

THURSDAY, 21 JULY 2011

ESTIMATES—COMMUNITY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE—MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS QUEENSLAND

Estimates Committee Members

Mr PA Hoolihan (Chair)

Mr MW Choi

Mr PJ Dowling

Mr AP McLindon

Mr JD O'Brien

Ms FS Simpson

In Attendance

Hon. A Palaszczuk, Minister for Transport and Multicultural Affairs

Department of Communities

Ms L Apelt, Director-General

Mr G Page, Executive Director, Multicultural Affairs Queensland

Committee met at 9.00 am

 **CHAIR:** Good morning everyone. It is nine o'clock and our estimates hearing is due to start. I declare this hearing of the Community Affairs Committee now open. At the outset I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting today. On behalf of the committee I welcome Minister Palaszczuk, departmental officers, Ms Apelt and Mr Page, and other departmental officers and members of the public to the hearing.

I would like to introduce the members of the committee. I am Paul Hoolihan. I am the member for Keppel and chair of the committee. Miss Fiona Simpson, the member for Maroochydore, is deputy chair. The other committee members are Mr Michael Choi, the member for Capalaba; Mr Peter Dowling, the member for Redlands; Mr Jason O'Brien, the member for Cook; and Mr Aidan McLindon, the member for Beaudesert. We have non-committee members who have been given leave to ask questions during the hearing today. In that regard at this point we have Mr Scott Emerson, the member for Indooroopilly.

In relation to media coverage, the committee has resolved to allow television coverage and photography during the hearing. We have also agreed to the live broadcast of the hearing via the Parliamentary Service's website and to receivers throughout the parliamentary precinct.

The committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2011 for the portfolios of the Minister for Transport and Multicultural Affairs, but specifically Multicultural Affairs; the Minister for Disability Services, Mental Health and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partnerships and responsible areas within that; the Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women; and the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport. We will examine the estimates in that order.

The proceedings today are lawful proceedings subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. As such I remind all visitors that any person admitted to this hearing may be excluded in accordance with standing 208. The committee will suspend proceedings for the following breaks: 11 am to 11.15 am, 12.45 pm to 1.30 pm, 3.00 pm to 3.15 pm and 4.30 pm to 5.00 pm. I would ask that all mobile phones or pagers be either switched off or switched to silent mode.

For the benefit of Hansard, I would ask departmental officers to identify themselves before answering a question referred to them by the minister. I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Transport and Multicultural Affairs open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

As I have indicated, welcome Minister Palaszczuk. If you wish you may make an opening statement. The committee has asked that opening statements be no longer than three minutes.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Sure. Thank you very much, Chair. Multiculturalism means many things to many people. In today's world it is not just a commitment to Queensland and Australia through citizenship but it is also about being treated fairly, with mutual respect and understanding regardless of our cultural, religious, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds and that we can express and promote our cultures within our shared laws, values aspirations and responsibilities. I am pleased to announce to the committee that earlier this week—on Tuesday, 19 July—the Premier and I launched the new Queensland multicultural policy, A multicultural future for all of us. The Queensland government has invested significant time and resources into making sure that this policy has built on the implementation and review of the previous multicultural policy. We held 31 community forums across our state and met with over 1,000 people. Many community leaders and their organisations also provided valuable contributions to help shape this new plan.

Today, one in six Queenslanders were born overseas. In fact, in the past 12 months—from 31 December 2010—more than 41 per cent of our population growth here in Queensland was the result of overseas migration. Skilled migrants arriving in Queensland are predominantly from India, China, the UK, South Africa, the Philippines and Malaysia. Our new and emerging communities in Queensland are from Burma, Iraq and Afghanistan, not to mention the Nepalese community now settling in and around Cairns. Managing and supporting this population growth positively is a key focal point for the Queensland government.

The new policy outlines how Queensland can continue to meet the challenges and derive benefits from our increasingly diverse population. In order to implement this new policy funding for Multicultural Affairs Queensland will be increased by \$500,000. This funding is over and above that published in the Multicultural Affairs section of the SDS. This funding will be used to support programs and activities announced in the new Queensland multicultural policy, including a \$200,000 increase to bring funding for the multicultural assistance grants round up to a record \$1 million. This additional funding will mean that even more organisations will be able to showcase their cultural traditions and celebrate their heritage with Queenslanders of all backgrounds. Developing this policy has been about cementing Queensland's position as a welcoming and inclusive place for people of all cultural and linguistic backgrounds and religious beliefs. In addition to the announcement of the new multicultural policy the Queensland government's Language Services Policy has been updated. This updated policy provides departments with a set of best practice guidelines for providing language services to Queenslanders who have difficulty communicating in English.

