he did not have details about whether they were assaults on teachers, staff or other students. He came back to me within the required time but said in his answer that the department does not maintain specific data pertaining to assaults, even though the minister had given an undertaking to provide the breakdown summary details of WorkCover or police records, which is obviously where either one would be reported as to whether it was against teachers or against staff.
I am disappointed that the minister did not come back with that information. I think the level of assaults in our schools and what we are doing to address it are things that parents, staff and students would like to know about. Unfortunately, we were not able to get that information from the minister.

Mr LEE (Indooroopilly—ALP) (2.52 pm): I am delighted to rise in the House today in support of the Estimates Committee E report. At the very outset I put on record my sincere thanks and gratitude to the secretariat team—Stephen Finnimore, Jodie Martin and Andrea Musch—who did tremendous work in the organisation of Estimates Committee E. I thank all of those other members of the Queensland parliament who served on our committee. I also put on record my thanks to various other people in various government departments and also among the opposition who made the process of asking questions on notice run as smoothly as it did. I believe the committee's hearing on the day ran incredibly smoothly, and I would like to thank all of my colleagues for the way that they contributed to the committee.

Two things stood out for me in the Education section of the hearing. One relates to the great news that was provided in relation to Queensland academies, one of which is in my electorate. The Toowong Academy, formerly Toowong College, will be a wonderful addition to my local community. It does something that is very important to me: it ensures that the site at Bywong Street, Toowong remains used for public education well into the future. That is something that I am very pleased about.

I was thrilled, too, to hear from the minister for the environment about the resources that are being provided for visitor facilities at national parks. It is a shame that the member for Charters Towers is not here, but I was also delighted to hear some great news from the minister for the environment about humane and sensible research into the possible chemical dispersion of flying foxes that involves removing them from a particular area without the National Party's approach of 'just shooting the little critters'.

I make comment on the report, in particular the thing that is not actually in the report—that is, a substantive reservation about the environment section from the member for Burnett. The member for Burnett comes into the parliament on a regular basis and rants, raves on and annoys all of us with prattlings about what we are not doing in the area of the environment, purely because he is the shadow minister. I remember that when the parliament sat in Rockhampton he was asked to place his environmental credentials on the table and he said, 'Well, I am wearing a green tie.' That was his idea of what a great environmentalist he was.

The member for Burnett comes in here and he rants and raves about things that he thinks we are not doing, but is there a significant statement of reservation from him or a dissent about our report on our examination of the department of environment? No, there is not. There is no significant dissent from him. At least the member for Cunningham, who may have a few issues with what we are doing, took the time and made an effort to put on record his concerns. The member for Burnett must be one of the laziest members of this parliament. I can see that other members of the parliament agree with me; they are nodding their heads.

Mrs Desley Scott: We could add some more adjectives.

Mr LEE: There are many adjectives that people could use to describe the member for Burnett. I want to say, as the chair of the committee, that I believe he is lazy. I also put on record my delight at the great work that the minister's office did in delivering on commitments to not have a duck and quail management plan. That is something that her department had committed to.

Mr Lucas: You will be well known for your advocacy in that area. Your advocacy has been well rewarded.

Mr LEE: Thank you very much, Minister. I will not speak further, purely because it relates to legislation that is on the floor of the parliament. I thank my colleagues for their hard work and I thank the secretariat, but also I want to say to the member for Burnett that I would have thought that we would see more from him by way of substantive criticism. Clearly he thinks we are doing a great job. I know that the minister for the environment will be thrilled when she reads the report of Estimates Committee E.

Ms JARRATT (Whitsunday—ALP) (2.57 pm): It was my great pleasure to be a part of Estimates Committee E this year, because it examined a portfolio area that is very dear to my heart, that is, Education. I think the greatest gift that we can give a child is a good education that prepares them to be good and constructive citizens as well as identify and develop the unique skills and abilities that each child has and show them how to use these to guide them towards a rewarding career and a satisfying life.

Ours is a huge education system. It has around 490,000 students in 1,276 public schools across the state. The key to the success of this massive organisation undoubtedly is the 55,000 full-time equivalent educators and associated staff who nurture, guide, teach and care for our children and our young people. I acknowledge the genuine dedication of the teachers and principals who do so much more than just earn their pay. I acknowledge the many hours of work undertaken by most teachers above and beyond that which they do inside the official school hours. We owe a great debt of gratitude to the teachers because they are, after all, out there actively shaping the next generation of Queenslanders.
The performance of the environment minister during the limited time I had to question her was a shocker. Because of time constraints caused by a committee vote which was won by the opposition, the minister only had to answer two environmental questions from the opposition and most of her energy was focused on personal attacks of me. She failed to show any concern, for example, over the Traveston Dam, starving cassowaries or the obstruction by the EPA of the Bundaberg Turtle Interpretive Centre.

(3.03 pm): I would like to thank my estimates committee colleagues for their fellowship and professionalism—the members for Cunningham, Fitzroy, Nicklin, Nanango, Whitsunday. The most important year in my opinion. I am really excited about the $1 billion Tomorrow’s Advantage for our young children to have a learning curriculum introduced so early in their lives. The foundation years are the most important years in my opinion. I am grateful, as are parents and students in my electorate.

I am pleased about the $120 million Asbestos Roof Replacement Program which is being rolled out. There are 400 roofs being replaced in just 12 months. In my area the Calen State District College and Calen State School will have their roofs replaced over the Christmas holidays. They are the final schools in my electorate to have their roofs replaced. I congratulate the minister on achieving that in my electorate. I am grateful, as are parents and students in my electorate.

I am really excited about the $173 million in the budget to support literacy and numeracy initiatives. There is funding to provide professional development for teachers in reading, grammar and spelling. From October this year every region will have a regional manager for literacy. This is so important, and I congratulate the minister for tackling this issue head-on and putting actions in place to address it.

I thank the chair of the committee, my fellow committee members and all staff who assisted us on the day. The estimates process is important one and I hope that it continues for many years to come.

Mr MESSENGER: Do not worry, it is coming. I also thank the departmental staff of the Minister for Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women. Particular mention and thanks must also go to the hardworking staff of the Leader of the Opposition.

While personal relationships during the hearings were good, I do have serious concerns and worries about the estimates process. I table those formal reservations.

Tabled paper: Mr Messenger’s Statement of Reservation—Environment.
We asked that the minister table documentation that was provided to other government agencies on the Traveston Dam. I have a copy of that here. Unusually, the minister has not signed this briefing note that she gave to the committee. She has not been doing her homework because she has not signed off on it. I will read it into the Hansard. It states—

The key issues that she was supposed to look at were the potential environmental issues, the reduction of environmental flows within the Great Sandy Straits, Hervey Bay and estuarine areas of the Mary River. This includes the Great Sandy Marine Park, high environmental value areas, the EPP water in the Great Sandy Straits, Ramsar areas, significant wetlands, state and coastal management plan, and fish habitat areas.

These are all warning bells that the minister should be listening to, because the establishment by the Beattie government of that absolute environmental and social disaster on the Mary River will have dramatic effects throughout the Great Sandy Straits, recreational fishing and commercial fishing areas, not to mention the Mary River turtle and the Mary River cod hatcheries. I will also table an article from Nature which shows how endangered the lungfish are and how stupid this decision is by the Beattie government to put a dam right at Traveston crossing. It is an absolute travesty for Traveston.

Tabled paper: Document titled ‘Dam project threatens living fossil’.

The other issue that I would like to raise in the brief time that I have available is the plight of the southern cassowary in far-north Queensland following Cyclone Larry. What I will do is table a letter from the Garners Beach Cassowary Action Group, which has just written to me alerting this House and Queenslanders to the fact that cassowaries are starving on Mission Beach and around Innisfail, and this government is not doing a thing about it. It is letting them die. It is stopping their feeding program. So we have an iconic species—

Tabled paper: Letter dated 9 August 2006 from Garners Beach Cassowary Action Group to Mr Messenger regarding the plight of the southern cassowary in far-north Queensland following Cyclone Larry.

Mr Lee: What is their feeding program?

Mr MESSENGER: I will tell you about the feeding program because I went for a walk with the Garners Beach Cassowary Action Group and saw firsthand just what was happening. Cassowaries are eviscerating animals. They are endangering the lives of children and adults who have, for example, apples or fruit on their person.

Mr Finn interjected.

Mr MESSENGER: What we must do is listen to the wisdom of the local community and the environmental experts. We need significantly more crisis feeding stations for cassowaries. They need to be set up in the Mission Beach and Innisfail regions as well as the hinterland and Atherton Tableland areas to prevent further unnecessary deaths of the endangered species.

Time expired.

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—Ind) (3.08 pm): I rise to speak to the Estimates Committee E report. I believe our estimates committee process plays a very important role in enabling members of parliament to better question ministers about matters relevant to their respective portfolios. More importantly, I think Estimates Committee E, which I was involved in, was able to demonstrate that, notwithstanding the different political views that all members of parliament have on our committee, we were able to work together effectively notwithstanding we had different views on a number of issues and bearing in mind that there was a vote taken. Notwithstanding that, business did continue.

We also demonstrated how the opposition, the National Party representatives, Cate Molloy, the Liberal member on the committee and I as an Independent were able to work together to pass a motion which called on the minister for the environment to table documents. History will speak for itself as to the effectiveness of the outcome of that resolution, but reports were duly presented to the committee and they are now part of the Hansard record.

I note that a number of members have criticised the current committee process when they have spoken to the various committee reports. I believe that, without this committee, this parliament would be worse off. I am prepared to consider and support any moves from any member of either this parliament or any future parliament—if I happen to be a member of a future parliament—to improve and strengthen our committee system and allow the committees to do the important work which I believe they have to.

On the issue of the Education portfolio, during the committee hearings I questioned the minister about the Nambour Special School’s future and the role it will play as well as the great pressures on our special schools in south-east Queensland. Only last week, I attended a meeting of the Nambour Special School P&C. They were aware of the minister’s response to my question, and I put on the record now that they are preparing a letter for me to present to the minister at the next sitting. I hope I will be able to organise a future meeting with the senior management of the Nambour Special School and the Minister for Education so they can talk about some of the real concerns they have at the moment.

One issue I raised during the hearing which is of very real concern to me is the behaviour of some students and some parents who have children attending our state schools. It really concerns me that we have some real behaviour problems in grade 1 at some of our schools. Speaking to some of the teachers and teacher aides, I found it very concerning that our teachers, our teacher aides and our
students—including boys and girls in grade 1—have to put up with some deplorable behaviour. I hope we can review the current behaviour management plans and policies, which are due to be finalised by the end of September, in perhaps six months to see if they are effectively delivering the outcomes which I, the minister and many members of parliament hope will be delivered.

These behaviour management plans and policies are needed to ensure that boys and girls, teachers and parents get the best out of our public education system in Queensland. If the system does need to be finetuned and if further changes do need to be made, I hope this parliament will have the strength of character to meet that challenge and make those moves to ensure we provide the best education system possible for students in Queensland. I also would like to thank the minister on behalf of my constituents who have seen a significant increase in the removal of asbestos roofs in my electorate and right across the Sunshine Coast.

On the issue of the environment, I questioned the minister about when we will see a final decision on the future certainty of the horseriding trails on the Sunshine Coast, especially in the Mapleton forest area. We are still waiting for a final decision. I know many horse riders in my electorate read with interest the minister’s answer to my question. It certainly created a bit of controversy in the community, so we are looking forward to the minister’s final announcement on the proposed horseriding trails.

More importantly, we are looking for an announcement on the timing of the construction work which will be required to ensure that the alternative horseriding trails are accessible and safe for our horse riders—bearing in mind that many horse riders are children or elderly people, not just parents. On the issue of local government, there was discussion about the Traveston Dam and I would like to report to the House that on 25 August we hope to have an inspection of Paradise Dam.

I can vouch for the education provided by Queensland state schools, having three happy, successful kids. Tewantin State School is in its fourth year of providing prep classes, with wonderful feedback regarding its success. The waiting list for people wanting their children to enter the prep year program in previous years has shown a desire by Queensland parents to ease the transition from preschool care to school for their children.
To consolidate children’s learning, the government is allocating $173 million to the budget to strengthen numeracy and literacy initiatives in Queensland schools. Last year, a blueprint was launched providing a framework to develop higher literacy standards. This blueprint identified four elements in improving literacy in schools across Queensland: teacher professional development, literacy in the curriculum, student learning and leadership. I now have a suggestion for all new school projects: ‘How can we kill the river?’ You dam the trunk of a river and you kill the river.

I would like to sign off. Many of us probably will not be coming back to this place, and I would like to tell you all how very sad I am that you have taken this position that you have. For 25 years, you have stood with good green credentials and I honestly believe you have let us all down.

Dr DOUGLAS (Gaven—NPA) (3.17 pm): I wish to congratulate the committee on its efforts. A lack of action following the Gold Coast City Council inquiry is quite disturbing. If following the CMC inquiry the local government minister is going to fight for the public in absolute honesty, then it needs to be done correctly—not half-heartedly. As the member for Gaven, I have constituents approaching me regularly saying, ‘Surely there is something you can do about this dishonest council running our city.’ And, yes, there is. I can do what I am doing right now and speak in favour of giving the CMC stronger powers. Look at what happens in New South Wales. The state government there is a responsible government, and it did not hesitate to sack the entire Tweed council to clean up the Tweed shire. At least the public there can be reassured that state governments take their responsibilities seriously.

The Gold Coast City Council is dysfunctional. Some councillors are honourable and do not stand a chance when voting on important issues. The council is full of alternative agendas, and the people of the Gold Coast are ultimately the ones being punished. Former Labor members and a Labor mayor have an unusual amount of influence. Interestingly, in very recent times, they even seem to be supporting honourable members of the council.

The recent CMC inquiry showed that there was evidence of dishonesty. The ‘bloc’, as they are widely known, is made up of a group of councillors who are funded by a narrow group of developers who did not excuse and continue to not excuse themselves when voting on development applications lodged by the very developers who fund their campaigns. Despite the CMC’s findings, all the local government minister suggested was that the Gold Coast City Council be given a rap over the knuckles and be reprimanded. That is following an inquiry that cost millions of ratepayers’ dollars. How disgraceful! The entire city has no faith or trust whatsoever in this council. This Labor government, despite its famous six-pack of local representatives, has let them down.

Earlier this week the member for Southport said that the major issue that people in his electorate ask him to address is their lack of trust in the Gold Coast City Council. The member now says that we need an election for the Gold Coast City Council one year early. The minister responsible failed to act decisively when she had the opportunity.

The minister is not here but hopefully she is watching. The minister is the local government watchdog, and this terrible problem occurred on her watch. Does she not think she has any responsibility for this? My wife is the councillor for Surfers Paradise on our magnificent Gold Coast. She was the only councillor not named as a person of interest before, during or subsequent to the CMC inquiry. But the minister directly criticised my wife and the National Party, linking me, as the member for Gaven, to this when she knew I had no opportunity to respond. The minister did this just before my maiden speech. She knew what was going on. There were cheap political stunts instead of substantive actions for the public’s sake. It was cowardly and unparliamentary.

The minister for local government clearly knew that it was the same council that, after the inquiry, tried to lay a ridiculous charge on my wife—the councillor who stood up for women working on council who were victims of a proven sexual predator. The case may be heading to the courts and this is an abuse of process. It will be vigorously defended. Is this minister not the minister for women? Where is she? She has done nothing.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr O’Brien): Order! Did you say this case is before the court?

Dr DOUGLAS: The estimates process is supposed to demonstrate that, once appointed as a minister, a minister is there for everyone—even their opponents. Remember the line: even though I do not agree with him I will defend his right to say it. Does the minister realise that this government allowed a former council officer, an acknowledged sexual perpetrator, whom Justice Thomas sacked and gave no access to benefits, access to the tribunal and a six-figure financial settlement? This is despite him not being entitled to use the tribunal. Do members know who paid for this? The government paid for it.

Who is watching the watchdog? The watchdog was appointed—a Mr Paul O’Shea. I wish him well. I believe that he has some local government experience. Just because he happens to live on the coast, is he an appropriate choice? What powers does he have? We have heard the member for Southport say that he does not support administrators. I agree with him. But we all admired John Andrews. I say that it is too little, too late—dithering. Nero fiddled while Rome burned. I would ask that this department be reviewed.
Mr PEARCE (Fitzroy—ALP) (3.22 pm): I rise to comment on the outcome of Estimates Committee E, which examined the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2006 relating in particular to the portfolios of Education, the Arts, and Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women. I endorse the words of appreciation offered by other members about the staff and other committee members.

Education is not only an important issue for families looking for quality learning opportunities for their children; it is an issue of significant importance to elected members who regard the education sector as the link to the local communities that they represent. Getting involved, making contact with teachers and parents, ensures that a local member is in touch with the issues and the needs of schools, paving the way for community acceptance.

Education Queensland provides educational opportunities for some 490,000 students in 1,276 state schools. Education provides jobs for around 55,000 full-time equivalent employees, including 36,000 full-time teachers. The budget for Education in the current financial year is one of new initiatives and is one that recognises the strong growth in education. As well, the budget caters for the need to improve and replace school buildings with a $1 billion injection into state and non-state schools.

The five minutes allocated for members to comment on the estimates committee reports allows for only brief reference to some of the debate on the matters raised by the committee. The minister told the committee that the government’s investment of $1 billion over five years is the most comprehensive school renewal program ever undertaken in Queensland. He talked about the unprecedented degree of parent and local community involvement in deciding primary and secondary requirements. I support that. I think families need to get involved in what is happening in their schools. Unfortunately, we have a number of schools where P&Cs are struggling because of the lack of involvement by parents. I would like to see that change in the years ahead.

The main features of the program are a five-year, $850 million capital injection into state schools—the largest one-off school building project in Queensland’s history. This is on top of the existing $427.1 million worth of capital works for this financial year. In addition, a $50 million school community development fund for state school communities will be spent on minor capital works. The non-state school sector has also done well, with a one-off $100 million contribution to improve school facilities.

One of the most important new directions for state schools in this state is the preparatory year of schooling. I was able to ask the minister to summarise where we are in terms of preparation for the introduction of this new year of schooling. A positive message is that it does not matter where students go to school—whether in urban or rural areas; the prep year will be available as a universal service next year in contrast to the part-time, geographically distributed preschool system. Prep year students will be able to access a place and will not be restricted by preschool quotas.

Some 96 state and 24 non-state schools have already been phased in to determine the needs of a prep year class. These experiences will help set the standard for the full introduction of prep classes in 2007. There will be an additional 100 teachers. I was interested in the minister’s advice to the committee that he proposes to initiate a trial homestay program that will enable students to have a home away from home. They can then study at a school that delivers the sort of education or the particular subject offerings at a senior level that they are seeking.

Each pilot host school—and there are 10 or 11 of these—will receive $2,000 per student towards the cost of employing a coordinator to provide support to students, families and their homestay families. For people living in rural and isolated Queensland this is a great pilot scheme. I hope that it is very successful over the years ahead and that we can expand it and ensure that more and more students who live in isolated areas get the opportunity to attend a school where the curriculum suits their needs.

The committee also heard in detail the proposed expenditure of the portfolio of the Minister for Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women. With 157 local governments across the state of Queensland, the minister has the responsibility of ensuring that local governments provide an efficient and transparent service. The department manages grant and subsidy programs to assist local governments to provide a broad range of services to their ratepayers and communities within their boundaries. In her opening statement the minister informed the committee that the department was currently reviewing the Integrated Planning Act and the integrated development assessment system to see how they are working or, in some cases, not working.

Time expired.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (3.28 pm): I rise to speak to the report of Estimates Committee E. As a previous speaker stated, the best gift we can give our children, besides the love of a sound and responsible family, is a good education. It is a great empowerment for young men and young women for their future. It gives them the best options and choices for their future development and growth.
We have wonderful schools, both public and private, in my electorate, overwhelmingly with teachers and staff who care very much for the students who attend. Gladstone State High School is a very old school. It is one of the oldest high schools in the region. It is in need of a significant amount of expenditure to update its teaching spaces to provide a better learning environment for the students.

The P&C at the Kin Kora State School raised a number of issues of concern with me. On 22 June I wrote to the Minister for Education about its concerns but to date have not received any reply, and its concerns relate to the proposal to relocate two buildings from Kin Kora State School to Rosella Park. Rosella Park School is our special education area for students with learning and living disabilities. I have to put on the record my wholehearted support for Rosella Park. It has not only dedicated teachers but also dedicated volunteers who work tirelessly with the students to give them the best options available. However, the P&C at the Kin Kora school believes that the decision to move two old demountable buildings to Rosella Park is not the best option, and it has expressed concerns in a number of areas. Firstly in terms of economic grounds, it believes that the relocation of the two demountables will not be a cost-effective option. It believes that it would be a better option and, in the long run, a cheaper option to have a new double modular building placed at the school. It has expressed concern in relation to the current service model for schools and it states—

Advice we received from facilities and service staff indicates that a school of our size with 780 students receives an allocation of three extra-classroom spaces. We prefer this to be an informal model rather than an established model and it does not recognise the complexity of large schools and the classroom spaces required to service the needs of a large number of students.

The other area of concern is aesthetics. The staff and P&C of Kin Kora school have established a wonderful physical school environment which all goes towards the development of public confidence in our school. The removal of the proposed building will leave a considerable and physical hole in the school grounds which detracts from the aesthetics of the school. The teaching spaces that are proposed to be relocated to Rosella Park are heavily utilised by the Kin Kora school P&C and other staff, relief teachers and special needs teachers. Rosella Park school, as I said, is the special needs school for the area. It used to be Gladstone Special School. I think Rosella Park is a much more desirable name for the school. It certainly does need extra teaching spaces, but the request that is being made and being asked for in the budget—and it is difficult to read in the budget documents because many of the expenses are done in bulk and they are not broken down in detail—is that Rosella Park receive new teaching spaces for those students who have special needs so that they can be purpose-built and adapted for the high needs that many of these students have.

We have a school at Tannum Sands which is our newest high school, and it certainly addresses the needs of an expanding region. I had the pleasure of seeing the Minister for Education in the electorate only a couple of weeks ago to open new facilities and a new teaching program. It was wonderful to see him. I know that many people in the electorate were pleased to see the minister there. Some students took him through the museum and art gallery, as did Pam, and he is certainly welcome to visit at any time, particularly because of, as I said, the quality education that is offered to residents and students in the electorate of Gladstone.

Hon. RJ WELFORD (Eveton—ALP) (Minister for Education and Minister for the Arts) (3.32 pm): I thank all honourable members for their contributions to this discussion about the estimates in relation to Education and the Arts. The contributions of all members were generally very constructive and positive, except, I regret to say, that of the opposition spokesperson for education, who in his statement of reservation in the report has completely lost the plot. He has gone totally off the rails. He has absolutely no idea what he is doing in that portfolio. He clearly took no time at all to actually read or understand the responses that were given to him following a number of matters that were taken on notice and he reinforced his reputation as a first-class underachiever in his contribution to the debate today. And he is the opposition spokesperson on education!

Let me just point to a couple of examples. He speculated in his contribution to the debate today that he was not sure that everything that should be ready or might be ready will be ready by the start of next year. Can I assure everyone in the House and can I assure all Queenslanders that the prep year will hit the ground running next year full throttle, and right across the state there will be young children 4½ onwards—rolling into our prep classes and absolutely having a ball. By the time they finish prep year next year, they will be charging into year 1 with a whole range of skills that will see them accelerate their learning in literacy, in numeracy and in the other initiatives that the government is rolling out in ways that we have never seen before.

I know the opposition supports the prep year. It would be, however, a welcome change if the opposition, and in particular its education spokesperson, actually made the effort to acknowledge that the work is being done to implement it effectively. Some of his criticisms were the failure of the minister to advise how many schools will need additional prep classrooms to those previously estimated and the failure of the minister to advise the actual number of prep classes required in 2007. How on earth am I to specify the precise number of classes when we do not yet have the enrolments?

Mr Cummins: Crystal ball!

Mr WELFORD: That is right. I am supposed to be Merlin the Magician or something.
An honourable member interjected.

Mr WELFORD: The Nostradamus of the Labor government; that is me. If I was that good, then obviously he would have no room to make squalid and invalid criticisms.

Another of his criticisms was my failure to advise on the estimated staffing costs. I have, in fact, given the honourable member all of the information that the government has in relation to the costs of implementing the prep year. It will cost up to $350 million to provide facilities in state and non-state schools and the recurrent cost for our government to implement the prep year by the end of 2008-09 when prep will be fully implemented with a full-year age cohort is about $228 million. That is the current budget for it, yet he perpetuates and persists with the untruth that I was not prepared or have not been able to provide that information.

We anticipate under current forecasts—this is all part of the budgeting process—that we will need 900 full-time equivalent teachers, growing to around 1,600 full-time equivalent teachers in 2008. The number of teacher aides, as I say, will be informed by the actual enrolments on day 8 in 2007. So to criticise someone for not being able to tell you something that you cannot even know until day 8 in 2007 seems like a pretty hollow criticism to me.

Then in the contribution to today's debate he also said that he was very interested in knowing how many assaults occur in our schools. The education department does not keep a chapter and verse record of every criminal offence that may or may not be happening in our schools. If he wants information on assaults, he should go to the justice department or the police department. We do not categorise every misdemeanour that might be committed by a student, or someone else for that matter, in our schools. If it is a criminal matter it goes to the police. If it is not a criminal matter it is dealt with as a disciplinary matter within the school, and all of those disciplinary figures in terms of suspensions and expulsions are reported transparently—openly—in our annual reports. Again, he was criticising us for not being able to provide information which we simply do not have—hardly a valid criticism.

Mind you, I should point out that very little of what the honourable member—the opposition spokesperson on education—had to say in his dissenting statement of reservation had anything to do with the budget estimates in particular. It had nothing to do with the figures, other than things that he knew full well were not figures that were part of the budget estimates. There were a number of other matters in relation to curriculum and performance measures. He makes the extraordinary comment that Queensland state schools have not achieved 10 out of 12 national academic benchmarks. This was another falsehood perpetuated in the campaign material that the Liberal Party is putting out.

I point out that the retention rates in our government schools between years 10 and 12 are higher than the national average. In the past two years the total number of school students in Queensland government schools has shown net growth. In all areas, more than eight out of 10 Queensland students are achieving the national benchmarks and in most areas nine out of 10 are achieving the national benchmarks. So the fact that one out of 10 or two out of 10 are not simply shows that the national benchmarks are aspirational.

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (3.39 pm): I am pleased to speak to the report of this estimates committee. Firstly, I thank the chairman as I was an invitee to the committee. Overall, I think the process worked fairly well. I must say, though, that the overall concept of estimates committee hearings is of limited value. It is of great value to the ministers who have to go through an extensive review process. Of course, it gives the opposition a chance to ask a few questions, but the reality is that the ministers answer the questions the way they want to answer them. So overall, it is of limited value to Queenslanders but, as we all know, it is a process we have to go through.

In relation to the estimates committee hearings process, the problem often arises that the answers to questions on notice come in less than 24 hours prior to the commencement of the hearings. Surely, if there is a problem with time limits, we can put the questions in earlier. There must be a way that we can get those answers earlier than 24 hours before we go into a hearing. Usually, the questions asked are quite detailed and we have to examine the answers to them. Quite clearly, I think there is a deliberate attempt by the government to do so that there is limited opportunity for us to scrutinise the details. If the government is serious about having a better process, we should extend the time for questions so that the answers can be received earlier.

I must say that quite a few issues in relation to local government were covered by the estimates committee hearing. For example, we talked about the Gold Coast City Council. In that regard we have already heard a contribution this afternoon from the member for Gaven, but I would like to make some further comments about some of the inconsistencies in the whole debate. There seems to me to be two periods in the Gold Coast election process during which issues of concern have been raised. One is the election period and the other is the functions of the council after that time. We know from the published facts that came out of the in-depth inquiry that was held on the Gold Coast that there are some issues in relation to the election which are being discussed in another place. That is where that discussion should take place. I am not going to go into the details of that. But when I asked the minister whether she found any evidence that the council was not functioning effectively, her answer was no, there was no evidence that the council was not functioning effectively. In fact, if members read the CMC report they would find...
that a lot of the council’s decisions were consistent with the usual process. However, I see that the minister has appointed a watchdog. That is a rather intriguing move, seeing that the minister said that the council was functioning effectively.

I also note that the member for Southport made some very generous donations of between $9,800 and $19,800 to two candidates in the Gold Coast elections. If any member is looking for some funding for the election campaign, I suggest they head off and have a yarn to the member for Southport. He seems to be very, very generous.

There was also an issue raised in relation to a contract that was given to UXC Ltd. That company was given a $22.5 million contract to reduce water usage in homes and businesses as part of the water reduction plan. This is a very similar situation to what happened with the letting of the contract to Aspen for Caboolture Hospital. I understand why it happened, but the reality is that it should not have happened the way it did. I think there are some serious matters that need to be investigated further in relation to the process of government. There is certainly the potential for a watchdog to be appointed to oversee the department. That would be interesting.

During the hearings we also talked in detail about the minister’s call-in powers. We went through in detail the Montville Links call-in. We found numerous inconsistencies. In particular, the minister said that one of the reasons for the call-in that was given in the ministerial statements made by the Premier and the minister was that it was to be constructed on good agricultural land. In fact, the report that I have says that the land is in a poor state in agricultural and scenic terms. There were also other inconsistencies.

Time expired.

Hon. D BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (Minister for Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women) (3.45 pm): Firstly, I acknowledge the hard work that was undertaken by the parliamentary staff in relation to the estimates hearings. I especially want to register my appreciation to the chair, Mr Ronan Lee, who did a great job in the lead-up and on the day of the estimates hearings. I also thank all members of the committee for the way in which they conducted themselves, with one reservation which I will refer to in a moment. I also give a special thanks to my very hardworking officers from the two departments—the department of local government and planning and the Environmental Protection Agency. They put in huge hours to prepare for the hearings.

So far as we were given a chance, the hearings provided a small insight into the great work that is going on in my portfolios. However, we could have showcased much more of the good work being done in those portfolios had, particularly in relation to Environment, the opposition members of the committee not chosen to pull a stunt that wasted the best part of an hour in which the opposition could have questioned me and the EPA about our environmental credentials. It is probably a compliment to us that the opposition members felt that they had so few questions to ask us that they could squander that time. I was certainly disappointed, because it was an opportunity for me, for the director-general and others to talk about some of the really important matters that come up under the heading of environmental protection.

It was not much better in the Local Government section of the committee during which the shadow minister did not ask me about call-in powers; he asked me over and over about one call-in. He appeared to have prepared questions only about the Montville Links call-in. He started with the wrong premise by asking me why I called it in and the decision that I made. Despite repeated answers to his questions, it appears that the member still does not understand that it was not my call-in, it was a call-in undertaken by the Premier as the regional planning minister. To that extent, it was not a call-in about which I had made a decision or had the detailed knowledge.

However, I recognise that we managed to talk about some important things. I particularly had the chance to clear up the errors that the member for Burnett made in not understanding the budget for the EPA. The budget for the EPA has not, as he has said, decreased. Some years ago the Queensland government introduced a capital charge on all agencies. This was never money that we could spend. Treasury gave it and took it back, you might say. In some years it amounted to in excess of $100 million. In 2004-05 the government removed the capital charge. That gave the false impression that the EPA budget had decreased. The accurate picture of the EPA budget is that it has been increasing every year. The bucket of money that we had to spend in 2004-05 was $255.7 million. In 2005-06 it was $271.9 million. In 2006-07, it is $294.4 million. In 2006-07, the budget works out to about $72 per Queenslander. When the coalition was last in power, the budget was about $50 per Queenslander.

The member for Burnett has also made mistakes in this House in relation to EPA staff numbers. He took the June 2005 headcount of 2,331 employees and compared it with the full-time equivalent figure for June 2006, which is 2,111 and then attacked us for reducing staff. Headcounts refer to all employees, full-time and part-time. Full-time equivalents refers to exactly that. It is always a lower figure than headcounts because, roughly speaking, two part-time jobs equal one full-time equivalent. The true comparison is that as at June 2005 there were full-time equivalents of 2,101 and as at June 2006 there were full-time equivalents of 2,111—an increase.
I want to address the statement of reservations by the opposition members. They wanted to know why the answer to question on notice No. 7 was replaced after the deadline for receipt of answers. There was nothing sinister in that at all. The department noticed that it had left the name and contact details of an officer on the response and so they were removed.

I was really proud to be sitting at the table as the local government and planning minister, the minister for women and the minister for environment. The work done by hundreds of public servants all over the state of Queensland in those departments has been excellent.

Time expired.
Report adopted.

Estimates Committee F

Report

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (3.50 pm): I am pleased to speak to the report of Estimates Committee F. I was pleased with the way the committee ran, although there is probably limited value in the process for Queenslanders. However, it is an opportunity for ministers to have a good look at their portfolios.

Once again, the problem we had was in relation to receipt of answers to questions on notice—less than 24 hours prior to the committee hearing. That is a ridiculously short time frame in which to analyse in detail the answers that are received. If the government is serious about wanting to be open and accountable, it needs to get those answers back earlier than that. It was interesting when at one stage the minister for communities said that he spent his life ‘abiding by rules and parameters’ as set for him. He also said that he has spent his life ‘obeying the rules whether in the military or as a teacher’. However, the minister broke the rules by sending his answers to questions on notice back very late. We did not get them until very late in the afternoon. So we had them officially only for a few hours. That was disappointing. While there is pressure on the opposition to fully understand the answers when they come back, it is important that ministers have enough time to formulate the answers. They do not want to be under that pressure and have the embarrassment of being late with their answers. I think this is important for both sides.

There are a couple of issues that I want to raise in relation to the Communities portfolio. The minister made much of the Blueprint for the Bush and has been doing so for some time. We support the concept of the Blueprint for the Bush, but we do not support the conning of people in relation to how much money is allocated to programs under the Blueprint for the Bush. I say again that we support the Blueprint for the Bush in principle.

The minister tried to tell us that the $153 million allocated for Blueprint for the Bush was new money. He said—and it is quite clear in the Hansard record—‘An amount of $153.4 million is new money.’ It is not new money. They are old programs that the department has continued. Sure, some allocations have increased, but of course they have been increasing for a long time. The minister said that as part of this new money there was $4 million in additional funding for Queensland’s 14 regional tourist organisations. I was a foundation member of one of those tourist organisations 24 or 25 years ago. We were getting funding then and we get it now. We have also been getting increases in funding over that period of time. I think we started getting $75,000 a year and then that increased a bit more and then in later years it increased by another $200,000 and the like. We used to get those increases at different stages.

We are talking about money for new programs. Of the $153 million allocated to the program only $35 million is new money. We appreciate that. That is good. That is for rural community strategies, regional planning and infrastructure plans. That is fine. We can look at that to see whether we can benefit from that, and I am sure we can. But it is no good trying to make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear, and that is what has happened. The government should not gild the lily. If it tells the truth, people will be happy with that. No-one is arguing that we need to do better with a lot of those programs for the bush, and this is one way in which we can do that. The groups that were travelling around rural areas seemed to want to make continued accusations that this money was brand-new money.

I want to talk about another issue at Logan City. There is a program at Logan City that is causing a lot of problems. In fact, the minister did not want to answer my question in relation to this scheme. It was interesting because he should have been able to answer that question. I asked about Community Care Inc. Something is going on there and we need to find out exactly what.

Time expired.

Hon. DM WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (3.55 pm): The honourable member for Capalaba, who chaired Estimates Committee F, is unable to be in parliament today. As a consequence, he has asked me to read the speech that he would have given had he been here. So this speech is that of the
honourable member for Capalaba. I ask honourable members to imagine, if they will, that instead of my voice they hear that of my brother from Capalaba and that instead of my appearance they see that of Michael Choi. But I would remind them that the sentiments will not change.

At the outset I would like to apologise for my inability to attend parliament this week. On Tuesday morning I was simply attempting to fulfil one of my fatherly duties by cooking breakfast for the children before heading into parliament and, whilst reaching for the frypan, something in my back apparently did not agree with that simple motion and decided to voice its objection by reducing me to my knees with a sharp pinching pain in the back. For the last 48 hours or so I have learned a lot about the ceiling in my bedroom, and let me say that even the opposition looks decidedly interesting from where I am at the moment!

Being the chair of Estimates Committee F, I would firstly like to thank all of the committee members for their contributions. Although it is the job of opposition members to create as much difficulty for the minister as possible during their questions, I do think by and large that all members have behaved and acted appropriately and professionally. As the chair, I do thank them sincerely for their cooperation, particularly the deputy chair, the honourable member for Warrego.

The statement of reservations from the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, the honourable member for Caloundra, concerning comments made by the Attorney-General was, in essence, related to the timing of delivery of questions to the research director and, subsequently, to the relevant minister. For the information of the House, questions on notice from the opposition members were received by the research director on 10 July at 7.36 am. I studied each question carefully and thought that a few of the questions could be in breach of section 181(4) and (5) of the standing orders. Opinions were sought from the research director and it was my final view that some questions from the opposition members were in breach of section 181 of the Standing Rules and Orders of the Legislative Assembly.

Having considered practices of past chairs and as a courtesy to the opposition members, I then decided to allow all of the questions by the opposition as they stood at the time. This decision was made about 3.30 pm and the research director forwarded the said questions to the relevant ministers at around 4.40 pm. However, I would like to suggest a fixed deadline for the submission of questions on notice to the ministers. The standing orders are silent on this but require ministers to reply by at least 10 am on the day before the committee’s allotted hearing day. A fixed deadline for the submission of questions to the ministers will eliminate uncertainty and reliance on common practice.

Finally, I would like to thank the research director, Ali de Jersey, and executive assistant, Carolyn Heffernan, for their dedication and support. It has been a great pleasure working with them on the committee.

You will now notice a change of pace, as may honourable members. Instead of subtlety, as you would have got from the member for Capalaba, you will get a certain amount of vehemence because it is now me that is speaking without the script that the member for Capalaba gave me. I would like to refer to the remarks that the honourable member for Warrego made in which he was complaining again about the matter which my brother from Capalaba has explained—the matter of the timing of the answers to the questions. I notice that he is on again about the timing. I note that he was concerned about the timing of the answers but not about the substance of the answers. There was nothing wrong with the substance of the answers. They could not, in fact, find anything to criticise and so what they criticise instead is the timing—a mere matter of temporality.

I expect that this is a major issue out in the area represented by the honourable member for Warrego. I believe that out on the plains of the Warrego they talk of little else but what time they got questions to the research director on Estimates Committee F. On behalf of the chair of the committee I thank all honourable members of the House and recommend the deliberations of the committee.