To cap off an extraordinary week, I am also pleased to announce today to the committee here that nominations for the Queensland Multicultural Awards are now open. This year's awards are offered across six categories: outstanding volunteer, community organisation, private enterprise, public sector, education and media. The ceremony will take place in early November and I encourage all interested Queenslanders to nominate. On a final note, the 2011 Queensland Multicultural Festival will be held on Sunday, 16 October. This is one of the Queensland government's signature events and I look forward to it being bigger and better than previous years.

CHAIR: Thank you, minister. We will now commence questioning. I call the member for Indooroopilly.

Mr EMERSON: My first question is to the director-general. In this year's budget there is a significant underspend for Multicultural Affairs Queensland—from a target of \$9.3 million in 2010-11 to an actual spend of \$8.2 million. Why was that?

Ms Apelt: In fact, the budget documents do not represent an underspend. What we see behind those budget figures that are carried over between 2009-10 and 2010-11 is that there is a shared service arrangement with the corporate service costs for the Department of Communities. Those costs are apportioned across each of the different service areas. Of course, with any corporate apportionment it is not exactly a precise science at the time that the SDS is put together but, as the year progresses, budget adjustments are made accordingly. So there has been no underspend in the program or policy or service delivery dollars for Multicultural Affairs Queensland but there has been a distribution of the corporate apportionment costs for the Department of Communities.

Mr EMERSON: So \$9.2 million or \$9.3 million was spent somewhere; is that what you are saying?

Ms Apelt: Absolutely.

Mr EMERSON: So in terms of that \$8.2 million, when we get to 2011-2012 for the target for the current financial year, as dealing with this budget, it has gone down to \$8 million. So why is it continuing to fall?

Ms Apelt: The explanation for the budget variation is that the program dollars remain constant. As the minister has indicated, there is a post-budget adjustment of \$500,000. So that takes the revised budget up \$8.532 million. Some of the carryover funds through some of the grants program have already been spent. So we now have the budget back to the zero base.

Mr EMERSON: I think that is referring to the deferrals you have mentioned in the note there. So the deferrals would have gone into the spending for the current year; is that correct?

Ms Apelt: Deferrals, as you would appreciate with any grants program, are a very typical part of any cash management of a budget. So what you will see in the budget from year to year, there is a proportion for deferrals where a budget allocation has been made—typically grants to non-government organisations—and by the time the grant agreement is signed sometimes some of that money actually defers over into the next financial year.

Mr EMERSON: I appreciate that.

Ms Apelt: So that money is committed and the money is spent.

Mr EMERSON: Sure. My concern is that when you look at these budget figures, even if you take in the fact of the deferrals, the deferrals should show up if they are deferred to the next year into the next year's budget and target and spending. What I am not seeing here is that occurring or, if they are, it is not clear from the numbers. What we see here is that the target spending for 2010-11 was \$9.3 million and then the actual was \$8.25 million. Fair enough. If you deferred them—there was an underspend or deferral of those grants as you say—that extra money should be appearing in this year's budget. But what we see is that it is down to \$8 million. So the extra money deferred from the last year underspend—or not spent—should have been appearing in this budget. But, in fact, what we are seeing here is a further decline in the target spending.

Ms Apelt: No. I am very happy to provide a more detailed briefing of the budget figures, if that is helpful. There has not been a decline in the actual program budget. In fact, the revised budget has increased by \$500,000. I think it is also important to put this budget spend for Multicultural Affairs Queensland in proportion with the whole-of-government spend for Multicultural Affairs Queensland, which is in the order of \$80 million. So in terms of what you are referring to as the decrease from the 2010-11 budget to the 2011-12 estimate, this is primarily due to no expected Commonwealth funding in 2011-12, which previously had been in the order of \$0.036 million.

Mr EMERSON: I am looking at the state contribution, not the overall cost. So when I look at the state contribution, which excludes the federal numbers, I am referring to that state contribution. The federal numbers have no relevance to what the answer is here. The state contribution is the one in the budget figures here. I am not talking about something that the government may have done subsequent to these figures; I am talking about what the government did and in these figures here it shows a continual fall.

Ms Apelt: I think, as I mentioned earlier, when you have a department like the Department of Communities, which is the whole entity, Multicultural Affairs Queensland, which has a full-time equivalent staff of 33, is quite a small proportion of the overall resource allocation for the Department of Communities. So Multicultural Affairs Queensland does make a contribution to the shared services arrangement for corporate support across the agency. So the balancing item in each of the carryover figures from year to year tends to be the corporate apportionment and that is what you are seeing here as being the balancing item. The actual program dollars, I need to reiterate—the program dollars, the grants program, the money going out to the communities for service delivery—has not decreased.

Mr EMERSON: Even if you take out the corporate side of things here, again, that target estimate figure would include—and correct me here—the deferred grants from last year. So what you had not spend last year for grants would be included in this figure; is that correct?

Ms Apelt: That is typically the case, but I think you will find in this instance the deferrals for grants from last year is actually very small compared with previous years.