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—Lib) (4.01 pm): I would like to start by congratulating all members of the committee, the research director and staff for the work that they put into making the examination a successful day. In particular I thank the chairman, Mr Choi MP, member for Capalaba, for the work that he did. At times a committee of this nature can be unwieldy and difficult to control. He did a wonderful job and I believe that he should be congratulated.

As the member for Warrego and the member for Capalaba by his proxy did indicate, there were some concerns in relation to answers being returned to me late on 18 July. My only concern was that the Attorney, when she addressed that issue, implied quite clearly that it was only from non-government members that questions were received late. In fact, the Attorney made this comment—

Mr Chairman, can I advise the committee that the questions from non-government members of the committee—the member for Caloundra—were due to be tabled by 10 am on Monday, 10 July. These were not received until 4.49 pm on Monday, 10 July.

I have three issues with that statement. Firstly, it does indicate that I failed to comply with Estimates Committee F’s direction that questions on notice be received by the research director by 10 am on Monday, 10 July. Secondly, there is the clear implication that the government members’ questions on notice were received in accordance with the direction of the committee and, thirdly, that the non-government members’ questions were not forwarded to the research director until 4.49 pm on
Monday, 10 July 2006. It is, in fact, not correct that I failed to comply with the direction of the committee. In fact, it has been clarified that at 7.36 am on 10 July 2006 the non-government questions were forwarded to the research director. It was, in fact, the government questions that were late, not being received until 12.18 on 10 July 2006, and it was the research director who forwarded the documentation to the Attorney’s office at 4.49 pm on 10 July 2006.

I simply ask the Attorney to correct the record and acknowledge that the statement that questions from non-government members of the committee, including me, were due to be tabled by 10 am on Monday, 10 July and not received by 4.49 pm on Monday, 10 July is, in fact, not correct. In my opinion, she has an opportunity here today to correct the record. The error contained in her statement needs to be corrected in Hansard.

I will quickly turn to the issue of the capital acquisition statement. I have been amazed that in the last three financial years there have been major shortfalls in the stated outlay and actual outlay. In 2005-06 that shortfall was $2.673 million; in 2004-05, $2.658 million; and in 2003-04, $14.775 million. Clearly this raises a real question, that is, is the government meeting the ongoing needs of a growing judicial system brought about by the population increase in this state? I note that there is a catch-up budget on the capital acquisition side of the ledger of $74.091 million in 2006-07. It will be intriguing to see whether that figure is actually met.

One of the issues that I have is with the integrated justice information strategy. Since 2003-04 it has not met budget on one occasion. Shortfalls for 2004-05 of $4.8 million and 2005-06 of $3.5 million are examples of this. This strategy is to integrate the various components of the justice system and provide a quicker and more effective method of delivering justice throughout the state. This has simply not been the case and this year—2006-07—we have $17.1 million to be spent in an endeavour to catch up on that shortfall.

I recently had an opportunity to view the Supreme and District courts complex here in George Street. I have to say that that complex is an absolute abysmal disgrace. I congratulate the government on its recognition of the need to move forward to construct a major new courts complex in Brisbane. That building is 20 and 30 years old respectively, and if anything does need changing in this state it is certainly the major institution which houses our major courts. I join with the Attorney in the hope that 2011 will be the year that the new complex will be opened. When one goes through that complex one soon finds that not only is it antiquated but also it poses, I suspect, significant and dangerous health risks given the fact that it is poorly air-conditioned and badly lit.

Mr Hoolihan (Keppel—ALP) (4.06 pm): It gives me great pride to stand today and speak in support of the report of Estimates Committee F. I do have some comments to make about certain of the approaches that were taken during the investigation of this committee. At the outset I would like to thank the various ministers and all of their staff for their assistance and their wide outline in relation to questions asked. I would also like to thank parliamentary and ministerial staff. Our research directors, Ali de Jersey and Stephen Finimore, were the two prime movers, but the other members and support staff worked admirably and it made the work of our committee exceedingly easy.

This is the third estimates committee on which I have sat, and the minutiae which is raised by opposition members never ceases to amaze me. It is not really using the power of estimates in relation to investigation of expenditure. It is a sad indictment that, with three departments with a total output summary of $955 million, the member for Caloundra can stand up in this House and make all sorts of complaints about the fact that he did not have his questions in on time. Nothing turned on that and the minister, in actual fact, indicated that she was prepared to answer any questions and to discuss those aspects.

The other thing that really concerned me was the opening gambit by the member for Caloundra and his complete insistence on demanding an outline of how the minister appoints a judicial officer. If anyone looks at the way the estimates committees are structured and the basis for them, they will see that they represent a powerful way of really looking at the spending of the various government departments. It is sad that opposition members seem to have overlooked that and want to try to embarrass ministers rather than look at the actual amount of expenditure.

I enjoyed my time on this committee because of the ministers we had to question, and I have great pleasure in supporting the recommendation as to the proposed expenditure. Estimates are a powerful way for members of parliament to ask questions of the relevant ministers pertaining to their portfolios so that they can outline for their own constituents just how their tax dollars are spent. If people are prepared to walk into an estimates committee and not ask any questions in relation to the spending, then I think it is a complete and utter waste of time. I think it is a great sadness that when we see the statements of reservation the only real statement of reservation that mentions any amount is from the member for Maroochydore. If we look at the statements by the member for Caloundra and the member for Warrego, I would suggest that the general reservations set out by both of them seem to have been written by the same person because the dot points use exactly the same English expression.
All in all, this has been a great opportunity to outline the spending of the Beattie government in relation to the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice; the Minister for Communities, Disability Services and Seniors; and the Minister for Small Business, Information Technology Policy and Multicultural Affairs. I support the recommendation.

**Miss Simpson** (Maroochydore—NPA) (4.10 pm): After participating in this estimates process, it became clear that small business has a minister who has no department and at many times no idea of what his specific responsibilities are or for how many people he is responsible. We do know that he is now responsible for one piece of legislation, and that was from about February this year.

The state coalition believes policy areas of small business, ICT and multicultural affairs are of great importance to the state. However, their presentation in the Ministerial Portfolio Statements is poor and amounts to window-dressing, given the minister’s inability to be able to explain his area of responsibility. The Ministerial Portfolio Statement of the Minister for Small Business, Information Technology Policy and Multicultural Affairs is misleading. After coalition questioning in the estimates process, it is now clear that the minister is not responsible for all of his financial statements and that his area of responsibility is substantially less than the $210 million budget presented in that MPS. This is despite page 1 of his MPS which states—

The ... MPS includes financial and performance output information for the Department of State Development, Trade and Innovation’s Business Market Development and ICT initiatives. These initiatives report to the Minister for Small Business, Information Technology Policy and Multicultural Affairs. Information relating to these outputs also appears in the MPS for the Deputy Premier, Treasurer, and Minister for the Department of State Development, Trade and Innovation.

Minister Cummins’s MPS statement under Output Income Statement on page 1-11 is identical to the statement in the Deputy Premier’s MPS on page 3-19, with $50 million of employee expenses and $119.6 million of grants and subsidies. However, after questioning the minister we found that most of these budget items are not administered by Minister Cummins but by the Deputy Premier and minister for state development. Furthermore, Minister Cummins’s MPS does not provide a breakdown of the cost of the items he is responsible for. When questioned about whether the minister was in fact responsible for the $50 million worth of employee expenses in his MPS in the state development department, as listed in the MPS, the minister took the question on notice and only answered at the close of the hearing to confirm that he was not responsible for all of this expense but that his staff expenses were a subset of the $50 million.

He did not provide any information as to the quantum of that subset. However, it was confirmed earlier in the estimates that he was responsible for 44 staff in the state development department and 21 in Premier’s—a total of 65 staff. Yet he is a minister with a full ministerial expense package. In fact, he has a greater expense package than the Attorney-General, who administers a significant amount of legislation and has a far heavier workload.

When questioned about the quantum of the grants and subsidies the minister for small business was responsible for, given that his MPS mentioned $119.6 million, the minister confirmed that he was only responsible for the grants referred to in an answer to a coalition question on notice, which when you add it up totals about $1 million.

The state coalition believes that small business is too important to be stuck with a junior minister who does not even have a department. It is not about a title; it is about substance. Unfortunately, this MPS that was presented to this parliament is misleading. There is not a real breakdown of the amount of funding that the minister is responsible for. We found that when asked basic questions about his responsibilities he had to take them on notice, even though there were some 38 staff in the room—one of the largest contingents of all the estimates processes. Surely in this so-called Smart State we can see some smart business done in the way that this portfolio is administered, rather than the window-dressing which was just a joke. It was most disappointing and expensive for this parliament that no accurate MPS was produced for these units. In fact, it was only about a press release opportunity for the minister rather than about informing us as to what his real areas of responsibility were.

Small business is too important to be treated this way, as are these other areas and portfolios. It is time that it was put with a minister who is responsible for a department, who knows how that department runs and who knows the elements that pertain to good ministerial management.

**Ms Liddy Clark** (Clayfield—ALP) (4.16 pm): I would like to take this opportunity as a member of Estimates Committee F to acknowledge the input of the departmental officers in preparing the important financial data required for this process. This places a very heavy demand on officers, but as we know and are aware it is vitally important for the transparency and accountability of ministers and directors-general. My thanks also go to our research director, Ali de Jersey, and to the chairman, my colleague the member for Capalaba.

Estimates Committee F scrutinised the portfolios of the honourable Attorney-General and the Department of Justice; the Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors; and the Department of Small Business, Information Technology Policy and Multicultural Affairs. I congratulate the Attorney on presiding over her first estimates hearing and acknowledge the way in which she executed her role. It is an extremely positive move to have a woman of fine intellect and understanding
in this position. It is good for Queensland. This is unlike the member for Caloundra who seemed to be hell-bent on being adversarial in his five minutes of fame rather than being incisive in his scrutiny of the financial status of the portfolio.

It was greatly appreciated when the minister for communities made his opening remarks with the announcement of increased financial support to homeless people throughout the state of $17.68 million over the next three years. This was a great step forward. Needless to say, this portfolio is important to the electorate of Clayfield and to Queensland. We are all acutely aware that one of the greatest areas of poverty in our communities is the poverty of loneliness through isolation brought on by various forms of disability.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of community centres within our communities and how they bring together many peoples. To that end, The Community Place in Wooloowin is a flagship centre. I thank it for what it does in the support of our community.

Small to medium enterprises are of critical importance to the economy of Queensland. They are the powerhouse of innovation, product design and service delivery. Ninety per cent of businesses in Queensland employ 100 people or fewer, and of that number 80 per cent of businesses have 20 employees or fewer. A great percentage of those firms have fewer than five people. Small to medium enterprises are a major source of employment and growth in Queensland. The true benefits of the Queensland resources boom will be realised not only from export growth but also from the response from small to medium enterprises—the real economic income, as there are enormous opportunities for small to medium enterprises to provide essential services to the major resources projects.

Small to medium enterprises are fundamental. They are critical to a vibrant Queensland economy. We must recognise and celebrate the importance of small business and their input into the Queensland economy. It was a great pleasure to be a member of Estimates Committee F. I congratulate everyone concerned and I commend it.

Hon. KR LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (4.19 pm): Estimates Committee F covers the Disabilities portfolio. I must admit that, after being the minister for disabilities a long time ago, I have never criticised any minister for disabilities in this parliament or asked him about individual cases, because one issue that is always in the community is how the government and the minister cater for all of the concerns of people with disabilities.

I congratulate the advocacy groups because they do a very important job—even though it is most annoying to have advocacy groups. Most people would know that I run an open line service from 6.30 to quarter to eight every morning. The disabilities minister listens to the complaints from people who have disabilities and listens to advocacy groups. He is continually besieged because no government will ever have enough finances, especially with the way the disabilities sector is changing. With deinstitutionalisation, group homes and all of the concerns that people have, it is a continual problem to provide enough finances to assist people with disabilities.

I get particularly concerned when I hear some members talking about previous ministers and previous governments. All ministers and all governments do as much as they possibly can with disabilities, and I would be the first to recognise the increase in funding that this particular government has given to the disabilities area. But it will never be enough and the government will continue to be criticised. All of us who receive representations from advocacy groups must remember that those advocacy groups are paid to do their job. They do their job very well, but we will continually have representations from advocacy groups saying that the government is not providing enough funding for people with disabilities.

I believe there are some special areas that the government has to look at. The government must look at cerebral palsy and work out exactly who will look after cerebral palsy. We get people like Bruce Milligan warning us that his organisation might be forced to stop providing services for people like Nathan Ford. They are concerned about who is looking after cerebral palsy. We have groups like the Down Syndrome Association and statements like this in estimates—

In light of the Beattie government’s Disability Action Week and the fact that one in 700 people are born with Down syndrome, will the minister consider providing core viability funding for the next three years to the Down Syndrome Association of Queensland Inc?

Once again, I say that it is difficult to work out how who should fund these programs. Is it Queensland Health or is it Disability Services Queensland? This is one question that this minister is trying to answer as well.

I also referred to the problem of intellectually disabled people with violent and dangerous behaviours. The Courier-Mail has reported that they are being treated by mental health authorities because the mental health authorities have more powers to treat them than Disability Services Queensland. The issue is whether Queensland Health or Disability Services Queensland should look after these people. That is one of the matters that this minister has to determine.
Another issue I raised in the estimates committee was the fact that Disability Services Queensland is spending many hundreds of thousands of dollars on ads at present. Anyone who watches TV would have to say that an election is around the corner and probably Disability Services Queensland is funding all of the ads that are being run. I asked the minister how much is being spent on these particular ads, and the minister said $450,000. The people of Queensland have every right to say that these are clearly ads which are promoting the government rather than promoting disability services. The minister says—and he is probably genuine in what he says—that it is advertising all of the services that are available for people with disabilities, especially because the last disability legislation changed the act completely. But the residents of Queensland could not be criticised if they said that this money is being spent on pure electioneering. I believe it is up to the minister to show how he is spending all of this money and whether it is money that is clearly leading towards an election.

Hon. CP CUMMINS (Kawana—ALP) (Minister for Small Business, Information Technology Policy and Multicultural Affairs) (4.23 pm): I begin by thanking the chair of Estimates Committee F, the member for Capalaba, and all members of the committee as well as the parliamentary staff. I must mention that the member for Maroochydore was very determined during the estimates hearing to portray my portfolio responsibilities in a poor light. She was at pains to draw media attention and public attention to the machinery of government arrangements that had been put in place 12 months prior, when I first took on this ministry. The member for Maroochydore should understand quite clearly that the small business, information communication technology and multicultural affair sectors are not complaining about bureaucratic structures or lack of legislation. What they are complaining about are things like rises in interest rates and petrol prices that will have a flow-on effect on their business performance and, of course, their profits.

Mr Mulherin interjected.

Mr CUMMINS: And the poor telecommunications around the regions where the National Party at a federal level and a state level have sold out the bush. I take the minister’s interjection. These sectors also complain about the amount of red tape they are burdened with through the GST and their BAS statements—thanks, of course, to the member for Maroochydore’s Tory friends in Canberra.

When you consider that the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry estimates there will be an additional cost to Queensland businesses alone of more than $600 million per year from the latest interest rate rise, I would suggest that the member for Maroochydore turn her attention to some lobbying of her federal colleagues and their empty promises on keeping interest rates in check. Perhaps this is a subject she should scrutinise.

Unlike the member for Maroochydore, I am out there talking to small businesses, to ICT industry representatives and to members of multicultural communities on a daily basis and I listen and hear their needs and concerns. They are not asking for more legislation. They are not asking for more regulation, bureaucrats or red tape, they are not concerned about bureaucratic structures; they want a voice at the cabinet table. They want a voice and a government that listens and is responsive.

As the former opposition spokesperson, the member for Maroochydore should look to her own backyard. In fact, she had ample time to formulate and articulate at least one policy. But, then again, in the two terms that many of us have been here, including me, she has been the shadow minister for health, for tourism, for transport, for main roads, for urban affairs, for industrial relations, for state development, for small business, for information technology, for innovation—and finally she is now back to transport, main roads and women’s policy. It is no wonder she is a perpetual passenger on the shadow ministerial merry-go-round. She consistently fails to show an understanding of the issues and her portfolio statements—thanks, of course, to the member for Maroochydore’s own friends in Canberra.

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The coalition policy is obviously based on a vacuum. We realise the major shortfalls from the deputy Liberal leader when it comes to truth and honesty. We know he was up to his eyeballs in a pensioner rip-off.

**Mrs MENKENS** (Burdekin—NPA) (4.28 pm): I am pleased to participate on the debate on the Estimates Committee F report. In my role as shadow minister for seniors, I am very pleased to comment on this report. I do commend the minister and his staff on their running of the portfolio and their readiness to answer all queries during the estimates hearing.

It is no secret that, as a percentage of population, the number of seniors and retirees is steadily increasing. Queensland has an ageing population, with many people living longer and retiring earlier. This means that there is now a significant number of healthy, active older people who want to contribute to community life and retain their independence and respect while maintaining a decent quality of life.

During the hearing I put several questions to the minister seeking further information on a number of areas, including budget allocations and actual numbers of Queensland seniors accessing cards and services provided by the department. Seniors continue to be a largely untapped and unrecognised resource. Much of what they do goes unnoticed by the greater public. For example, the many grandparents acting as full-time carers for their grandchildren do so quietly and often anonymously, yet they have the same costs and impost on their time as all other carers and parents.

I note that in answer to a question on respite schemes for grandparents the minister was able to give detail on the $580,000 allocated to the Seniors Enquiry Line. This statewide service has the responsibility for assisting grandparents to access services and also subsidises their access to a wide variety of activities for young people. It is aimed specifically at providing some respite for grandparents as the primary carers of these children.

Since December 2005 the Time for Grandparents program has made more than 200 referrals and organised overnight camps for grandparents and grandchildren. At these camps, apart from physical activities, I understand grandparents receive advice on the skills necessary and support networks available to help improve their capability to cope as full-time carers. They are a valuable resource.

We are all aware of the contribution our senior citizens have made to the prosperity of this state in the past and the contributions many continue to make in their retirement. We are also very well aware of today’s high cost of living and the effects increasing costs and charges can have on the quality of life for our retirees. I have lobbied strongly for support for self-funded retirees. A small proportion of independent retirees may be able to look forward to a financially comfortable retirement but, unfortunately, the majority of independent retirees will not. This group must not be disregarded, and more effort must be put towards encouraging future self-funded retirees. These independent retirees have worked very hard all their lives to provide for their own security in retirement and, as such, are relieving the government of this responsibility. They require every encouragement.

The Office for Seniors is an excellent initiative but it does need more resources. Seniors groups have lobbied for a much broader range of services than this office can encompass. Our Queensland seniors deserve a much higher priority, which further resourcing of this office could deliver. Queensland provides both the Senior Cards and the Seniors Business Discount Card to its eligible residents. The minister noted during the hearing that this dual-card approach ensures that government concessions are targeted towards this group, and the provision of the cards is a means of saying thank you to seniors. In reply to a question on the use of these cards the minister informed the House that, as of 30 June this year, 471,408 Queenslanders had been issued with the Senior Card and 53,244 with the Seniors Business Discount Card.

Interestingly, when the baby boomers start turning 60, by 2020, we can expect to have more than one million cardholders in Queensland. I will bring this into perspective. Many members in this House should have an interest in this scheme because, no doubt, many members here will be counted in that number. The cards allow eligible holders a variety of concessions and discounts on government services, transport, electricity, rates et cetera. The increased allocation of expenditure in the latest budget recognises the increase both in costs and in the number of eligible Queenslanders, but no further government concessions have been put in. It is important that we continue to recognise the social capital that is contributed by older people to the community, including their roles as part-time carers or participants in community organisations and in so many other ways.

**Hon. LD LAVARCH** (Kurwongbah—ALP) (Minister for Justice and Attorney-General) (4.34 pm): I am pleased to speak to the Estimates Committee F report.

**Mr Mickel:** And we are pleased to hear you.

**Mrs LAVARCH:** Thank you. I would like to particularly thank the chair of the committee, the member for Capalaba, Michael Choi, and all the other members of Estimates Committee F. This was the first time the member for Capalaba had chaired an estimates committee. He did an outstanding job. In particular, he dealt with a range of procedural issues with both patience and aplomb. These started when he was faced with questions on notice from the opposition that, on the face of it, breached standing orders.
This was my first estimates hearing as a minister. In line with the Beattie government’s commitment to transparency and accountability, I was pleased to answer any questions about my portfolio—what has been spent, what has been achieved and what we plan to do. The opposition once again, however, has missed the point that the estimates committee process is an opportunity to examine the expenditure of each portfolio.

The member for Caloundra, the opposition justice spokesperson, asked 18 questions in the two hours and 45 minutes allocated for the Justice portfolio but really only covered five topics. I was pleased to go over the old ground of the appointment of the Information Commissioner and explain the process for judicial appointments. However, not one of these questions went to the heart of the performance of the department.

The member for Caloundra has a commendable attention to detail, but, of course, there is a downside. As the saying goes, sometimes you cannot see the forest for the trees. This is the case with the member for Caloundra. This was illustrated by each of the 10 questions on notice asked by the member for Caloundra. All of them could at best be described as data collection sets going into trivial detail.

The member for Caloundra, who sees himself as the alternative Attorney-General, should be mindful that questions that require hundreds of hours of staff time to answer for no good policy reason are a waste of resources and not in the public interest. For example, one question asked, amongst other things, for the academic qualification of every single person who is employed in the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Mr Mickel: He wanted to see who is smarter than he is.

Mrs LAVARCH: I guess all of them were. There are 2,788 staff in this office. Another question asked, amongst other things, for the position description and classification of each position in the department in each agency. There are 2,366.2 people in the department alone and 3,666.2 people in the entire portfolio.

Yet another question asked, amongst other things, for details of each conference, workshop, training session, seminar or symposium broken down by the cost of hiring the venue, entertainment, hospitality, meals, alcohol and other drinks, catering, travel, accommodation and guest speakers reported separately. The department estimated that the break-up of the costs as requested by the member for Caloundra for this question alone would require analysis of in excess of 10,000 individual transactions.

Now, I could have easily answered his question that the departmental staff and staff in portfolio statutory authorities are well trained and encouraged to undertake training and conferences wherever possible. It adds to the body of the work that they do in designated areas. Perhaps the member for Caloundra could reflect on the wise words of the great American philosopher Henry David Thoreau: ‘Our life is frittered away by detail—simplify, simplify.’

During the estimates debate I was delighted to inform the committee of a number of highlights from my portfolio. These included an increase in the amount payable for funeral expenses to help families of murder and manslaughter victims, the freezing of $11 million from the proceeds of crime in 2005-06, an increase in the conviction rate of child sex offenders now that children are able to give prerecorded evidence from outside the courtroom, and $250,000 dedicated to an option study of the Townsville Courthouse. These are, of course, just a small sample of a number of the exciting initiatives within the portfolio.

Finally, I once again place on record my thanks to the Director-General of the Department of Justice and Attorney-General, Rachel Hunter, and her staff for their thorough and professional approach to the estimates committee hearings. They are a credit to the Public Service. I can assure the people of Queensland that the Department of Justice and Attorney-General is well positioned for the future.

Mr RICKUSS (Lockyer—NPA) (4.39 pm): I rise to say a few words about Estimates Committee F. I did not participate in the actual committee but I did read the Hansard, particularly in relation to the portfolio of Small Business and IT Policy. I was actually at the parliament at the time and it was quite amazing to see the number of bureaucrats assisting the minister in that portfolio.

Mr Horan: I believe it was about 65 per cent of his staff.

Mr RICKUSS: Yes, well over half of his staff were at the hearing. It was quite interesting to see that. The estimates committee also examined Communities, Disability Services and Seniors. It is great to see that there is some discussion on grandparents fostering children. This is a real problem in the community. In my electorate many grandparents foster children. They are underrepresented by the social services that support them. I am glad to see that both levels of government are starting to look at these issues and improve them.

The small business policy of this government is one that this side of the House really believes does need some support as it is one of the major drivers of the Queensland economy. I have an interest in the small business area because my electorate survives on small businesses which employ from one
or two people to several hundred people, and the Lockyer depends on those businesses for their infrastructure and the drivers it provides for the community. One major problem is the lack of infrastructure that this government has not put into place to support these small businesses. Water in particular is a real drama. The IT policy of this government should also be improved so that some small businesses do get some benefit from the IT policies, because they are something that can keep driving communities for a long time.

This side of the House has always fully supported small business. We have been looking at such things as payroll tax relief. Payroll tax is a blight on unemployment. I understand that the employment rate has been recorded at a very low rate of 4.5 per cent, and the Howard government is to be congratulated for that.

Mr Lawlor: You’re going to get rid of it, are you?

Mr RICKUSS: I take that interjection about getting rid of payroll tax, but it provides $7 billion to Treasury. So it is a large amount of the Treasury budget. It would be irresponsible of me to say that we would get rid of it immediately.

Mr Mickel interjected.

Mr RICKUSS: It is something that should be looked at seriously and we should slowly start to remove it from the budget. However, $7 billion is very hard to replace in a budget in one fell swoop. But I am sure that good conservative policies will reduce this amount substantially so that small business has more money to invest. Unfortunately, payroll tax is almost a tax on employment. It seems ridiculous that we are actually taxing employers. The problem with the tax is that even in years when companies do not actually make a profit they are still paying that tax, and that is really a problem for some of the larger employers in my electorate. They can have years where they are—

Mr Mickel interjected.

Mr RICKUSS: Yes, but they can pass that on. It really is a tax on employment. It really is a problem. Payroll tax is an issue that we should all look at very seriously. I can hear the interjections of the Minister for Energy. He seems quite happy with payroll tax, and I am sure that small business owners would be only too happy to hear his comments about that. The GST of course comes back to the states, but unfortunately our state seems to be managing to squander this GST money and not spending it on the infrastructure that it should be spending it on. Further, it is not assisting these small businesses that are paying this enormous amount of payroll tax or trying to fix up the mismanagement that has happened. We feel that the—

Time expired.

Report adopted.

Estimates Committee G

Report

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): Order! The question is—

That the report be adopted.

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (4.44 pm): It was again a privilege to be able to take part in Estimates Committee G. At the outset I would like to thank our chair, Julie Attwood, the member for Mount Ommaney, and the other members of that committee for the meetings that we had and the process. Also at the outset I want to thank the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries and the director-general and staff for the courtesies extended and also for their involvement in the process.

It is quite concerning that I had to make a dissenting report. Any reading of this dissenting report will show the number of failures that we were able to quite clearly demonstrate. With a department as important as DPI&F which is responsible for an $11 billion industry, one would like to see consistent results coming from that department. Sadly, that department has had a succession of some four different ministers throughout the last 12 months, so we can understand the dislocation and disruption that has occurred in that department. It is also a department that has been at the receiving end of an absolute hammering from the Beattie government ever since it has been in power throughout the last eight or so years. The department has had consistent cuts to its budget and consistent cuts to its staff, and we were able to demonstrate that throughout this estimates hearing.

There are a couple of issues that I want to highlight. With regard to the statements that the minister had made about a recruitment drive prior to the estimates, we were able to show that there was actually a cutting of staff. Where the government had loudly said that there were going to be 100 new staff in DPI, it turns out that at the same time there were 121 voluntary early retirements. So the cutting continues with about 21 losses, and this will bring to around 300 the number of staff who have left the DPI under voluntary early retirement arrangements in the period of the Beattie government. No wonder the department is having trouble meeting its targets and its achievements!
There has also been cutting of staff from the fire ant eradication program despite eight new infestations being discovered. There is the failure of the drought recovery loan scheme to provide far-reaching and meaningful assistance during the worst drought in living memory with only 20 and 10 new applicants respectively assisted in the 2005-06 year; the failure of myriad rural loan schemes, such as the sugar farm consolidation scheme and the coral reef fin fish temporary assistance scheme, with only a very small number of people taking these up; and the failure of the minister to explain again the continual cutting of the budget. We were able to demonstrate that the amount of contribution by the state government to the DPI's budget—because there are other components from other areas—this year is less than the contribution in 2002-03, 2003-04 and 2004-05.

We also discussed the Hendra virus at Peachester. An independent report has just come out and 30 days has been provided for interested people to look at and respond to that. I was very concerned about some of the processes from day one to day 10 in that period of time. I was also extremely concerned about the lack of support to the young vet in the field and particularly the failure of systems to provide advice through the two telephone hotlines in particular and other lines. There was no information from the minister about the effect of the Traveston Crossing Dam on primary producers, bearing in mind that about 10 per cent of Queensland's vital dairy production is produced in that part of the Mary Valley. We were able to demonstrate that the department failed to meet its target for international and domestic trade. We were able to show that it failed to meet its target for new market opportunities. It decided to stop reporting on measures such as trade targets because of its failures. The forestry department in a time of record economic growth failed by 47 per cent to meet its target of $46 million. It achieved only some $24 million. We also, of course, once again could not get an answer on the fishing zones in Moreton Bay and what the government plans to do after the election with regard to restricting recreational anglers.

How refreshing it is to have heard part of our policy this week which I announced in parliament. We are going to put in 50 new stock inspectors and extension officers, a new culture of service within the DPI, a biofuels unit and a 20 per cent increase in research and development. Under the coalition, there will be a revitalised DPI. We will give hope, optimism and enthusiasm to the staff. At the same time we will give service to the farmers, the foresters and the fishers of Queensland. What a refreshing change that will be.

Time expired.

Hon. KW HAYWARD (Kallangur—ALP) (4.49 pm): I rise to speak in this debate on the report of Estimates Committee G, which examined the expenditure for the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Water and the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries. Before making a few comments in relation to Estimates Committee G, I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge all of the other committee members who were involved in the hearings and the secretariat for their work and the efforts that they put in to ensure that the process functioned efficiently and well. I particularly want to take this opportunity to thank the chair of the committee, Mrs Julie Attwood, for her commitment and for the work that she did in her role as chair.

Much of the questioning by the committee to the ministers concentrated on the impact of the proposed Traveston Dam. The member for Toowoomba South talked about that issue as it affects primary industry. In fact, he made some comments in his statement of reservation to that effect. The Budget Highlights included $50 million to accelerate land acquisitions for dams to be built on the Logan and Mary rivers.

I want to take this opportunity to talk about something which seems to have become par for the course in the estimates process and that is that both shadow ministers have submitted statements of reservation. As I said before, that in itself is not unique; it seems to have become par for the course. But what I found interesting in the statement of reservation that was submitted this time for this particular estimates committee report—and I have not bothered to read any of the other reports, but I understand the same or very similar statements of reservation were expressed—is that the shadow ministers expressed general reservations in relation to the estimates committee process.

I have had the opportunity to read both shadow ministers’ general reservations. I found it interesting to note that, apart from some very small differences in the wording, those general reservations are the same. It is as though they were written by the same person. I understand from the debate that has been held in relation to the other committee reports that a very similar thing has happened. As I said, I have not had the opportunity to read the other shadow ministers’ statements of reservations about other estimates committees, but I sense that the wording of those statements would be similar.

One of the most notable things about being in opposition—and I have been in opposition so I can speak with some authority—

Mr Lawlor: The whining.
Mr HAYWARD: I was going to say is the tendency—and the member for Southport has managed to do this while in government—to whinge, whine and complain. It is easy to dismiss these general statements of reservation on that same basis and I would usually do so. As I said before, I speak from the experience of spending some time in opposition in this parliament.

As I said, I was concerned when I read those statements of reservation. It occurred to me that maybe the time has come to review the estimates process, because it has operated as it is now for over 10 years. I think the challenge—and this does not come through in these statements of reservation—for the shadow ministers, in presenting their statements of reservation, is to demonstrate how their reservations could be addressed practically. In the time that I have left I will take the opportunity to refer to some of them.

I can remember when the estimates process was simply this debate. There was nothing else. There was no real scrutiny of expenditure. There were no estimates committees as such; the whole House was the committee. There was no opportunity at all for members to ask any questions of any of the ministers. My point is that I think the committee system in this House has dramatically improved and we now have an estimates system.

Time expired.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (4.54 pm): I rise to speak to the report of Estimates Committee G. I would like to refer in particular to a couple of very important matters, the first one being water. Nothing will exist without an adequate and reliable supply of water. Throughout the state we see irrigators, who are very responsible in their use of this commodity, having to pay for water licences but not receiving their allocation. I am sure it is particularly galling for them, when they have a restricted ability to create income, to have to continue to pay this charge.

In Gladstone and Calliope a problem raised its head just days before the two councils that service those areas brought down their budgets. Historically, Gladstone City Council and Calliope shire had a price equalisation agreement for water out of the Awoonga Dam. That is treated water for the two urban communities as well as for industry that takes treated or potable water. The agreement was perhaps less formal than others, but it was certainly in existence and referred to over a long period. A cost equalisation is borne by all residents. But, as I said, decisions about augmentation and the development of water infrastructure have had factored into them that price equalisation agreement. When the Gladstone City Council handed down its budget, it announced that it would be withdrawing from that agreement and that the Calliope Shire Council would have to pay the full price for the water that travels from Awoonga Dam into Gladstone and then back out to Calliope.

I know that the Calliope Shire Council will be looking to the Queensland government for a water subsidy. The council is proposing to build its treatment plant at Benaraby. Currently, the water travels over 43 kilometres from the dam to Calliope. But, in light of that historical agreement, which coloured where infrastructure was developed and augmented, the treatment plant will be only 13 kilometres to Boyne Tannum and 14 kilometres to Calliope.

The Calliope Shire Council will be looking to the government to provide a substantial subsidy. Meetings between departmental officers and Treasury have been held in order to provide water at an affordable price to both communities so that equity is not only done but is seen to be done. I will certainly be adding my voice to that of those two councils to ensure that the communities can receive this very important commodity at an affordable price to them. I believe they are a very responsible group of people owing to the water restrictions that occurred before Cyclone Benny. They reduced their water use and have kept their water use down to the point at which the Gladstone Area Water Board has suffered some loss of income. People have handled the restrictions and availability of water that well.

Additionally, with the proposed Calliope water treatment plant there will be some redundant infrastructure that will be the responsibility of the Gladstone Area Water Board. To an extent, they have stood back from the whole debate between the Gladstone City Council and the Calliope Shire Council. Instead they have been decision takers rather than contributors and decision makers.

In relation to water for the south-east corner, I have to place on the record that in 2002-03 a constituent of mine, Mr Brian Ross, put a proposal to the minister for state development at the time to pipe water from the Burdekin River scheme down to here. I am not sure how much consideration was given to that proposal, but certainly it would have been an answer to some of the problems that are being faced today, particularly with the surfeit of water that is occurring up at the Burdekin at the moment with the very generous rain—perhaps overly generous rain—that it has received in comparison to the rest of the state.

Fisheries is a very important area of concern to my community. We have an extraordinarily high number of boat registrations per capita. We also have a very important commercial fishing industry that works out of Gladstone. I think we have the best quality seafood in Queensland. That might be debated by others, but I believe I am right. Fisheries certainly need consideration in terms of not only the constraints that are required for sustainability but also their ability to service their financial obligations,
which are extreme, and their ability to provide an income for their families. The fishing industry has faced significant constraints, closures and obligations placed on it over the last few years. It is time that everything stopped and that the effect of those changes is measured.

Mr LAWLER (Southport—ALP) (5.00 pm): I support the report of Estimates Committee G, which examined the proposed expenditure set out in Appropriation Bill 2006 for the organisational units within the portfolios of the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Water and the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries. Firstly, I thank the research director, Rob Hansen, and his executive assistant, Narelle Robinson. As is always the case with parliamentary staff, they were efficient, conscientious and pleasant at the same time. The same applies to the Hansard reporters, whom I also thank, along with the ministers and their ministerial and departmental staff, who approached the hearing in such a professional manner. I also thank my fellow committee members and chair Julie Attwood, who conducted the hearing with fairness and efficiency.

In the Natural Resources, Mines and Water budget for 2006-07 there is an increase of 22.7 per cent to $591.6 million. This budget allocation includes $69 million for strategic land purchases, which includes $50 million to accelerate land acquisitions for the proposed dams on the Logan and Mary rivers; $11.64 million for the implementation of the Blueprint for the Bush initiatives during 2006-07, which includes $4 million for the State Rural Leasehold Land Strategy and $3 million for Reclaim the Bush—a Pest Offensive; and $11.8 million for water reforms to ensure security of supply, maximise sustainability and efficiency of use and promote recycling and increase knowledge of water systems. There is additional funding of $1 million for the delivery of the Natural Heritage Trust program in Cape York in conjunction with the Commonwealth government.

In the Primary Industries and Fisheries budget for 2006-07 there is an increase of 8.6 per cent to $255.99 million. This allocation includes a reduction in anticipated natural resource management expenditure of $15.6 million due to the progress made in ongoing citrus canker and fire ant eradication programs; implementation of the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries workforce strategy; continuing investment in research and development; and the implementation of the Food and Agribusiness Export Strategy. I commend the report to the House.

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (5.02 pm): The authors of the report of Estimates Committee G have certainly been charitable in their interpretation of the activities of that committee, especially with regard to the examination of the expenditure of the department of natural resources. By any measure, the activities of the committee when it examined the expenditure of the department of natural resources would have to be described as a farce. It became an absolute farce simply because of the attitude and the incompetence of the minister for natural resources, who adopted a strategy of reading long, tiresome and irrelevant briefing notes in response to any question at all. Any question at all was met with a long and tiresome briefing note, the irrelevance of which would have severely embarrassed anyone who had the slightest understanding of the issue. One aspect of the estimates committee process that I enjoy is the look of absolute embarrassment on the faces of the officers who sit behind a minister who demonstrates his incompetence to the extent that this minister did.

Mr Palaszczuk: You’re the embarrassment. How are you going to make water run from Brisbane to the Burdekin?

Mr SEENEY: The estimates committee process is a waste of time when ministers indulge in this tactic of reading briefing notes that have absolutely nothing to do with the question. It makes a mockery of the process but it also demonstrates your incompetence, Minister. You demonstrated your incompetence that day much more extensively than by anything the opposition could do. You have been relegated to retirement, and might I say that you probably will not be much of a loss to the portfolio.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Wallace): Order! Member for Callide, direct your comments through the chair.

Mr Shine: How are you going to get water from Brisbane to the Burdekin?

Mr SEENEY: That is a good point that the member for Toowoomba North makes, because that is the extent of the contribution that the minister and his advisers make to the whole debate about natural resources. They want to argue about spelling mistakes and expressions of grammar. That is about the extent of the contribution and understanding that the minister and his advisers bring to the complex issues faced by the department of natural resources. The committee hearings demonstrated the complete lack of basis for any of the decisions that have been made, especially with respect to Traveston Dam, and the extent to which that was a purely political decision and was part of a perception-building exercise—more so than any serious attempt to address the water crisis that has been of the government’s own making.