Mr EMERSON: And how much was that?

Ms Apelt: I can get those figures for you.

Mr EMERSON: Why were they deferred?

Ms Apelt: Why were they deferred? The experience of working with the allocation of grants to primarily not-for-profit organisations is that many of these organisations are very small organisations that do not have a lot of resourcing themselves. In order to be able to finish a funding agreement and

negotiate the finer details of the grant sometimes that takes some time for a number of organisations. We respect that, and appreciate that some organisations are less equipped than others in order to finalise a grant, and therefore we keep the grant within the budget, we carry it over, and we allocate it when the organisation is ready to receive it. That is not an unusual situation.

Mr EMERSON: The budget also shows as a new measure the \$1.8 million to \$2 million on translation and interpreter services.

Ms Apelt: Yes.

Mr EMERSON: This is a question on notice. The total amount expended on interpreting and translation services in 2010-11 was \$2.16 million. So is this new measure in addition to that or is this a rearrangement of those figures?

Ms Apelt: This is a new measure.

Mr EMERSON: I appreciate that, but the question was whether this is in addition.

CHAIR: I would ask the member to ensure that the person being asked the question is allowed to answer the question before you interrupt, please.

Mr EMERSON: Certainly, Mr Chair.

Ms Apelt: The purpose of the new measure is so that we get a true picture of what the overall spend is for interpreter and translation services for government. For example, the Queensland Health alone spends \$5.1 million in interpreter and translation services. The previous way of capturing this data was not getting a full picture. So while the Department of Communities contributes \$2.16 million for interpreter and translation services, the new measure will also capture the spend from other government organisations which is in the order of \$9.68 million. The new measure really will provide greater transparency for the public on what the overall government spend is.

Mr EMERSON: That is fine, but the question I am asking here is is this additional money or is this just a new way of looking at what money is being spent?

Ms Apelt: It is a more accurate way of capturing the actual spend for interpreter and translation services by government.

Mr EMERSON: The figure here, and it is not particularly precise because it says \$1.8 million to \$2 million, seems a pretty broad figure.

Ms Apelt: Yes.

Mr EMERSON: But even in that case, the only figures the department has given us in questions on notice say that in 2010-11 the total amount expended was \$2.16 million. So that is a cut of at least \$160,000. Why has that occurred?

Ms Apelt: I think you need to appreciate the way the interpreter and translation spend happens. It is a demand driven expense. Each year we make an estimation of what we think the demand might be. But, of course, when you look at a department the size of Health, for example, the demand for translation and interpreter services will go up and down according to what the demand is within that portfolio. As we know with the document, it is a budget estimates document, and so interpreter and translation services is a very good example of where an estimation is made pre budget and then adjustments are made post budget based on the actuals.

Mr EMERSON: Can I turn to the minister then. Minister, you have just heard how this budget is about estimating what the spend will be in the coming year. Just this week you have announced an extra half a million dollars recurring.

Ms PALASZCZUK: That's correct.

Mr EMERSON: Given the fact that it is only four weeks or so since the budget when you announced what you expect to spend in 2011-12, why suddenly are you announcing another half a million dollars? Four weeks after you have put that forward to this place and to this committee which is scrutinising the government's spending, why are you suddenly putting another half a million dollars up?

Ms PALASZCZUK: Because we have just announced a new multicultural policy. The Department of Communities is a huge organisation. As the director-general has indicated to you, Multicultural Affairs Queensland has a budget of around \$8 million estimated for 2011-12. There is an extra \$500,000 now, as part of our new multicultural policy, which now takes that budget up to \$8.532 million. I need to put this in context. I think you have lost sight of the fact that the whole-of-government spend for Multicultural Affairs is over \$80 million. It is an increase of some 20 to 30 per cent from previous years. This government's commitment to Multicultural Affairs is significant. I find it quite ironic today that you have asked me one question about the whole Multicultural Affairs budget. You have not asked any questions about the Multicultural Affairs policy. I am more than happy to advise the committee about what the additional \$500,000 will be spent on as part of the policy.

I announced in the opening statement that \$200,000 would basically be for increasing our grants. As the director-general said, our money goes out for grants to a whole lot of community organisations. We have been able to continually increase the number of organisations that benefit from these grants. There were 127 people who applied last year; 125 people have expended that money. They also provide reports to the department and the department has the opportunity to analyse the reports to make sure that the money was spent in accordance with their funding agreements. We are also expending \$100,000 for the Migration Heritage Partnership Initiative and \$50,000 for interpreter scholarships. This is really important. This is for our new and emerging communities. This is to make sure that we have people for those new and emerging communities who can use their knowledge and skills to provide assistance to those people most in need. Then we also have a remaining \$150,000 to further implement the new multicultural policy throughout the state.