We also could not avoid the conclusion that so much of the government’s response to the water crisis was not based on anything other than hope and optimism, because the minister could not point to anything concrete that had been done. He and his advisers could not provide the committee with any indication that the department had any money allocated to address the huge amount of work that is
necessary to advance some of those projects, such as the western corridor pipeline, the southern regional pipeline, the Wyaralang Dam and the other projects that are so badly needed and so many years overdue. There is nothing in the department’s budget to indicate that the department has any capacity to deliver on any of those projects.

That was proof again, if any further proof was needed, that the government’s response to the water crisis has been all talk and no action, and so it continues today. As we debate this issue in parliament and reflect on the lack of information that was provided by the minister to the estimates committee, there is still nothing happening in real terms to address this water crisis. There is no water grid being constructed. The only things that are being constructed are more plans and more documents. There are no bulldozers. There are no excavators. There is no concrete. Nothing is happening.

As the minister drifts off into his much overdue retirement, I express the hope that we may get somebody in that portfolio who has a degree of understanding of the complexities of the issues, someone who is interested in more than spelling mistakes and grammar, someone who can address the complex issues that are so critically important to the people of south-east Queensland. This minister has been a complete failure since he has been responsible for this portfolio, and he was a complete failure at the estimates committee hearings.

Time expired.

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (5.07 pm): I am pleased to address the House in relation to the Estimates Committee G hearing held on 20 July this year. Firstly, I would like to record my appreciation of the work and responses of the two ministers involved: the minister for the new portfolio of Natural Resources, Mines and Water, the Hon. Henry Palaszczuk; and the new Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries, the Hon. Tim Mulherin. I would like to congratulate the ministers and their ministerial and departmental staff from each of the two portfolio areas for the highly detailed work undertaken in research and follow-up in preparation for the hearing.

A lot of activities were covered during question time, and scrutiny of each portfolio was at a very high level. I would also like to thank research staff and the research director, Rob Hansen, for their enormous effort in coordinating the committee’s work to ensure that everything ran smoothly on the day. I thank the Parliamentary Service officers as well for their assistance at the hearing. Last but not least, I would like to mention the work of the committee members and my colleagues the members for Kallangur, Southport and Pumicestone; the deputy chair, the member for Toowoomba North; and the members for Tablelands and Callide.

The estimates process is very important in ensuring accountability of government in a unicameral parliament. It complements the role of the Auditor-General and other accountability mechanisms that are built into the modern state and government instrumentalities that we now have here in Queensland. The committee considered the proposed expenditure using the various budget documents along with written and verbal evidence from the relevant ministers and public officials. The state budget that was delivered by the Treasurer on 6 June was an outstanding one for our state and I commend the Hon. Anna Bligh for her great work in this regard.

In regard to the estimates hearings, it was good to hear about the significant investment in the department and the essential sustainable management of the state’s land, water, vegetation, mineral and petroleum resources. The budget forecasts record spending of $650.5 million for the department in 2006-07. It also made considerable whole-of-government investments in areas related directly to the portfolio, including $825 million for infrastructure to support the resources sector and a massive $600 million for water infrastructure. Water is one of the most complex and important areas of public policy and is becoming a critical issue for everyone in Queensland. The Beattie government is committed to delivering water security for all water users: homes, businesses, farms, industry and the environment.

The South East Queensland Regional Water Supply Strategy being developed and implemented by the government and local councils in the region is the blueprint for the region’s water security until at least 2050. The government is committed to a regional water grid, new dams, raising existing dams, a recycled water scheme for industry, a desalination plant and water-saving programs for homes, businesses, industry and local councils. Of note is the amount of water saved since the Regional Drought Strategy was launched in May last year—approximately 100 billion litres or 100,000 megalitres. The average current daily water use for July was about 690 megalitres per day. South-east Queensland has saved the equivalent of 145 days water use. Previously the region’s average daily water use for the month of July was 955 megalitres. The actual use is about 690 megalitres per day, which means it is 265 megalitres less for each day.

The government is committed to supporting the community in efforts to save more water and in turn save more money through the Water Rebate Scheme. This is vital for Queensland’s future and particularly our farming community. I congratulate the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries, the Hon. Tim Mulherin, on his first estimates hearing as minister. The gross value of production of Queensland primary industries commodities for 2005-06 is now forecast at $10.93 billion, four per cent
more than the original forecast published in September 2005. Despite the ongoing dry conditions and the destruction caused by Cyclone Larry in far-north Queensland, the state’s primary producers have continued to perform well in 2005-06.

As of 27 June 2006 there were 62 shires and five part shires drought declared under state processes. There is no doubt that this state’s primary producers are in many instances doing it tough, but what they can rely on is this government’s commitment to do all it can to work with organisations and stakeholders to ensure continuing profitability and sustainability. I commend the report of Estimates Committee G for consideration of the parliament.

Mr HOPPER (Darling Downs—NPA) (5.12 pm): Before speaking to this estimates committee report I inform the House that I have been appointed the shadow minister for DNR and am looking forward to working with the minister. When we get into the nitty-gritty of this debate we see that there has been a lot of focus on water in south-east Queensland and what needs to be done to address the crisis the Beattie Labor government has created in this fast-growing region. I say that the crisis has been created by the Beattie Labor government because it has done nothing with a capital N. It has built a footbridge and a football stadium. That is what Queensland has seen. There are 1,500 people a week coming in from over the border and what infrastructure has been put in place? Absolutely nothing. We have built every bit of infrastructure in Queensland: the Burdekin, the Bowen Basin, the Gateway Bridge, the Gold Coast freeway. We put all that in place—absolutely everything. We are the build-it people of this parliament and it is as simple as that.

This Beattie government has built nothing and is now reaping the fruits of what has occurred. As for the current drought, I have heard a lot of people talk about climate change. If members read the Courier-Mail on Saturday they would have seen that the Weather Bureau has said that it has no definite evidence of climate change. We heard our leader this morning talking about the Burdekin River not flowing for 30 years. That was a drought; that was a stage they were going through. We are going through a drought at present. The problem is that there has been no infrastructure put in place. We were calling for a waste water pipeline to be put in place years ago. We had drafted a plan to do that. What has this government done? Absolutely nothing! This has snuck up on the government. It has caught out the members opposite and they have been left wanting.

We have a government that has made a heap of promises in a glossy brochure saying, ‘This is what we’re going to do. We’ll go to the polls on water and we’ll say that the opposition does not support it’—all because of a measly little motion which was moved in the House last night. It is an absolute farce. Like the shadow minister for water, I have to ask: what has been put in place? There is not a dozer, not a bit of cement, not one piece of infrastructure, not one bit of money spent towards this. What we have is promises, promises, promises; we will, we will, we will.

I will now touch on vegetation management and in particular the financial assistance package that the government, under this minister, claimed would assist landholders whose livelihoods have been affected by vegetation management laws. For a start, let us look at the DNR staff in our rural towns—the people over the counter. The staff of the department are wonderful people, but they have been faced with irate farmers who have to pay a charge to get a property management map. The process they have to go through involves cost, cost and more cost. The people who work for the department are on the end of the whip, on the end of the stick. Morale in the department has totally gone down and that has to be addressed. They are good people who are doing what they can but their hands are tied by ludicrous laws put in place by this minister.

Going into the last state election Labor claimed it would provide a $150 million vegetation management assistance package of which $130 million would be available to landholders either through enterprise assistance grants or exit assistance grants. So far $19 million of the $130 million package—about 15 per cent—has actually been provided to landholders affected by these laws. Here again we have exactly what I was talking about before: promises, promises, promises; looks good, but the ‘can do’ is not being done.

There is nothing to back up the legislation that passes through this House. The real fruits of legislation do not get put in place. This is a government that is just promises, promises, promises, glossy brochures and paperwork. It is as simple as that. There is only about six months to go before these applications close. It is becoming increasingly apparent that almost $100 million of this package will disappear into the black hole of Treasury. The minister knew that. The minister knows that if he does not give this money out it will go back into the government’s coffers and not into farmers’ pockets—desperate people who need this compensation. That is typical of this Labor government which is more interested in being seen to be doing something than actually doing something to fix the problem it has created.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN (Pumicestone—ALP) (5.17 pm): I do appreciate being part of the estimates process. It was introduced by the Labor government under Premier Wayne Goss and finally gave some accountability to state governments. It is a time of the year during parliamentary recess that a lot of the members of parliament do go on holidays, but I certainly prefer to stay back and participate in the estimates process and have done so since I was elected in 2001.
I take great pride in representing Pumicestone constituents on a full-time basis. I do not own a business or have a part-time job like Liberal members. I am a full-time MP and very proud of it. I am the only candidate in the upcoming election to commit to full-time representation.

Mr Wilson: Any farming interests?

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: No, I have no farming interests. With regard to the current water issue, the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Water, the Hon. Henry Palaszczuk, and his department have made considerable progress in solving the water issue. In Queensland, unlike other Australian states, local councils control the distribution of town water. They charge for water and they get the money and in most cases it is quite lucrative—a real cash cow. The state government is encouraging councils to cooperate and provide the best possible outcomes for ratepayers.

It seems that as of Tuesday we are certainly making some headway. Other councils came on board early and they certainly understood their responsibility; others were too busy playing politics and protecting their cash cows to the detriment of ratepayers who are suffering by having to bucket water. To simply blame the state government was quite outrageous and just buck-passing.

Councils could have given ratepayers incentives years ago to put in tanks which would not have solved all the problems but it certainly would have helped. After all, they could have afforded it with the profit they make on charging for water. Can members imagine the jobs that would have been created in the tank industry? I had a tank for 21 years, ever since I moved to Bribie Island to live. I can understand the reason local councils would probably not want to provide incentives, because my water bill is quite small.

I am supportive of the state government’s plan to include Bribie Island bore fields in the water grid by 2007. There were some issues with this, but Premier Peter Beattie has made a commitment to fast-track all measures including the bore fields, which will help provide more water to south-east Queensland and help make communities self-sufficient with regard to water in the future. It is important, however, that the proper monitoring or extraction of any groundwater be done to ensure that water quality is maintained and to prevent sea water intrusion of freshwater aquifers.

The drought is biting, and the state government, in partnership with SEQWater, local governments and other stakeholders, is preparing an SEQ Regional Water Supply Strategy. One of the aims of this strategy is maximising safe and reliable water supplies in the region including groundwater sources like Bribie Island, supporting economic growth while also ensuring environmental health. We are the only state government to tackle the water shortage and we are on track. Recently we constructed the Paradise Dam outside Bundaberg, and it is the only dam that any state government in Queensland has built in over 10 years. The Liberals did nothing while they were in government in the mid-1990s, and now we need their support to build more and they will not come on board. They oppose our plans but have none of their own.

I turn now to the other portfolio in our estimates committee—that of the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries—and congratulate the new minister, the Hon. Tim Mulherin, on the way in which he answered my questions. I am disappointed with the Liberals in the way they are trying to scare particularly the recreational fishers into thinking that this government will ban them from fishing in Moreton Bay. If they look at Labor’s track record, it speaks for itself. The state Labor government protected the recreation activities of the passage and I supported that move.

A few months ago we had the Liberals saying that the biggest killer of dugongs in the passage is not sharks but boats. They used this in an argument against the government and it sent shock waves through the boating community. They were worried about the statement because in the context it was used it sounded very much like the Liberals were wanting to limit recreational boating facilities. I want to reiterate that the Labor government has no intention of doing this. As I said, our record speaks for itself. I add my overwhelming support to keeping Moreton Bay open to all recreational usages, including fishing.

I conclude by expressing my heartfelt thanks to the committee, particularly the member for Mount Ommaney and estimates chair, the Hon. Julie Attwood, and staff for their assistance and their hard work during the estimates process.

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (5.22 pm): I rise to make a contribution to Estimates Committee G and begin by raising water issues in my electorate. We have gone through the water resource planning process on the Barron River, and, apart from a specific area, the resource operation planning procedure also. Current concerns revolve around installing water meters in the area known as ‘above Tinaroo Falls Dam’ and the costs and repayment methods that will apply. These have been explained by the minister and I thank him for that.

Unresolved issues include the conversion ratio from area licences to volumetric licences and selecting the distribution method for 4,000 megalitres of spare water above the dam. Regarding the conversion ratio, I emphasise again that multiplying the acreage licences by 6.6 is downright daylight
robbbery. It is the same as saying that a farmer can only produce a third of his income. It takes at least 6.6 megalitres of water per hectare to produce just one crop a year, and there are farmers who are now growing two, three or even more crops on this same piece of ground annually.

I cannot stress enough that this figure of 6.6 should be increased significantly. There are 4,000 extra megalitres of water available thanks to the WRP which are still to be distributed. Surely, those who do not have any water at all should be given a basic amount and those whose allocation is under the basic level should be brought up to that level.

Regarding the installation of water meters, it is good to know that farmers can pay initial costs of purchase and installation up-front if they wish and ongoing costs as they arise. It was stated during estimates that this is happening under a National Water Initiative time frame which calls for these matters to be finalised by 2008. Yet again, a national agreement signed up to by the states is forcing our hand.

I want to briefly mention the department’s inability to provide timely responses to many mining issues especially involving permits of various kinds. Constituents are coming to me with issues that have been ongoing for years, and with incredible stories of letters and inquiries going unanswered for months at a time. Then when a response arrives it is often brief, uninformative and does not progress the issue one bit. Some constituents have even resorted to the aid of solicitors only to have them, in frustration at the department’s lack of response, directing their clients to my office.

The time to build water storages is before we run out. Surely that lesson has penetrated by now. The south-east is not the only part of the state experiencing growth. It is, however, a glaring example of what happens when governments fail to plan ahead. In the far north we have the wettest part of the state and the country, and we should be working now to harvest that water for our next dry season.

I turn now to the proposed changes to Torres Strait fishing which are causing a lot of angst. State and federal governments are jointly planning to resume 50 per cent of fishing licences in the area and to hand them over to the Indigenous people. Whilst it was stated during the estimates that compensation would be paid to those fishers who lose their licences and livelihoods, it is to be hoped that the compensation will be a sufficient amount. It was also confirmed that the goal is for 70 per cent of licences to eventually be in Indigenous-only possession.

There are major issues raised by this plan. The first is the fate of those fishermen forced from the area. Another is the flow-on effects that will run back through to the fish merchants, the service industries, the families and the communities who will also suffer. Another concerned sector is the fish and chip shop owners and other food outlet sectors. At present Spanish mackerel, for example, is caught in the cape, which is a major source of their product. Under the proposed new arrangements in combination with catch-sharing provisions within PNG, it is predicted that instead of buying what is now a domestic product the same fish caught in the same place may instead wind up having to be imported from a foreign country.

I now turn to the shedding of some 121 of DPI’s experienced scientific staff. Despite the minister’s explanation for this, I still remain concerned that there is a tremendous amount of knowledge within the DPI and it is pretty much entirely contained within the experienced staff. As the member for Darling Downs said, the morale of DPI staff is extremely low. Relying highly on employment of postgraduate students with no real life skills is not really the smart way to go.

Farmers, particularly at the Mareeba end of my electorate, are looking for the old style DPI extension officers to support their industries. Having been forced to diversify from a single crop that was tobacco to a multitude of industries such as mangoes, sugar, poultry, bananas, fruit and vegetables—and the list goes on—farmers are seriously seeking this assistance and want to see an extension officer back in place.

I note that even though primary producers earn the states significant amounts of revenue—in the billions—the total proposed expenditure by DPIF is just $308 million, which is about the same as that spent on Suncorp Stadium. We must do better for our primary producers—a section of Queensland that is absolutely essential to this state’s economic health.

Hon. H PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Mines and Minister Assisting the Premier on Water) (5.27 pm): I would like to thank the members of the committee that was chaired by the member for Mount Ommaney, the staff of the committee and the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Water. The detailed questioning by government members and the member for Tablelands was in stark contrast to the narrow focus of the members for Callide and Toowoomba South. The National Party members on the committee did not ask a single question on mines, natural resources or water issues outside the south-east corner during the three-hour hearing.

The National Party’s approach was apparent, with the member for Callide’s comment in the Queensland Country Life on the morning of the estimates hearing. The member for Callide said he expected the estimates process to be like picking on your grandmother. I doubt any other member of this House would know what picking on your grandmother was like. I certainly do not.
The committee’s report detailed 14 issues raised at the hearing. I can count only three of the 14 that were raised by the National Party members. The reservation statement submitted by the member for Callide is very scant. The first page is a generic opposition response. The second page is unconvincing—most probably written by some secretary in the opposition member's office.

Let me address the issues raised on the second page. In terms of vegetation management assistance, I am pleased that the rate of application for aid has risen so dramatically over the last 12 months. In 2004-05, $600,000 in assistance was provided in enterprise assistance. Last financial year approximately $20 million was provided. The latest figure for vegetation management assistance is $24.3 million and rising. The streamline scheme criteria, the initiatives of client liaison officers and seminars have been of great assistance. I continue to urge affected landholders and clearing contractors to seek this assistance.

In terms of the Mines Inspectorate, I have been committed to implementing findings of the review. The legislative amendments passed by the parliament last year will be of great assistance to the inspectorate. As a consequence, the number of audits and inspections anticipated in 2006-07 will be the same as the target for the previous year of 2,400. In 1996-97, the number of lost-time injuries in all Queensland mines was 919, with a labour force of 10,870. For the period 2004-05, the lost-time injuries reported were down to 278, with a labour force of 27,380. Statistics like these are hard to ignore but we must continue to work harder.

In terms of Traveston Crossing Dam on Teviot Brook, our government has stood in the market to purchase land required for the dam, as have successive governments. I remind honourable members that the former Borbidge government promised to build a dam on the Teviot Brook by about 2065. We are committed to building it by the end of 2011.

In terms of the rebate scheme, I join the Premier in welcoming the $2 million worth of applications received to date, less than six weeks since the scheme started. I urge residents in the state’s south-east to seek assistance under this scheme because, at the end of the day, it is about saving water and saving money.

In terms of Traveston Crossing Dam, the government is following the same process that applied to the Paradise Dam on the Burnett River. I answered in full the questions on the Traveston Crossing Dam. The member for Callide refers to the Brisbane to Burdekin water pipeline; I assume he is referring to the Burdekin to Brisbane pipeline. The member’s question to me was in the context of alternatives to the Traveston Crossing Dam. The Burdekin pipeline is not an alternative to the Traveston Crossing Dam, but it may be a long-term option for future governments. That is why we have commissioned a study into this. In terms of Toowoomba, our government has formed a task force to look at viable and sustainable water supply options after the result of the referendum on the Toowoomba Water Futures project held on 29 July.

In conclusion, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the departmental officers, especially Director-General Bob McCarthy and others, in preparing the estimates. In particular, I record my thanks to Deputy Director-General Scott Spencer. Scott is one of the most professional and dedicated public servants I have had the pleasure to work with. He has recently been promoted to the position of deputy director-general with the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. I certainly wish him all the best in his illustrious career as a public servant here in Queensland.

Mr Johnson (Gregory—NPA) (5.31 pm): I was not a part of Estimates Committee G, but it gives me pleasure to be able to participate in the debate this afternoon. The issues that I want to canvass here today are in the area of primary industries. One area that needs canvassing is QRAA, the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority. This is an integral and important part of the operation of primary industries. From the outset, I want to salute the work performed by the CEO of QRAA, Colin Holden, and his operatives there in conjunction with the government. Over a long period, this has been the savoir of many a person in rural industries.

In 2005-06, concessional loans of $41 million were made under state funded programs provided to 210 business operations and rural enterprises. With respect to drought interest subsidies, a total of $75 million was provided to 2,550 primary producers and small businesses. In relation to small businesses, it is all very well to talk about the farm body. It is very important that we give these people those interest subsidies so they get sustenance and an opportunity to survive in these trying times.

Pastoral people are eligible for interest subsidies of up to $100,000. Most people are not aware that a lot of those rural businesses carry the credit of many of those pastoral operations. They provide jobs for a lot of young people in those country towns, but they are only able to attract interest subsidy loans of up to $10,000, whereas pastoral people can have interest subsidies of up to $100,000. This is a totally unfair situation, and I call on the current government to look at this. It must be expedited very quickly before we see the total demise of some of our rural businesses.

In recent times, the emphasis has been on the drought here in the south-east corner, but I have to tell members that the bloody drought has been going for 100 years in western Queensland and the rest of the state. We have a drought five out of every 10 years. South-east Queensland has had a bad one
for five years now, but it has been going for five years out there, too. A lot of people out there are haemorrhaging because of the drought, but they do not complain about it. They try to make amends. The important factor here is that we have to change some of these strategies in relation to QRAA. I see the former minister for primary industries in here, and I think he would nod in agreement with what I am saying in relation to some of those small businesses.

I come now to the area of stock inspection services. Our stock inspectors are some of the most important people we have in rural Queensland, especially in relation to the tick line. We have canvassed this area before in relation to stock inspectors at Alpha and the part-time operative there. This is just an absolute joke. If we get a wet season there, that tick line will move south and, before we know it, we will have ticks right down to the Darling Downs and out into western Queensland if it ever rains again—and it will. Stock inspection services are an integral part of primary industries in this state, and they complement veterinary services and extension officer services in rural areas.

The other area I want to touch on very quickly is my pet subject of AQIS and citrus canker. I am not taking a shot at the state government because this is the responsibility of both state and federal governments, especially the federal government. I am going to take another swipe here today at the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service. If they had done their job properly five years ago, we would still have a citrus industry in Emerald.

I want to put on record here today my sincere thanks and gratitude to the Hon. Peter McGauran, the federal minister for agriculture, for having the guts to go to Emerald last year. After he was appointed the federal agriculture minister, he visited Emerald within a week. I also want to pay tribute to the former state minister, Gordon Nuttall. Gordon was also there within a fortnight of becoming minister. Both of those ministers were in Emerald at that time, and we have seen some results because of that. That is something we never had before. I know that the present minister, Tim Mulherin, is currently working with one farmer there to try to resolve his business dealings.

One thing we have to be careful of here is that we keep our quarantine people in place right across the state—whether it is AQIS, our stock inspection services or whatever. We have the best farmers in the world and the best quality product in the world, and it is absolutely paramount that we preserve and protect those farmers.

Hon. TS MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries) (5.37 pm): Firstly, I would like to thank the members of Estimates Committee G for what was my first appearance as minister during this very valuable parliamentary process. I also take this opportunity to respond to the statements made by the self-styled independent. I have not had the benefit of hearing the whole debate, but I have read through it, and I also recall the debate in the House, in letters to the editors of various newspapers and on radio. The fact is—just one more time—that the answers given were true and correct.

As part of the project, the Department also will be reviewing current staff assignments and responsibilities, in areas where priorities have changed. Some employees will be offered Voluntary Early Retirements and other opportunities in different areas.

‘The key to the VERs is that they will be as the term implies—voluntary’ ...

‘There will be no forced redundancies.’

The final number of VERs that will be offered has not yet been determined.

‘But I want to stress that the Department will maintain its strong presence in regional and rural Queensland’

At estimates, I said that up to 121 VERs were on offer. I also said that that would not necessarily be the final number, and I again confirmed that no-one would be forced to take a redundancy package. At no stage has there been deception or misrepresentation.

Many of the reservations raised by the member for Toowoomba South referred to issues to which he has already had a response. That the answers did not comply with the political slant he wishes to place on the issues does not alter the fact that the answers given were true and correct.

Alleged budget cuts were again raised. It is an issue which I have answered ad nauseam in this House, in letters to the editors of various newspapers and on radio. The fact is—just one more time—that the government’s core funding for DPIF in the 2006-07 budget increased by five per cent on the previous financial year.

I point out again that if the 2006-07 budget for DPIF and budgeted expenses of the newly established Forestry Plantations Queensland for the coming financial year are added together, as was done in the 1997-98 budget, the total allocation for the 2006-07 budget would be $21.2 million higher than was the case in 1997-98 under the Borbidge government.

I do not have time here today to go through every issue raised, but I would like to comment briefly on an issue raised during estimates and that is the issue of the department’s handling of the recent Hendra virus case. As I said during estimates and again reinforced yesterday in this House, it would be inappropriate for me to comment while an independent review of all aspects of the case is taking place.
Under the very clear terms of reference of the review, allegations raised in the media and at estimates will be addressed. I have since announced that the first phase of the process, the compilation of the independent report, is complete. Stakeholders have now been given up to 30 days to respond to the reviewer. The findings will be made public only when the review process is fully completed.

At Estimates Committee G my answers and those of my senior departmental officers clearly reinforced this government's commitment to our primary industries and fisheries. A total proposed expenditure of $308 million during 2006-07 includes $227.8 million from the Queensland government. Implementation of the DPI&F workforce strategy, continuing investment in research and development, the department's ongoing involvement in providing support to those in north Queensland, especially primary producers devastated by Cyclone Larry, and our timely and appropriate response to biosecurity concerns were also canvassed during estimates. All questions asked at estimates were answered.

Primary Industries and Fisheries is a challenging and exciting portfolio. As I said in my opening address at estimates, the gross value of production of Queensland’s primary industry commodities for 2005–06 is forecast at $10.93 billion, four per cent more than the original forecast published in September 2005. This is an outstanding achievement by Queensland primary producers in, for many, extremely difficult conditions. Primary producers in Queensland can rely on this government’s commitment to do all that it can to work with organisations such as the QFF, AgForce, Growcom, QDO, QST, Canegrowers, the federal government and other key stakeholders to ensure continuing profitability and sustainability. Once again I would like to thank the committee for its examination of the Primary Industries and Fisheries Ministerial Portfolio Statement and for its recommendation that proposed expenditure be agreed to without amendment.

Report adopted.
Clauses 1 to 4, as read, agreed to.
Schedules 1 and 2, as read, agreed to.

Third Reading (Cognate Debate)
Question put—That the bills be now read a third time.
Motion agreed to.

Long Title (Cognate Debate)
Question put—That the long title of the bills be agreed to.
Motion agreed to.

CRIME AND MISCONDUCT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading
Resumed from 19 April (see p. 1166).

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—Lib) (5.44 pm): First of all I thank the Attorney for organising the two briefings I had with her staff to outline the Crime and Misconduct and Other Legislation Amendment Bill and the amendments to be placed before the House today. It gives me pleasure to rise to speak to the bill today. I say at the outset that we will be supporting the bill. I will leave it to later in the debate to comment on the amendments.

I start by turning to the strategic plan of the CMC for 2006 to 2010 at page 12. I think it is important to understand the background of the CMC and look at that in the context of this bill. Page 12 is headed ‘Strengthening the law enforcement impact on organised crime and criminal paedophilia, including prevention initiatives.’ It reads as follows—

The CMC recognises that organised crime networks and criminal paedophilia offenders are becoming increasingly complex, opportunistic and shrewd, and are using state-of-the-art technology to safeguard their illegal activities. Today’s criminal does not recognise state boundaries and is becoming increasingly adept at minimising the impact of conventional law enforcement methods. The challenge for the CMC is to focus on proactive and innovative investigative methods to identify and target these individuals.

It is vital that the CMC finds and uses methods that will enhance its capacity to contribute to the joint efforts of law enforcement agencies, both state and national. It must do this if it is to contribute to making significant inroads into strengthening the law enforcement influence in Queensland and nationally.

The CMC will meet this challenge by continuing to develop and implement proactive and innovative strategies based on sound research and accurate and timely intelligence.

We will use a range of investigation, intelligence, research and prevention initiatives with a special emphasis on alerting our law enforcement partners and the community to specific dangers.

We will take an integrated approach and draw upon a wide range of expertise and resources, using strategic intelligence and research to identify and develop targets for tactical investigations that have a high probability of success.
The CMC will work in partnership with other law enforcement agencies, particularly the QPS, the Australian Crime Commission and the Australian Federal Police, building upon advances already made, and playing a key role in combating organised crime and criminal paedophilia.

I read that because, as I said at the start of my speech, it is very important that we understand the role the CMC plays not just in this state but across Australia and indeed overseas. The role of the CMC cannot be underestimated. It is a major crime fighting body. It is a major initiative that this state has to deal with major criminal networks but also, equally importantly, paedophilia. As a consequence, scrutiny of a bill in relation to improving its powers or at least providing it with a better way or better method of dealing with these sorts of matters is important and, in my opinion, we should allow some leeway in relation to the terms of a bill of this nature.

I note the Alert Digest does raise some concerns in relation to the intrusion on civil liberties. We have looked at this very hard and very closely. However, when we take into account what the CMC does, who it is tackling and who it is trying to bring to court and then to jail we can certainly see that this bill is a significant move forward.

The bill itself amends a number of acts: the Crime and Misconduct Act, the Misconduct Tribunals Act, the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act, the Witness Protection Act and the Whistleblowers Protection Act. Perhaps the greatest proportion of the bill deals with the witness protection functions of the CMC and in clauses 5 and 6 extends the powers of the commissioners to request by notice the production of documents to witness protection hearings as well as criminal investigations.

The aim was to implement recommendation 41 of the PCMC report for the purpose of protecting the person or integrity of witnesses’ actions. Typically, this will be used to require a bank to provide information on where a protected person last transacted to determine their location and ascertain their safety. It should be noted that the new power is provided in a way that attempts to conceal from the recipient of the notice the fact that it relates to a protected witness and the identity of the protected witness.

The bill allows the CMC to link these notices with the crime and investigation notices so that the recipient will not know whether the notice relates to a crime investigation or the witness protection function. This departure from the normal requirement that a recipient of a notice has a right to know the provision under which such notices are issued is considered justified to ensure that people on the witness protection program are safe from physical harm and that the integrity of the program is maintained.

The recipient, however, does have the right to seek protection for noncompliance with the notice and if there is a claim of excuse or privilege the chairperson has the right to require the person to attend a CMC hearing to substantiate the claim. The chairperson may seek that this person immediately attend to make his or her claim, and in doing so the CMC is required to seek the prior approval of a Supreme Court judge. If the claim is refused, the person can then appeal the decision. It is anticipated that the additional procedures for determining claims of reasonable excuse or privilege are not expected to be used often but are nonetheless inserted due to the need to meet the new power of the crime investigation power.

I initially raised with the Attorney’s office my concern that the new section 75B allowed the presiding officer to require a witness to immediately produce a stated document or thing that the chairman believes is relevant to the investigation. My concern with the wording was that the bill did not require a level of belief or indication of possession or control of the documentation or thing prior to an order being made. As a consequence, I raised with the Attorney’s office my concern on that point and there is now to be an amendment whereby the officer has to believe ‘on reasonable grounds’ that a witness has possession of a document or thing and believes again on reasonable grounds that it is relevant to the investigation. That does resolve the issue as possession is defined in schedule 2 of the primary act to include having custody and control.

Clause 9 provides the right for a witness protection function hearing to be in public in certain set conditions, including that it considers the opening will make the hearing more effective and will not be unfair to the person or contrary to the public interest and will not threaten the security of a protected person or the integrity of the witness protection program. Importantly, clause 10 now allows for a chairperson to nominate an assistant commissioner to conduct a public hearing. This has long been a concern for the CMC in which there are certain hearings that can only be conducted by the chairperson. That has meant hearings being delayed and certainly being elongated. This provision will rectify that concern and is one that will be welcomed by CMC officers. I also note that an amendment to be brought into the House tonight by the Attorney further elaborates on that particular point.

In addition, the bill also contains amendments unrelated to the PCMC report, including initially relaxing the limit on the tenure of senior officers and assistant commissioners from eight years to 10 years with a possible further five-year extension. The PCMC is to be informed of the further extension. As the Attorney would be aware, one of the primary functions of the CMC is to deal with entrenched criminal behaviour. One of the concerns that has arisen from other jurisdictions is that with the length of
term of officers in such a crime-fighting organisation there is always a risk that a particular person could himself or herself be trapped into corruption. There is always a concern in those circumstances. I am quite well aware that the Attorney would be mindful of that in the future.

Second, it allows self-incriminating evidence that a person has been compelled to give at a CMC hearing to be used in proceedings against that person for the falsity of other compelled evidence. Third, it allows the CMC to delegate its power to appoint staff below senior officer level to a person other than a chairperson. Fourth, it ensures that only individuals and not corporations can claim the privilege against self-incrimination in accordance with the recommendations of the Queensland Law Reform Commission in its recent report on the abrogation of the privilege against self-incrimination. Fifth, it removes the requirement for ministers to approve secondments to positions at the CMC below senior officer level and instead requires them to be approved by chief executives. Sixth, it clarifies that the CMC can only compel persons to attend hearings for its crime and misconduct functions and not for its other functions such as research and intelligence. Seventh, it clarifies that commission officers and other persons can only be required to produce or disclose confidential documents or information relevant to the work of the CMC that is required for a prosecution started as a result of an investigation conducted by the CMC and not just any investigation. Lastly, it clarifies that a person is required to comply with the requirement of the CMC to produce documents or things for a misconduct investigation.

Moving on to clause 57, that clause inserts part 2A under the heading of arrangements for short-term protection in the Witness Protection Act 2000 and deals with the protection of persons who are not included or being considered for inclusion in a witness protection program but the chairperson believes there is a need for protection for a clear purpose and for a stated period of time because of danger arising from a circumstance as defined within the bill. The person may then be provided with what I may term an interim witness protection arrangement whereby the chairperson may enter into an arrangement for a specified purpose and period, called in the bill a short-term protection arrangement, which ends upon either the purpose for which the short-term protection arrangement was entered into or the period specified in the arrangement concludes.

The short-term protection arrangements may be varied, suspended or the person to whom they are addressed can voluntarily end the arrangement. Suspension will occur if the person who is protected by the order does something or intends to do something that puts at risk the integrity of the program or another witness or the person cannot be properly protected, and in those circumstances the chairperson may suspend the protection order. The bill also provides the chairperson with the power to end short-term arrangements, and at clause 58 the new section 36 provides that it is an offence to disclose any information about a person or a witness protection program that threatens the security of the person or integrity of the program, and that particular provision carries a maximum sentence of 10 years.

In essence, the bill does provide a number of what I would call procedural amendments and some substantive amendments, providing additional protections for witnesses, but also puts in place the recommendations made by the PCMC in its report of 2004. It is interesting to read the PCMC report of 2004. When one dovetails that with the strategic plan that I referred to earlier, we find that the CMC is still directing itself to improving the technology and the basis on which it operates to provide the protection that we tend now to need more often given the greater use of technology by criminals.

As I said earlier, the question had been raised in Alert Digest No. 8 of this year as to whether the provisions had regard to the rights and liberties of individuals. Of course those rights and liberties are always important in relation to any criminal matter or, for that matter, any matter involving a court application or proceedings. It is, however, as I said earlier, equally important to understand the role of the CMC and I find that overall this bill does not in any manner erode the rights of individuals to the extent that would warrant them being opposed by the opposition.

If I could just quickly turn to the proposed amendments to be introduced by the Attorney today, and with the Attorney's consent I will address those at this point in time instead of delaying them until later. I can probably state that the amendments come in two formats. Firstly, they deal with the Corrective Services Act and, secondly, they deal with a variety of acts in relation to prisoners having the right to vote at elections. I will refer to both of them generally to begin with. Under normal principle, the opposition would oppose these amendments given that they are not related to the primary bill before the House. But I have taken the chance to talk to the Attorney's staff late this afternoon. In relation to the changes to the right of prisoners to vote, they actually follow as a consequence of Commonwealth legislation passed in June 2006. They mirror that and in those circumstances there is no reason why they should be opposed by the opposition and we will be supporting those amendments when they come into the House.

In relation to the Corrective Services Act, again the Attorney's officers advise me that what it in essence relates to is that a sentence that has been suspended that is reactivated under normal circumstances cannot then attract a parole date. The amendments will in fact allow that to occur—that is, a parole date may now be set if a court reactivates a sentence that has been suspended. That seems purely in my opinion a right-minded thing to do and we will be supporting that proposal as well. In those circumstances, we will be supporting the bill and the amendments when they come into the House.
Dr DOUGLAS (Gaven—NPA) (5.58 pm): This bill was introduced following the review of the Crime and Misconduct Commission. It contains changes that will enhance the ability of the CMC to perform, retain its staff and report in an orderly manner. I congratulate the minister on introducing the bill in a timely manner. The recommendations for this bill came from the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Commission after it conducted its three-yearly review of the CMC. The opposition intends to support the bill.

I wish to acknowledge the major changes in the bill. They are—and not necessarily in this order—witness protection, the ability of the commission to appoint and appropriately delegate assistant commissioners, extending the tenure of staff, allowing the use of self-incriminating evidence that a person was compelled to give at a CMC inquiry to be used in proceedings against that individual, the issue of privilege, and a further amendment which the member for Caloundra has just discussed and which appears to clarify some of the difficulties contained in an earlier amendment.

The review of the CMC occurred because of the difficulties that the commissioner was having with the fact that all investigations have to be conducted by him. This bill allows assistant commissioners to be delegated the inquiry work—I presume—and also other duties that the commissioner may believe are required and that previously the act compelled him and him alone to do.

The bill also allows the extension of staff tenure so as to retain the corporate knowledge of staff. It goes without saying that that is appropriate because of the skill requirements that are necessary for investigative staff in such an organisation. The issue of witness protection was dealt with extensively in the explanatory notes, in the minister’s seconding reading speech and also by the shadow minister in his contribution. The amendments in this bill relating to witness protection reflect the modern approach to pursuing crime, criminals and criminal investigation. I support the objectives. Details contained in the legislation appear to address most of the concerns of most of the witnesses, their families, the investigative staff and the prosecution staff.

With regard to the issue of self-incriminating evidence, the amendments contained in this bill ensure privilege for individuals but not for corporations. The legislation can compel persons to attend hearings and bring any evidence that they seek to have involved for the investigation or the investigator. It then allows for self-incriminating evidence that a person may be compelled to give to the CMC hearing to be used in proceedings against that person for the falsity of compelled evidence. This is perjury. To commit perjury during an inquiry is almost the norm now, because of the soft nature of how it is treated. The amendments may possibly begin the journey to resolve this ongoing problem. What may then occur is either the so-called ‘Alan Bond defence’—that is, ‘I forgot’—or the claim for individual privilege, and then we may be back to where we started. The issue may continue to dog these inquiries. Interestingly, in relation to the most recent inquiry relating to wagering and bookmakers this is indeed what occurred. Whilst this issue is not specifically relevant to current CMC inquiries, it is relevant to inquiries in general.