I just want to congratulate the department. I want to congratulate the director-general and the head of Multicultural Affairs Queensland, Michael Hogan, and also Garry Page. They have been working tirelessly on this policy. The policy has been very, very well received by the community. In fact, Chair, it might be worthwhile for me just to highlight what the peak organisation, the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland, said about this policy. I am quite sure the shadow minister might be interested to know. We still have not heard what the opposition thinks about the Multicultural Affairs policy. There is still silence. It has been out there for a couple of days. We are still yet to hear what you say about it.

Mr EMERSON: I can tell you, Minister, since you are asking me a question now. I am happy to answer that if you like.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Happy to know whether or not you support it.

CHAIR: We are not hear to argue the point. The minister is making a point.

Mr EMERSON: I thought she was encouraging me to answer the question.

CHAIR: Member for Indooroopilly, please do not talk over the top of me. You are here by leave of this committee and you can be asked to leave by this committee. Minister, I did have a question, but you have foreshadowed parts of that so I will allow you to continue with that answer.

Ms PALASZCZUK: I just wanted to point out to the committee what the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland said. The peak body came out and said, in relation to Queensland's new multicultural policy, that it was 'the greatest single initiative by any Queensland government since the launch of Australia's very first multicultural policy nearly 40 years ago'. That is the what the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland, the peak body, has said. Also we had comments from QCROSS in relation to our new multicultural policy. QCROSS president, Karyn Walsh, stated—

It is particularly encouraging that the policy includes a whole-of-government multicultural action plan,

She further stated—

This renewed commitment to multiculturalism is important—as is the increase in funding to community groups and the move to recognise multicultural Queenslanders through specific legislation,

I just wanted to say to the chair that Multicultural Affairs Queensland, as the director-general said, is a small branch. There are about 33 people. They do amazing work right across the spectrum. But this again does not reflect the fact that over \$80 million is being spent by the Queensland government on multicultural services right across this state.

CHAIR: The question from me related to the policy which you mentioned in your opening statement. It was mentioned in the SDS at 3-6 that consultation was continuing. Could you give us some of the highlights of the policy and how that will be implemented?

Ms PALASZCZUK: I just wanted to say, too, that the consultation was very well attended throughout the state. We were able to hold over 30 forums right across Queensland. I was able to attend many of these forums personally to hear what communities had to say. Also we had over 1,000 people attend or provide submissions. We also had the peak community groups as well provide their input about what they wanted to see. What we have been able to do is to respond. What we are seeing is that people are settling and embracing multiculturalism right across this state.

Many, many years ago the main settlement areas were in South-East Queensland, but what we are now seeing is a vibrant culture now emerging right across the state. I know this because I have actually witnessed this firsthand. We are seeing, for example, as I said to you, the Nepalese community settling in around Cairns. We are also seeing growth in settlements in Townsville and also growth in settlements in Mackay. This is a document and a policy that responds to the needs of those communities right across the state. As part of the multicultural policy, the government has made a firm commitment that there will be multicultural recognition legislation as well. This is very important. This is something that came across very loud and very clear from the groups that we consulted.

I went through and outlined the extra money for the grants programs which means that more and more groups will be able to benefit. I also mentioned the partnerships we are going to have with the State Library and the Queensland Museum, as well as those interpreter services. This is about providing a response for service delivery right across the state as well in the areas where people need it the most in terms of employment and accessing the skills that they need to gain a job. For example, the Department of Employment and Training spends around \$10 million a year trying to get people those skills that they need to access a job. In education we are making sure that people have the skills that they need for language. Then we also have Health. We need to make sure that people do have access to health services.

As the director-general said, there is a very, very strong commitment in terms of making sure that people have access to translation and interpreter services. We have also announced a renewed language services policy which is part of the multicultural future for all of us. We also have clear action plans. As part of our recognition legislation, departments will be required to provide updates on how they are implementing multicultural affairs in their specific agencies.

CHAIR: That answers the following question that I had. I understand the member for Cook has a question in relation to that action plan.

Mr O'BRIEN: I do. I want to ask you a general question and then a specific question if I get time. I do want to know what contribution the Department of Transport makes to the whole-of-government multicultural policy action plan.

Ms PALASZCZUK: That is also very important. As I mentioned, employment is very important; they need the education and skills. Health is very important, but also transport. The public transport system is very, very important for people who are settling in our country, settling in Queensland, to try to get around to the different things they need to do, whether that is shopping or to go for jobs. What Transport has been able to do in particular is to ensure that, for example, with our TransLink website, that it is in different languages so that people are actually able to get the information they need from the website. In relation to Queensland Rail, it has a great program where their staff who can speak another language have that identifiable on their shirts. That is going to be very, very helpful.

The department is also making sure that with the rollout of new Queensland driver's licences that that is in different languages as well to assist people. Also, for example, the Mackay City Council, as part of our grants program, are able to run a safe driving initiative program partnering with TAFE Queensland. We are very committed to making sure that we have in transport areas information available in different languages. As I said previously, that is also central to our multicultural policy.