The CMC was set up to fight crime and misconduct. That is what it needs to start doing. It has a substantial budget, and a shroud of secrecy will not protect it from intermittent review. It has been well publicised that the Gold Coast City Council is full of dodgy dealing, yet those who have been found to be involved still have their jobs and continue to make important decisions for the city. The CMC inquiry into the election and the subsequent decisions led to recommendations. Making recommendations is not good enough. The public trusts that when the report is issued the government of the day will follow the advice of the commissioner in his report.

I would like to discuss the issue of the Gold Coast City Council in general rather than in specifics. The CMC’s most recent major inquiry involved the Gold Coast City Council, its election and matters that occurred since. I raised specific matters in relation to that here earlier today. They were discussed further by the member for Warrego. This inquiry covered allegations—and they are allegations—ranging from official corruption to perjury, to issues of privilege, to issues of evidence and to the management of witnesses. That demonstrates that these areas are common to all investigations involving the CMC. The inquiry process is continuously evolving and is definitely complex. It is really expensive, very painful, quite theatrical and, in this case, the business of local government in the area stopped altogether. Reputations can easily be lost. The web draws in players who do not expect to be drawn into it. The outcomes are unpredictable, but if the result is a lack of evidence, there is no outcome. I suspect that is the worst possible situation.

What we have seen in the past few days with the appointment of a watchdog for the Gold Coast City Council really is bizarre and it may be a dreadful precedent. In other words, if you have a CMC investigation it might be better to say, ‘It is not proven,’ ‘We are still suspicious and we ask for another look later on,’ or, ‘It is proven.’ It seems to me that, in this case, a watchdog seems to supplant the role of the local government minister. Does she then seem irrelevant?

It may be that there are further evolutionary steps that the CMC may have to move from and to. If we really want these organisations to be effective, we have to give them teeth, we have to give them resources and then we have to defend their actions. I do not see any progression to a McCarthyist type of approach, and this is to be applauded. What may be lacking is some component of subsequent review of the CMC’s recommendations when no action appears to have occurred. This acquittal process is standard for all government departments.
I acknowledge that changes had to be suggested because of the evolving nature of crime, organised crime networks, special types of organised crime networks—mainly paedophiles, internet crime, official corruption and complex criminal activity. The amendments contained in this bill have the capacity to deliver the type of power that the CMC will have to investigate, document and refer for prosecution the crime and misconduct activities that oddly may occur in our society over time.

I hope that, over time, progressively amendments will be made and an element of preventive strategies will be built into all of this activity—in other words, a large component being prevention in addition to the idea of investigation, documentation and referral for prosecution. It occurs in most other areas.

The opposition supports changes to the CMC to strengthen its powers and enhance its ability to address crime. Recent events have demonstrated that, with all the powers in the world, it will not always help if you do not have the collective will to deliver.

Hon. LD LAVARCH (Kurwongbah—ALP) (Minister for Justice and Attorney-General) (6.06 pm), in reply: I am pleased to sum up this debate. I thank the member for Caloundra and the member for Gaven for their contributions. I would like to conclude by highlighting the more significant aspects of this bill. The bill implements the outstanding government endorsed legislative recommendations made by the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee in its March 2004 report on its three-year review of the Crime and Misconduct Commission. The most significant of these outstanding recommendations are those concerning the Crime and Misconduct Commission’s witness protection function; namely, the power to issue notices to produce and discover and the ability to enter into short-term protection agreements.

I want to use this opportunity to inform the House of a revision of the government’s response to recommendations 4, 6 and 7 of the PCMC report. These recommendations supported devolution of the CMC’s misconduct function to agencies, provided that the Department of the Premier and Cabinet had a primary role in monitoring those agencies’ capacity and performance in dealing with and preventing misconduct. In its response to the PCMC report tabled on 10 September 2004, the government indicated that it would require directors-general to provide annual reports to the Premier on those matters. For the purposes of transparency, those reports would then be provided to parliament annually. Given the unnecessary administrative burden that would be placed on the Premier in collating and reporting that information to parliament, directors-general have been asked to provide that information in their annual reports.

This bill also makes a number of other amendments unrelated to the PCMC report. They include allowing an assistant commissioner to conduct public hearings if the chairperson considers that it is necessary for the efficient operation of the CMC and extending the tenure of senior officers and assistant commissioners.

I foreshadow that during the consideration in detail stage of the bill I will be introducing amendments which clarify clauses 6 and 10 of the amendment bill and also introducing amendments to the corrective services legislation, which was recently passed by this parliament, and some consequential amendments to other pieces of legislation, as well as amendments to the Electoral Act and consequential amendments to other acts in relation to changes made in the Commonwealth parliament to the Electoral Act. I thank all members for their support and contributions to the debate. I commend the bill to the House.

Question put—That the bill be now read a second time.
Motion agreed to.

Consideration in Detail

Clause 1, as read, agreed to.
Clause 2 (Commencement)—

Mrs LAVARCH (6.10 pm): I move the following amendment—

1 Clause 2 (Commencement)—
At page 6, line 7, after ‘on’—

omit, insert—

‘the date of assent.’.

Amendment agreed to.
Clause 2, as amended, agreed to.
Clauses 3 to 5, as read, agreed to.
Clause 6 (Insertion of new ch 3, pt 1, div 2A)—
Mrs LAVARCH (6.10 pm): I move the following amendment—

2 Clause 6 (Insertion of new ch 3, pt 1, div 2A)—

At page 8, lines 25 and 26, from ‘believes’ to ‘investigation.’—

omit, insert—

‘believes, on reasonable grounds, is—

(a) in the witness’s possession; and

(b) relevant to the investigation.’.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 6, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 7 to 9, as read, agreed to.

Clause 10 (Amendment of s 178 (Who must conduct hearings))—

Mrs LAVARCH (6.11 pm): I move the following amendments—

3 Clause 10 (Amendment of s 178 (Who must conduct hearings))—

At page 12, line 19, ‘the public’—

omit, insert—

‘a public’.

4 Clause 10 (Amendment of s 178 (Who must conduct hearings))—

At page 12, line 21—

omit, insert—

‘chairperson.

‘(2A) More than 1 public hearing may be conducted at the same time.’.’.

Amendments agreed to.

Clause 10, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 11 to 19, as read, agreed to.

Clause 20—

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (6.11 pm): I want to speak to this clause because of all the clauses in the bill this is the one that I have the most misgivings about to the extent that when the original CJC was instituted there were very careful protections put in place to ensure that the objectivity of the CMC, or the CJC at the time, was maintained and that the individuality and independence of the senior commissioners and senior officers was also maintained by a regular turnover. This particular clause allows for an extension of the tenure of those senior officers to 10 years, with the potential to extend that to 15 years in total.

In a number of the reports that the CMC and the previous PCMCs have produced there has been discussion about the difficulties in filling senior positions and the need to extend the tenure of senior officers. I believe that this ability to change the period of tenure should in no way undermine or preclude proper succession planning. I believe that if that planning is done in relation to long range goals for employment and the type of people who should be employed and their skills and abilities then we should not be back looking at these types of tenure issues again.

I believe that those who established the original CJC, which rolled into the CMC after a couple of evolutions, had those protections in place for very good, valid and sound reasons and that it is incumbent on us to ensure that those protections are maintained. Whilst I acknowledge that this extension has taken place, it should in no way stop succession planning and we should be cognisant of the need to retain the principles that were first espoused for the CJC. Given the very intrusive powers of the organisation on people’s rights and liberties, the people in those positions who have such inordinate and extensive powers, yet are fairly isolated from the general operation of the Police Service and the other services that are very much open to public scrutiny, have to be scrutinised, and part of that scrutiny was the tenure regime. I just wanted to put those concerns on the record.

Mrs LAVARCH: I say to the member for Gladstone that I very much appreciate the reservations and concerns that she has expressed, as have many other members of this parliament, in relation to extending the tenure of the assistant commissioners and senior officers of the CMC. As the member has stated, there are reasons that have emerged in recent years as to why the tenure is being extended from eight years to 10 years—that is, to retain senior officers at the CMC.

This amendment to the CMC Act also provides that the term of 10 years can be extended to 15 years in certain circumstances. The new section 247A does oblige the chairperson to give the PCMC notice of any extension beyond 10 years. We did look at whether the PCMC should have to give its approval to that extension of time. However, that would place the PCMC in a position that I do not think any member of this parliament would want to be placed in—making a decision about whether someone’s term of employment should be extended. What the amendment does require is that the chair
give notice of that extension and, of course, the PCMC can monitor whether that provision for extension is used extensively and if the PCMC has concerns then that is something that can be raised in the three yearly reviews. So members of the parliamentary committee can monitor the use of that extended time.

In relation to the issues raised about the strategies for succession planning, I can inform the House that I am advised that the workforce management plan 2005-09 has been endorsed by the commission. This plan sets out the framework for a range of strategies focused on attracting and retaining experienced staff, succession planning and enhancement of management competency throughout the organisation. Incumbents of the 12 positions identified as the most critical for succession planning purposes have completed a succession management capabilities questionnaire. One of the outcomes of this process to date has been the development of a draft capabilities framework, which will assist in effective recruitment for these positions when required and in the provision of appropriate learning and developmental activities for existing staff.

I can also inform the House that I am advised that a succession management process has been endorsed by the commission’s strategic management group. It was endorsed back in August 2005. The process includes determining key positions, forecasting potential shortages, identifying feeder positions for the key positions, identifying the capabilities required for effectiveness and high performance in key roles, determining what gaps exist and how to fill the gaps between the capabilities required for effectiveness in the key positions and the capabilities of employees in the feeder group. I hope that answers the questions of the member for Gladstone.

Clause 20, as read, agreed to.
Clauses 21 to 35, as read, agreed to.

Mrs LAVARCH: I table the explanatory notes to the amendments to the bill.

Tabled paper: Explanatory notes to Mrs Lavarch’s amendments to the Crime and Misconduct and Other Legislation Amendment Bill.

Insertion of new clause—

Mrs LAVARCH (6.19 pm): I move the following amendment—

5 After clause 35—

At page 24, after line 22—

insert—

’Part 2A Amendment of Corrective Services Act 2006’

’35A Act amended in pt 2A’

’This part amends the Corrective Services Act 2006.’

’35B Amendment of s 497 (Insertion of new pt 9, div 3)’

’(1) Section 497, new section 160—

insert—

‘impose, a term of imprisonment on an offender for an offence, includes make an order that the offender serve the whole or part of suspended imprisonment for the offence.’

’(2) Section 497, new section 160, definition period of imprisonment, as a note—

insert—

‘Note—

Period of imprisonment therefore includes the term of imprisonment a court is imposing at the time of sentence.’.

’(3) Section 497, new section 160A(2), as a note—

insert—

‘Note—

Sections 160E to 160H further provide for the orders that may be made under sections 160B to 160D.’.

’(4) Section 497, new section 160B(1), ‘apply’—

omitted, insert—

‘applies’.

’(5) Section 497, new section 160H(1)(b), ‘under this part’—

omitted, insert—

‘under this division’.

’(6) Section 497, new section 160H(2), ‘under this part’—

omitted, insert—

‘under this division’.

’(7) Section 497, new section 160H(2), example, after ‘period of imprisonment’—

insert—

‘which must not be a date earlier in time than a parole release date notionally fixed under any of the previous orders the court would, apart from this section, be required to make’.
'Part 2B Amendment of Electoral Act 1992

'35C Act amended in pt 2B

'This part amends the Electoral Act 1992.

'35D Amendment of s 3 (Definitions)

'Section 3, definition institution, paragraph (f)—

omit.

'35E Amendment of s 58 (Commission to keep electoral rolls)

'(1) Section 58—

insert—

'(6A) Also, to enable the commission to decide the persons who are not entitled to vote because of section 101(3), the commission may ask the chief executive (corrective services) to give the commission information about persons who are serving sentences of imprisonment for offences against the law of the Commonwealth or of a State or Territory.'.

'(2) Section 58(7), after ‘entity’—

insert—

‘or chief executive (corrective services)’.

'35F Amendment of s 64 (Entitlement to enrolment)

'Section 64(5)—

omit.

'35G Amendment of s 101 (Who may vote)

'Section 101—

insert—

'(3) Also, a person who is serving a sentence of imprisonment is not entitled to vote at an election for an electoral district.

'(4) For subsection (3), a person is serving a sentence of imprisonment only if—

(a) the person is in detention on a full-time basis for an offence against a law of the Commonwealth or a State or Territory; and

(b) the detention is attributable to the sentence of imprisonment concerned.’.

'35H Amendment of s 105 (Who may make a declaration vote)

'(1) Section 105(2)(f)—

omit.

'(2) Section 105(2)(g)—

renumber as section 105(2)(f).

'Part 2C Amendment of Local Government Act 1993

'35I Act amended in pt 2C

'This part amends the Local Government Act 1993.

'35J Amendment of s 336 (Procedure for voting at a polling booth)

'Section 336(7)(a), '344(a), (b) or (c)—

omit, insert—

‘344(1)(a), (b), (c) or (d)’.

'35K Amendment of s 343 (Who may cast a declaration vote)

'Section 343(f)—

omit.

'35L Amendment of s 344 (Who must cast a declaration vote in ordinary elections)

'(1) Section 344(d)—

renumber as section 344(1)(e).

'(2) Section 344—

insert—

'(d) an elector who is serving a sentence of imprisonment on the cut off day for the election, but who is not serving a sentence of imprisonment on the polling day for the election;’.

'(3) Section 344—

insert—

'(2) For subsection (1)(d), a person is serving a sentence of imprisonment only if—

(a) the person is in detention on a full-time basis for an offence against a law of the Commonwealth or a State or Territory; and

(b) the detention is attributable to the sentence of imprisonment concerned.’.

'35M Amendment of s 347 (Distribution of ballot papers to other electors who may or must cast declaration vote)

'Section 347(1), ‘section 343(a) to (f)’—

omit, insert—

‘section 343(a) to (e)’.
Amendment No.5 amends the bill by inserting after clause 35 a new part 2A, new clause 35A and new clause 35B which in turn amend the Corrective Services Act 2006; a new part 2B and new clauses 35C to 35H which in turn amend the Electoral Act 1992; and a new part 2C and new clauses 35I to 35O which in turn amend the Local Government Act 1993.

New clause 35A provides that part 2A amends the Corrective Services Act 2006. Clause 35B amends section 497 of the Corrective Services Act 2006 which inserts new sections 160 to 160H into the Penalties and Sentences Act 1992 which are yet to be commenced. New clause 35B(1) amends section 497 of the Corrective Services Act 2006 by amending new section 160 of the Penalties and Sentences Act 1992 to insert a definition of ‘impose’ in the context of imposing a term of imprisonment on an offender. The definition provides that imposing a term of imprisonment includes the making of an order that either whole or part of an order for suspended imprisonment is activated. The effect of this is that the provisions of the new section 160B to section 160D of the Penalties and Sentences Act 1992 apply to cases when the court activates an existing suspended term of imprisonment. What this ultimately means is that the court is obliged to set either a parole date or is empowered to make a parole eligibility date on any such term of imprisonment.

In other words, if someone is on a suspended sentence and they are convicted of a further offence and the suspended sentence is then activated the court at that time can set a parole date as per the new provisions of the Corrective Services Act 2006. Currently the act does not make provision for this so it is required that it has the ability to do so. This amendment is required to realise the policy objectives of the new parole regime created by the Corrective Services Act 2006 which was passed on 1 June 2006.

Amendment agreed to.

Clauses 36 to 49, as read, agreed to.

Insertion of new clause—

Mrs LAVARCH (6.22 pm): I urge members to read the explanatory notes in relation to the amendments to the Electoral Act. What they, in effect, will do is bring us into line with the Commonwealth act which allows prisoners to enrol to vote but if they are in a correction centre at the time of the election on the polling day then they are not eligible to cast a vote. I move the following amendment—

6 After clause 49—

At page 32, after line 10—

insert—

‘49A Amendment of s 408 (Who may inspect CMC’s register)’

‘Section 408(a), as numbered before the commencement of section 459A of the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000—

omit, insert—

‘(a) the CMC chairperson; or’.‘.
Amendment agreed to.
Clause 50, as read, agreed to.

Insertion of new clauses—

Mrs LAVARCH (6.23 pm): I move the following amendment—

7 After clause 50—

At page 32, after line 12—

insert—

*Part 4A Amendment of Referendums Act 1997

*50A Act amended in pt 4A

This part amends the Referendums Act 1997.

*50B Amendment of s 21 (Who may vote)

'Section 21—

insert—

'(3) Also, a person who is serving a sentence of imprisonment is not entitled to vote at a referendum.

'(4) For subsection (3), a person is serving a sentence of imprisonment only if—

(a) the person is in detention on a full-time basis for an offence against a law of the Commonwealth or a State or Territory; and

(b) the detention is attributable to the sentence of imprisonment concerned.

'(5) To enable the commission to decide the persons who are not entitled to vote because of subsection (3), the commission may ask the chief executive (corrective services) to give the commission information about persons who are serving sentences of imprisonment for offences against the law of the Commonwealth or of a State or Territory.

'(6) The chief executive (corrective services) must give the commission the information as soon as practicable after receiving the request.

'(7) Subsection (6) has effect despite the provisions of any other Act that would otherwise permit or require the chief executive (corrective services) to refuse the commission’s request.’.

*50C Amendment of s 25 (Who may make a declaration vote)

'(1) Section 25(2)(f)—

omit.

'(2) Section 25(2)(g)—

renumber as section 25(2)(f)”.

*50D Amendment of sch 3 (Dictionary)

'Schedule 3, definition institution, ‘section 3.’ and footnote—

omit, insert—

‘section 3.’.

Mrs LAVARCH: Amendment No. 7 adds new clauses 50A to 50D to provide for new part 4A which amends the Referendums Act 1997, as do the amendments to the Electoral Act 1992 contained in amendment No.5. This is consequential to those amendments to the Electoral Act in relation to eligibility to vote.

Amendment agreed to.
Clauses 51 to 61, as read, agreed to.
Schedule, as read, agreed to.

Third Reading

Question put—That the bill be now read a third time.
Motion agreed to.

Long Title

Question put—That the long title of the bill be agreed to.
Motion agreed to.

SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

Hon. LD LAVARCH (Kurwongbah—ALP) (Acting Leader of the House) (6.25 pm): I move—

That the House at its rising do adjourn until 9.30 am on Tuesday, 22 August 2006.
Motion agreed to.
ADJOURNMENT

Hon. LD LAVARCH (Kurwongbah—ALP) (Acting Leader of the House) (6.25 pm): I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

Education Queensland, EB Negotiations

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (6.25 pm): I have had a visit from people in my electorate concerned about the lack of progress on the EB negotiations with Education Queensland. I would like to table a log of claims from the QPSU.

Tabled paper: Copy of Education Queensland log of claims from Queensland Public Sector Union.

There are quite a broad range of concerns that are contained in this document. However, I wish to raise just some specific concerns related to the registrars and staff in my electorate that they felt required particular attention. At the last EB a workload management tool was supposed to have been developed and as things stand at this point in time no progress has been made on that workload management tool. I think everyone in this chamber would agree that education has been one area of government that has undergone substantial change and development. Certainly the ability to effectively and efficiently manage the workload that has been created or extended is vital.

The current allocative model in relation to human resources has not changed since 1990. The allocation of staff to manage the workload is 16 years old. I think all of us would acknowledge that the workload has changed, IT has changed and the level of maintenance for IT equipment has increased substantially. The relief policy for public servant positions is a waiting period for five days. In a school, particularly in the area of administration, that five days means that for a period of time in small schools one staff member has to carry the load of two for a week which means that a backlog of work occurs.

There are intense and growing workloads from Education Queensland changes and initiatives with no review or consideration of the existing jobs. Again that is an increase in workload without an increase in human resources. There needs to be improvement in the classification structures, in particular the progressive career structures for AO2 to AO3 and OO2 to OO3. There is a need for a review of the AO3 in larger primary schools to progress to AO4, after the last review promoted AO2 to AO3 in smaller primary schools.

They are the core issues that were of concern to registrars and others in my electorate. The QPSU log of claims contains a number of matters of concern in this growing area of government responsibility. As I said, the allocative model has not changed since 1990. It is the funding model that is used and it is vital to provide quality service to the community. This model determines whether the phones get answered, the legislation is complied with and the lawns and gardens are looked after.

Gold Coast, Health Services

Ms CROFT (Broadwater—ALP) (6.29 pm): The Gold Coast is currently growing at twice the state average. Tourists love the place and many of them decide to make a permanent move to enjoy the great lifestyle we provide. While the member for Currumbin wants to turn tourists away, the Beattie government will plan for the future. The Beattie government is committed to building a world-class tertiary hospital at Parklands. The Gold Coast will have a permanent population of 650,000 people by 2016.

Combined with the large tourist and transient population, the need for the new Gold Coast Hospital is obvious to all. The opposition, however, is confused. It is unable to provide a consistent point of view with regard to this matter. The government spent months consulting with doctors, nurses, allied and health workers, and with the wider community on the Gold Coast. The Parklands site received overwhelming support. What is the opposition’s response? The member for Gaven said that we do not have time for community consultation. Every local on the Gold Coast knows that we need a new hospital because of the space problems at the Southport site. His proposal to fix this tight squeeze is simple, he told Channel 9 news. He will cram in 200 beds and build Parklands.

He then thought further about the limited space available and told the Gold Coast Sun that the coalition would jam another 500 beds into the Southport site. However, the leader of the Liberals disagreed. He announced that he would build a 250-bed hospital at Coomera near Dreamworld. Dr Flegg wants the government to ignore the views of the Gold Coast community and the fact that no Gold Coast Hospital based clinician group supports the construction of the hospital at Coomera. The dream world he lives in does not recognise that quality, specialist staff have already indicated that they will come to a tertiary hospital co-located with the university.

Co-locating with Griffith University will present significant opportunities for collaboration between Queensland Health and Griffith staff in areas including research, teaching, provision of clinical services and development of new models of healthcare provision. This is a hard fact in a world that has a medical workforce shortage. Is there a doctor in the House on the other side who understands how to plan for
the future? Bringing back local hospital boards is the only clear policy the opposition has. This horse and buggy policy is no solution in the digital age. The Beattie government believes in the future, not dreaming about the past.

Melanoma; Grace, Mr B.

Dr FLEGG (Moggill—Lib) (6.31 pm): I met recently with some very brave, dynamic and caring young men behind the launch of www.melanoma patients.org. The concept of www.melanoma patients.org has come from Brent Grace. Brent, a young melanoma patient himself, realised that in his search for information and links, there was no central reference point on the internet for patients with melanoma. He set about establishing such a site with the support of a wide range of medical institutions and practitioners.

Her Excellency the Governor of Queensland held a reception at Government House on 6 July to launch the project. One key issue that came from that launch and about which I will be writing to the state and federal health ministers is that currently there is no central listing of melanoma research projects and clinical trials. This means that patients with melanoma are left to scramble around for information to see what trials may be underway that would be suitable for them. This is not terribly practical and in fact at times not even possible. It is not simply a matter of finding a trial but of examining the criteria for inclusion in that trial and so forth. It is also apparent that the lack of a central listing for melanoma projects and trials would be a severe handicap to researchers who may themselves not be aware of other projects being conducted around Australia.

I think when you see a courageous young person with intelligence and determination like Brent it behoves us to listen to their very valuable insights and experiences. I hope that this may lead to the setting up of a central register for melanoma research and projects at a state or national level and ultimately perhaps even at the international level.

It was quite a moving occasion to be at Government House with a group of young melanoma patients so motivated to assist other people placed in the same unfortunate circumstances as them. Obviously young patients—and melanoma tragically is a disease that often affects young patients—are the ones who often turn to the internet to look at what clinical trials may be of use, to look at what the latest research projects are and the latest information. I think I have written those letters, but I do wish Brent and his colleagues all the best as they seek to do more to assist young melanoma patients in Queensland.

Caboolture, Transport Infrastructure

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN (Pumicestone—ALP) (6.34 pm): The Caboolture area has been designated as a key metropolitan centre. It is rapidly developing as a significant growth area in business, construction and investment within the corridor north of Brisbane. Around 130,000 people now live and work in the Caboolture area. This high population growth rate is placing increased pressure on the region’s transport infrastructure. That is why the Beattie Labor government is investing a considerable amount of money into major road projects in the Caboolture area.

In 1993 the Caboolture transport study reaffirmed the need for a Caboolture bypass to remove a significant number of heavy vehicles and through traffic from the Caboolture business precinct and some residential homes. The Labor government has committed $87 million for this project and soon the Caboolture bypass will prove a vital link to improve safety and ease the movement for pedestrians, cyclists and local traffic accessing local businesses and services.

Stage 1 of the bypass was opened to traffic in July 2003. On completion of stage 2, it is estimated that 13,000 vehicles per day, with 15 per cent heavy vehicles, will use the eastern end of the bypass from the highway to access the industrial and residential areas to the north of Caboolture. This will have a significant effect on traffic volumes in Lower King Street, with a reduction of approximately 9,000 vehicles per day, of which 1,300 are commercial vehicles. Pumicestone Road will also experience a reduction of about 3,000 vehicles per day.

Stage 2 of the bypass is being constructed under three contracts, with early works on Mewett Street connection completed in May this year. The Transport and Main Roads minister, Paul Lucas, announced the awarding of the construction contract to JF Hull Holdings, which will be responsible for building the 900-metre section of road from Old Gympie Road to the east of Caboolture’s Lagoon Creek. This is a relatively short section of the bypass including a 403-metre bridge over Old Gympie Road, Caboolture Showgrounds, Beerburrum Road, the north coast rail line and Pumicestone Road, a 159-metre bridge over Lagoon Creek and a two-way, two-lane road with an interchange at Pumicestone Road. Construction on this section is to target full completion in mid-2007.

The minister also announced that work is expected to start later this month on the last construction contract for stage 2, with Leighton Contractors building the bypass connection and highway interchange connecting to the Caboolture-Bribie Island Road. This interchange upgrade is part of the federal government’s commitment under AusLink to upgrade the Bruce Highway.
Along with the Caboolture bypass progress, the state government is accommodating regional growth with the Beattie government’s South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program. It identifies a number of major arterial upgrade roads including Morayfield and Bribie Island roads. Morayfield Road is experiencing significant traffic growth. We have commenced planning and preliminary design for an initial $90 million four-lane upgrade with the provision of six lanes in the future from Uhlmann Road roundabout to east of Gaffield Street.

We are also moving forward with planning activities to duplicate the remaining two-lane section along the Caboolture-Bribie Island Road. At an estimated cost of $225 million, our focus is on the 5.5 kilometre section from Aerodrome Road to Saint Road as the highest priority area along this stretch, and we are progressing with the planning and preliminary design. With these road infrastructure projects, the Beattie Labor government is shaping the future of traffic in one of Queensland’s fastest growing regional cities.

Homelessness

Dr DOUGLAS (Gaven—NPA) (6.37 pm): I wish to rise to speak to the issue of homelessness and how it particularly affects a rapidly growing area of my electorate of Gaven. Homelessness affects all ages and families. It is a very significant issue, and it has been raised in the House in a variety of ways over previous sitting weeks. The areas that are particularly affected are both Nerang and Helensvale.

The problem we have at the moment is that we have a difficulty with placing psychiatric patients. We have a massive shortage of psychiatric beds on the Gold Coast. We are 54 beds short of what would be the statewide complement. The enormous difficulty we are having—and it is making the papers—is in placing patients who need to exit hospital who have difficult problems and whose families may not be able to look after them. Unfortunately, they are becoming indigent and homeless. This is an unacceptable outcome and something needs to be done to address the problem.

We have an excellent director of psychiatry that we gained from forensic psychiatry, Dr Bill Kingswell. He has approached this problem in a very even-handed way. He is trying to make the point of why this is especially important on the Gold Coast. There was some criticism here earlier about the issues that I raised at the Gold Coast Hospital, which is mainly about trying to clear the emergency department. That too is an urgent problem and it shows a lack of understanding by the member for Broadwater. I am very keen to talk to her about how she needs to approach this issue in a very sensible and even way and why it is not being approached in that way currently.

There are difficulties with patients accessing beds on admission, there is difficulty to discharge and we now have a health hub. Housing needs integration, appropriate funding, commitment and a prevention strategy. The funding mechanisms have been taken out of Health and we need to put them back into Health. This is an area of affluence, but it is very difficult if you are poor and indigent. The hospital needs to be able to discharge patients into serviced housing accommodation where the patients are supervised. I ask that the minister concerned seriously look at these models, particularly with regard to psychiatric patients and their special needs when it comes to homelessness.

Morayfield Road

Hon. KW HAYWARD (Kallangur—ALP) (6.40 pm): Tonight, I wish to speak on progress on the upgrading of Morayfield Road between Gaffield Road and the Bruce Highway. Morayfield Road is a major arterial road connecting the Bruce Highway to Caboolture. Local people know that the road is experiencing substantial traffic growth because of the commercial and residential development within Caboolture, Morayfield and Burpengary. The road will join the Bruce Highway at the Uhlmann Road interchange. Improvements have just been completed as part of the upgrade of the Bruce Highway to six lanes between Boundary Road and Uhlmann Road. That six-laning is a federally funded Bruce Highway project.

Community engagement is a fundamental part of this project. To that extent, the first newsletter was distributed to the public in April 2006. Its aim was to inform the local community of the project’s inception and provided opportunities for input. Meetings were held with me and the member for Pumicestone, Mrs Carryn Sullivan, adjoining residents and landowners. I found these meetings provided an opportunity for the project team to discuss current and potential issues and, if possible, fit them into the upgrade option.

The second newsletter will be distributed in September. That newsletter will detail public display locations and times showing the upgrade option. The aim will be to encourage participation at the public display to gather more community feedback. A feedback form will be inserted into the newsletter and will also be available at the public display. Staffed public displays will be held at the Morayfield Shopping Centre on 12, 14, 19 and 21 October, and static displays will be on show at my electorate office and the Caboolture Shire Council Library. These displays will be advertised in local newspapers.
When the community engagement process is completed in early 2007, proposals will be assessed and the upgrade proposal will be refined and recommended for approval. The local community will be advised of the preferred option. Between 2007 and 2008, preliminary and detailed design will be undertaken, and in 2009 construction will commence. I made a commitment to this project before the last state election and I am pleased to see that progress is well underway.

Queensland Health; Plant Harvesting

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (6.43 pm): With the revelation this morning that Queensland Health has failed the people of Mackay, I am experiencing a sense of deja vu. I have some simple advice for the victims of Labor’s Queensland Health in Mackay: do not trust what the government and the health bureaucrats are telling you to be the truth, especially what this minister and this Premier say. I have to agree with Ms Crosby when she said publicly today that people should speak out, but I disagree with her statement that Queensland should have a pretty good liaison by now. It is abysmal. The lessons we have learnt in Bundaberg are that, if this government can cover up the damage it has caused, it will.

I say this to affected people. Keep a diary of what has happened. Demand to have everything in writing and, if they will not give you the information, record, within the bounds of the law, conversations you have with bureaucrats. Get some good legal advice and, if you are not happy with it, get a second legal opinion, get a third legal opinion, get a fourth legal opinion. Demand copies of your medical records as soon as possible and make sure that they have not been fraudulently altered, as they were in Bundaberg. If you need to get a medic legal opinion, demand to see the doctor of your choice. If you need corrective surgery, demand to see the doctor of your choice. If you need to speak with a Patel victim, I can supply lists of people who would love to talk with you.

This government, through the department of environment, has changed by regulation the commercial wildlife harvesting act. This change has destroyed the business of a constituent of mine in Agnes Water, Mr Keith Nash. He has written a letter to me detailing his frustration and I table the letter.

Tabled paper: Letter, undated, from Mr Keith Nash, Director, Eldanham Pty Ltd to Mr Messenger regarding wildlife harvesting legislation changes.

Mr Nash has had to sack eight employees because of this government’s action. Mr Nash’s business was to salvage and harvest cycads and grass trees on land that was zoned white. That means that it was zoned legally and able to be cleared by primary producers. Mr Nash’s letter said—

I received a letter from EPA on 11 April (after closure of licence) to find we are no longer allowed to salvage plants which have been approved by EPA and which otherwise will be destroyed. We have had no notification or information from EPA or any other Government Department till after cancellation of licences. Our local EPA officer said he received a final print out of these new regulations in late April—well after our licence period ended.

We have been harvesting Grass Trees under salvage for in excess of 16 years.

Mr Nash is a hardworking local business person in Agnes Water. He employed eight people.

Time expired.

Member for Sandgate

Mr NUTTALL (Sandgate—ALP) (6.46 pm): This being my last speech in parliament, there are a couple of people I would like to thank. Before I do that, I want to comment on two honourable members of the opposition—the member for Burnett and the member for Cunningham. The honourable member for Burnett stands with hand on heart to talk about the victims of Dr Patel. It was a terrible thing that happened but, if the honourable member for Burnett was so concerned about the wellbeing of these good people, why did he not pick the phone up and ring me when he first found out? Why did he wait for some time to raise it in question time in parliament? He had the opportunity and should have picked the phone up and spoken to me directly. He has to live with that. His own standards and own ethics are matters for others to judge.

In relation to the member for Cunningham and the infamous estimates hearing, can I just say that the member for Cunningham has an opportunity at any stage to supply a statutory declaration declaring that there was no collusion with people within Queensland Health, declaring that he was not assisted and declaring that in some way he just happened to ask those sorts of questions off the cuff without them being organised. All good people would understand if they read the Hansard of that day the well set up, orchestrated campaign that was implemented on that day.

In closing, I want to thank all my colleagues in the Labor Party for their wonderful support during my 14 years in this parliament. It has been a great honour and privilege to serve as the member for Sandgate and to serve in the Labor government. I have been on both sides of this House and, on any given day of the week when the House is sitting, I would rather be on this side of the House. I wish all my colleagues who are retiring, including yourself, Mr Speaker, all the very best for the future. We as a government, in my view, have much to be proud of—while others criticise.
I want to particularly thank my lovely wife, Liz, my children, Lisa, Kim and Andrew, my young stepson James, and my whole family for their continued support. While it has been a difficult time in the last 12 months, one should remember the good times and the positive contributions that are made in this place by people from both sides of the House, and it is important to be generous about that. I think most of us in here work very hard. I say to each and every one of you: God bless, and thank you for a wonderful journey.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Before I call the member for Callide, can I wish you all the very best in your new life.

Beattie Labor Government, Infrastructure

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (6.49 pm): It would appear that we are coming to the end of this parliament. The predictions that we are going to go to an election next week seem to be reinforced by the valedictory speeches that we have heard here tonight. I think the people of Queensland will be pleased to see the end of this failed government, and they will get that opportunity, because this is a government that has without question failed. I wanted to talk tonight about another area in which this government has failed. We have heard a lot about the government’s failure to provide water infrastructure in south-east Queensland. We have heard a lot in this last week about the continuing failure in the state health system right across Queensland. But in regional Queensland this government has also failed to provide the sort of infrastructure that is the key responsibility of any state government.

With regard to the central Queensland area, where the coalmining industry is providing a huge economic boost to all of Queensland and indeed all of Australia, the elements that that industry needs to continue to grow and prosper have been denied to that industry because of the failure of this government to provide that sort of infrastructure. There has been no water infrastructure, for example, provided in central Queensland. I have stood in this House many times and spoken about the necessity for the Nathan Dam to be built. We have in recent weeks seen an announcement by a private consortium to build the missing link in the railway between Miles and Banana, and that will allow the opening up of the coal deposits in the Surat Basin. But unless there is a water supply provided, unless we get the Nathan Dam constructed to provide the water supply that is the other essential element for that industry to grow and prosper, then those opportunities will be denied to the people of Queensland.

Further north in the Bowen Basin there is a great need for the Connors River Dam to be constructed. Nothing has been heard from this government on that type of infrastructure. It has consistently failed to even begin to provide that infrastructure, just as it has failed to provide the infrastructure here in south-east Queensland. I am sure that in the election, that it looks almost inevitable that we are going to have, those will be the issues that the people of Queensland will need to weigh up—the extent to which this government has failed to provide that sort of essential infrastructure as well as the roads infrastructure and all of the other necessary infrastructure that has been a hallmark of the failure of this government. This government has survived on the good work that was done by previous coalition governments, and the time for it to enjoy the benefits is now over.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Callide, I wish you all of the best, too.

Construction Industry, The Frook

Mr WALLACE (Thuringowa—ALP) (6.52 pm): We all know that Queensland is the Smart State, and today I want to speak about two smart blokes and a smart invention. Ken Jaffers and Peter Stevens have invented a product called the frook—f-r-o-o-k.

Mr Finn interjected.

Mr WALLACE: I take the member for Yeerongpilly’s interjection about what it means, and, Mr Speaker, I ask for your leniency here. Both Ken and Peter are tough old builders, so they invented this product called the frook. What the ‘f’ stands for I cannot really say in this House, but the ‘r’ stands for reliable and ‘ook’ stands for hook. So it stands for an effing reliable hook.

A frook is a re-useable temporary bracing and spacer tool for use during the erection of roof trusses. This is the most dangerous part of building a house—the erection of the roof trusses. Last week I had the pleasure of nationally launching the frook for both Ken and Peter in Thuringowa. They believe they have a market worth millions and millions of dollars, not only in Australia but across the United States and Canada. They recently appeared on the ABC show The New Inventors and won a prize. It just goes to show how valuable this invention is. But I would encourage all members here to get on to the builders in their area and recommend that they look at the frook. More information can be found at www.frook.biz. I will just have to repeat that the frook—it stands for the effing reliable hook—is a great invention for a great state.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Stafford, one minute.
Member for Stafford

Mr TERRY SULLIVAN (Stafford—ALP) (6.54 pm): This could well be my last speech as a member of the Queensland parliament, and I wish to thank a number of people who have supported me over the past 15 years and three months. I thank the Australian Labor Party, its party officials and especially local branch members. I thank Stirling Hinchliffe, who I am certain will follow me into this House as the member for Stafford. I thank my electorate office staff, currently Eileen, Sue and Michael, and especially Heather Bingham, who have worked so hard to assist my constituents and branch members. I thank my parliamentary colleagues, particularly my Labor colleagues who have been so wise in their counsel. Most of all, I want to thank my wife, Trish Bartlett, and my children Katie, James, Daniel, Dominic and Patrick. They have paid a heavy price for the benefits of my being a member of parliament. Can I say to Trish and my children: I love you very much and I thank you for everything you have done to support me.

Mr SPEAKER: And likewise, member for Stafford: all the very best in the future.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 6.55 pm.

ATTENDANCE