Mr O'BRIEN: This is, in fact, a specific question that I wanted to raise with you. I was going to write to you about this but since we are here today I thought I might as well raise it. I had two constituents approach me, John and Thongmai Gibbon, who gave some positive feedback about the website and the Department of Transport's foreign language licensing instruction that is on the website, but what they have said is that the Thai language is not a language that is yet available on the website. I just hope that you take that feedback on board. I was going to write to you about that. There is a growing Thai population in Queensland. I would hope that in the future the Thai language will be a language that you would be able to rollout on the website as well.

Ms PALASZCZUK: I think that is a very good point and that is also what we need to do. I am very committed to listening to what the community is saying and if there is a need for a particular language we will provide that. Thank you very much for raising that with me. We will ensure that we get that up on our website.

Mr O'BRIEN: Minister, can you quickly tell us about what your department has done with the community's response following the recent flooding?

Ms PALASZCZUK: I thank all of the multicultural communities that assisted during the summer of floods and cyclone. I make special mention of the Department of Communities, which was able to put out information in different languages to people in need. That was very important with the cyclone happening up north, especially around the Cairns and Townsville region, where it was needed most. In terms of the recovery, the Department of Communities has made a very conscious effort to make sure that, with our community recovery efforts, there has been translation into different languages. My thanks to Director-General Linda Apelt.

CHAIR: The time allocated for the consideration of the estimates of expenditure in the portfolio of the Minister for Transport and Multicultural Affairs has expired. I thank you for your attendance. I hope that your director-general mends quickly.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Thank you.

CHAIR: There will be a short break for the changeover from the Minister for Transport to the Minister for Disability Services, Mental Health and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships.

ESTIMATES—COMMUNITY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE—FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES COMMISSION AND ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLAND SERVICES

In Attendance

Hon. CW Pitt, Minister for Disability Services, Mental Health and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships

Department of Communities

Ms L Apelt, Director-General

Mr T Hayes, Associate Director-General, Regional Service Delivery Operations

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

Mr J Marsh, Assistant Chief Finance Officer

Family Responsibilities Commission

Mr R Curtin, Commissioner (Acting)



CHAIR: Welcome, Minister and senior officers who are appearing today. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Disability Services, Mental Health and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

I remind all of those participating in the hearing today that these proceedings are similar to parliament to the extent that the public cannot participate in the proceedings. In this regard, I remind members of the public that under the standing orders the public may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. I ask that all mobile phones and pagers be either switched off or switched to silent mode. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask departmental officers to identify themselves before answering a question referred to them by the minister.

I welcome the minister, the Hon. Curtis Pitt. If you wish, you may make an opening statement. The committee has asked that opening statements be no longer than three minutes.

Mr PITT: Thank you, Mr Chair. Firstly, I respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today, the Turrbal people to the north of the Brisbane River and the Jagera people to the south of the river, and elders past and present.

The partnership between the Queensland government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders is absolutely vital. We share a common goal: to build stronger and more resilient communities that will stand up to the scrutiny of future generations. I could speak of the billions of dollars that are being invested into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, but it is not about figures; it is about people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will tell you that they want a hand up, not a handout. That is why we are working hard to build better homes, create economic opportunities and improve health outcomes.

Our programs are working. Earlier this year, the ABC's *Four Corners* highlighted changes that have taken place over time in Aurukun. It showed how our groundbreaking programs have helped turn the community around. School attendance is up and levels of violence are down. Aurukun was held up as a beacon of hope, an example of what can be achieved when people embrace reform with courage and conviction.

In May, I chaired the first round-table meeting of Indigenous mayors in Cherbourg. This government is committed to the round-table process. It is about full, frank and fearless discussion with elected representatives speaking on behalf of their communities and no beating around the bush.

There is a range of exciting employment opportunities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Queensland, untapped potential and possible future partnerships between councils and the resources industry. We need to grasp every single opportunity that is out there and work with communities, councils and industry so that we can create real job opportunities, bring skills to the table and offer young people hope for the future.

Closing the gap is not a simple task. It is all too easy to get caught up in the targets, the ambitions and the statistics. Closing the gap is not about the change in numbers; it is about people. It is about young people who know that education is the key and who are keen to open the door to a world of learning. We want to get in early and engage with children and young people, encourage healthy and active lifestyles and provide opportunities that will see them on the right path. We want to get at-risk kids into jobs, to strike up partnerships with mining, construction and tourism companies. We want to get back to basics.

Today I will launch our latest strategy aimed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders living in urban and regional centres. Called LEAP—Learning Earning Active Place—it is a grassroots call to action. It is all about community based actions to help close the gap. I want all Queenslanders to get behind LEAP—young and old, city and country, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders and non-Indigenous Queenslanders. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I remind honourable members of standing order 117 in relation to restrictions on questions that name at-risk children. In accordance with the standing orders, members should ensure that questions concerning a child subject to the Child Protection Act 1999 or the Juvenile Justice Act 1992 are asked in a non-identifying manner or do not refer to information that if published may lead to the identification of a child. We will commence questioning in relation to the Family Responsibilities Commission. I call the member for Moggill.

Dr FLEGG: Thank you, Mr Chairman. My question is to the acting commissioner, Mr Rod Curtin. Welcome and thank you for being here today. Mr Curtin, the Family Responsibilities Commission is overseeing its program in Aurukun, Hope Vale, Coen and Mossman Gorge. On my figures, there are about 2,200 residents in total in those communities. According to this year's SDS, the budget is run at about \$4.5 million for the year. There appears to be a budget overrun of about \$1.2 million. The estimated actual is about \$1.2 million above the budget figure. Can you explain whether that is, in fact, a budget overrun and the reason for it? What effect, if any, would that have on the overall budget for the Family Responsibilities Commission over its entire life?

Acting Commissioner Curtin: I will answer the question for the honourable member as best I can in my position. I am the Deputy Commissioner with the Family Responsibilities Commission. I am sitting in the estimates committee as the acting commissioner as Commissioner Glasgow is currently away on leave.

There are a number of factors that lead to that position. Firstly, using the school terms, in term 3 there was an issue within Aurukun that saw a fairly rapid decrease in school attendance. That required the commissioner to undertake an increased number of conferences. In fact, the commissioner sat continually in conference in Aurukun during the period through October and November to the end of year. You will see in the published quarterly reports that 399 conferences were held in Aurukun in that time and an additional 207 conferences. There was a cost to that which, as I understand it, was dealt with by the commissioner at board level in relation to the additional expenditure component. The figure, in that regard, is around the sum of about \$130,000-odd.

In relation to another matter—and, again, this is as best as I can inform the committee—as the member would understand, this was a greenfields operation with regard to the establishment of the Family Responsibilities Commission. I understand that there was a significant cost that was created by the implementation—that would be the best word—of, euphemistically, the CRM, which is the recording data system that operates to deal with the enormous amount of data dealt with by the Family Responsibilities Commission. Because it deals with other service providers that provide ongoing information throughout the operation of the Family Responsibilities Commission, I am advised that that amounted to an additional \$394,000.

Further, as part of the recommendations the Family Responsibilities Commission staffing was extended to include the position of principal case manager and there was the rollout of what is known as the Active Family Pathways program. That is serviced by Active Family Pathways support officers. There was additional funding required of \$260,000 in that regard. That will require a payment extension.

As well as that, there has not been taken into the figures a balance amount, which was the original federal government grant of \$3.5 million, which this year will be \$500,000. I am not submitting that that comes down to an exact dollar amount. As you can see, there were overrun issues in relation to those three key elements. That other money is to come out of the original \$3.5 million from the federal government budget to see the commission through to its current term end, which is 31 December this year.

Dr FLEGG: I notice that in the SDS at page 3-41—I am sure you know where it is—one of the aims at the present time is to develop an exit strategy, because the life of the commission is limited. School attendance notifications were estimated at 1,100 and it turns out that the actual is 1,392; offence notices in relation to the criminal justice system were estimated at 1,300 and the actual appears to be more like 1,987; and the number of conference notices that have been issued was estimated at 1,300 and the actual looks like being 1,734. That is in communities with a total population of 2,200. How on earth could you develop an exit strategy while you still have that enormous amount of activity?

Acting Commissioner Curtin: I will answer the question in two parts, if I may. Clearly, when any organisation is faced with a determined period there is a requirement, in my respectful submission, that there be an exit strategy of some kind to deal with that factor. Throughout its life the commission has worked to deal with the aspects of training and development of the local commissioners so that at the end of the term there will be greater opportunities for them in relation to work available within the communities. That training has included, but has not been limited to, annual training sessions—in fact,

the local commissioners are at one in Cairns as we speak—where they are exposed to JP training, computer training and developmental training where some of the commissioners go out to other conferences and speak at those conferences.

There has also been that level of ongoing commitment to training with regard to the FRC staff. There is no doubt that it is the commission's role to provide that training to ensure that staff have better prospects of re-entering the workplace, other departments or other areas through that additional training. In relation to your statistical analysis of that, clearly there is more work to be done within the trial communities. There is no shying away from that.

Dr FLEGG: Can you tell us how many people have had payments withheld as a result of the commission's activities?

Acting Commissioner Curtin: I can indicate that at the end of the 2009-10 year there were 232 people who were subject to conditional income management orders. The estimated actual for the end of the 2010-11 year is 235 people.

CHAIR: The member for Capalaba has a question following on from one of your answers.

Mr CHOI: My question is for the acting commissioner. As a member of the previous Social Development Committee, I have a very strong interest in the work of the Family Responsibilities Commission. I recall that we discussed at great length school attendance and actions that have been taken to try to improve attendance, and you made mention of that in your answer just now. Can you inform the committee what sort of activities are now being undertaken to improve school attendance? Have those activities or initiatives had a significant impact on the outcome so far?

Acting Commissioner Curtin: Perhaps it follows on from the question of the honourable member for Moggill with regard to the cost factors. Regarding Aurukun, when the commissioner went up and undertook that continuous period of conferencing, he did so because statistically the figures had dropped. They were at around 64 per cent in term 2 and by term 3 they had dropped back to somewhere in the mid-fifties. After that period of continuous conferencing, by the end of the term 4 those figures had returned to a figure in the mid-sixties, or 64 per cent. We are able to say that at the end of term 1 those figures had increased to 73.7 per cent. Anecdotally—because we have not got published figures yet—it is my understanding that, having done the last level of conferencing, it looks like they are going to be maintained for the end of term 2 at around that level. That is the first part of my answer.

In relation to other matters, there has always been a very good and close dialogue between the academies at Aurukun, Hope Vale and Coen and the commission. There have been a number of meetings held on a regular basis with the school case managers, who are placed at the school to endeavour to improve school attendance. Those meetings have always been fruitful and are obviously clearly indicating by the figures positive trends towards increased attendance, certainly at Aurukun. Figures can vary. The figures for Hope Vale and Coen have been consistently good and in the high eighties and sometimes creeping into the nineties. I see now, being full and frank before the committee, that there has been a recent dip in relation to the Hope Vale figures. I can speak in more detail about what may have led to that. It may be, again, that the commission has to react and move forward and look at those issues and do more work towards getting those figures for its school attendance back up where they should be or higher. We are always trying to achieve higher figures.

CHAIR: Following on from that, the member for Cook has a question.

Mr O'BRIEN: It is not following on from that—I probably have two questions. Initially, can you talk more about the details of why you think the numbers are dropping in Hope Vale?

Acting Commissioner Curtin: Anecdotally, yes, I can. During my attendance at conference in early June at Hope Vale it was revealed to me by the school case manager that following the first State of Origin game there was a distinct lack of attendance on the Thursday and Friday. I say again to the committee that these figures are anecdotal because they are not published figures. I have to deal in that manner. The figures are around 40 or 45 children did not attend on one day and 33 on the Friday. That information was delivered to me in conference.

One of our local commissioners in Hope Vale is a school case manager as well. As a result of that, we sat down and discussed the strategy with the school case managers about reinforcing the need to attend school and that, whilst they could celebrate and enjoy the game, they should not see that as some leave pass to avoid school. A further meeting was held with the officer in charge of the police station and the commissioner in the commission. Through those discussions he informed us that he would make sure there was additional vigilance in and around that period. As a result of those activities, after the second State of Origin game the numbers—and, again, anecdotally—I have been informed were down to around seven or eight per day.

It may be that as a result of that incident or it may be another day—because as you know, it simply takes three unexplained absences per term to create a notification of school attendance. As a result of that we may see an increase again—getting back to the question of notifications—out of Hope Vale with regard to school attendance notifications. Generally speaking, attendance at Hope Vale has been quite good.

Mr O'BRIEN: I want to go back to a point that you made earlier in response to a question from the member for Moggill about the local commissioners. You talked briefly about some of the training they have been getting. I do know that they have been in Cairns this week attending a conference. Can you give us some details about the training that they undergo, particularly with regard to how they deal with the stress of it all? I understand how much pressure some of these commissioners are under in their community. You mentioned before computer training and things like that. How do they deal with some of the emotional challenges that they face in being commissioners?

Acting Commissioner Curtin: A simple answer to that would be stoically. Certainly there are pressures. The role of commissioner is a challenging one. I think that needs to be said. The issues that are raised are challenging. The commission is able to conference on a regular basis but, of course, the local commissioners remain a part of their own community 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We are very fortunate at the commission that a lot of the commissioners hold down other positions of employment within their own communities. As I said, in relation to Aurukun two of the commissioners are, for want of a better word, 'superannuated' former members of Queensland Health. They have worked tirelessly for Queensland Health as a couple for almost 30 years. One of the commissioners is the recognised entity for child safety in the community of Aurukun. Two other members are involved with the justice group. So they have a broad spread of experience within the community and they bring that to the commission. Their work is tireless. They are supported by programs in self-care, resilience and general health. There has been mediation training given as well.

Getting back to their roles, I should have added that in Hope Vale two of the commissioners are associated with the academy. One is a school case manager and one is a teacher at the academy. Another works for the local development office and another is tied up with the land council. Again, they are working. A commissioner in Mossman has been involved in work through the women's group. She has recently resigned but obviously has applied to become a local commissioner, and she will do a very good job.

They are working within their community. They do a tireless job. They are rewarded by the change and response that is coming through their community in relation to community members' attitude towards the commission. Whilst on that point, I should say that there has been—and this is the thing about statistics and attitude and how they can sometimes not necessarily follow each other—a greater awareness of the commission's work. There has been a greater acceptance within the community of the commission's work. Clients now approach the commissioners and the local coordinators to discuss or talk about their problems and issues that they may have, whether they be practical issues such as Centrelink issues, forms that may need to be completed or work within the commission. There have been more clients entering into voluntary income management in relation to their own benefits. There has even been feedback from what I would regard as long-term offenders who have undertaken the Ending Family Violence Program. They have come back on commission days and talked about the benefits they got out of that program.

Going back in a circular fashion perhaps to the member for Capalaba talking about things that had been done, I can say that at the last series of conferences I met and spoke with the coordinator of the parenting program. It is clear that is going to be one of the issues that assists Aurukun in practical ways in getting children to school—and they may sound simple—such as household organisation and having the children organised the day before, having the place tidy so lunches can be prepared and walking the children to school on time. These are visible changes within the community. You now see parents walking their children to school—fathers walking their children into the school grounds.

There was a conference recently where I had a full and frank exchange with one of the clients before the commission in relation to the need for her child, who was in grade 1, to go to school. It is fair to say her body language during the conference was not entirely positive and when she left it may not have been entirely positive. However, the very next day before sitting commenced—the justice centre where we sit is next to the school—that woman was walking her child into the school ground and the following day that woman was walking her child into the school ground.

They are the positives, the visual human side of the commission's work. There are certainly other incidents that I can indicate, without wanting to take up all of the time relating to the member's question. There are positive indicators as well through the Active Family Pathways Program that has been instituted. Under that program, support officers deal on a one-on-one basis with clients who are experiencing grave difficulties in relation to school attendance or general lifestyle issues. One of those clients—I can say again anecdotally—is the mother of seven, ranging in age from 14 years, a year 9 student, down to around seven or nine months old, the baby. Through the work that has been done with

that client, her son, who is 14—and this has been one of the problem years, the secondary years—has a 93 per cent attendance rate and the support officer has completed with the client application forms for boarding school for that child.

Conversely, there are issues with regard to the attendance of some of the children in lower primary. To assist her with that, the support officer is organising to take her through the parenting program but also to take her over to the day care so there can be some respite for her by her younger children going into day care, which will give her more time with the children who are not attending school, to sit with them in class and improve their level of attendance as well. I hope I have not laboured the committee with too much information.

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

Dr FLEGG: My next question is to the minister. I have spent quite a bit of time reading the quarterly reports and the annual reports of the commission. I can see that on your staff you have some very caring and motivated people but you also have some very frustrated people. I think the extent to which they care about getting this job done is typified by the honesty of some of the remarks in these reports. Quarterly report No. 10 could only be described as a damning assessment of your government, Minister. Let me quote a small part of that report to you. The report states—

Many services continue to lack full functionality with staff turnover and logistical issues preventing ongoing servicing of clients.

Then it further states—

... in its final year of operation the full impact of the Commission and service provider referrals will never reach anticipated potential if action is not taken.

Minister, isn't this really an indictment of the government's policy in Indigenous communities where your own commission is saying that they cannot achieve the objectives set out?

Mr PITT: I thank the honourable member for the question. I think you have touched on something that is very important—that is, the commission provide the government fearless and frank advice. They do care about what is happening with regard to the Family Responsibilities Commission and more broadly with the Cape York welfare reform. That is why they have the ability to write and call it how it is. They can write to the government by way of a report that says, 'This is what is happening.'

Issues have been raised there which relate to the ability to set up initiatives, to set up programs and those other things that go along with that. The difficulty overall of setting up this initiative has never been underestimated. That is the reason we are extending the trial, first of all—potentially at some stage. That is why we have gone out and we have consulted on this. It goes back to your earlier question about why we are consulting and it also goes back to the idea of having more time to structure an exit strategy if that were to be required. A whole range of those things are interrelated.

There is nothing easy about service delivery in remote areas of Queensland, period. That can be exacerbated sometimes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. So if there are people who work for the Family Responsibilities Commission who feel frustrated, you can suggest that I also would feel frustrated. If there is any lag, if there are services which are not at their full potential, we are constantly working on that. We are working on that because we want to get it done.

This is our policy and our program we are working on in partnership with the federal government and the Cape York institute. We think this is an important program. So we want that advice. We want to hear from them to say, 'This is not working.' Then we can respond to that. There have been some lags in some initial set-ups with regard to the trial, and that is one of the key reasons we want to look at extending a trial—to ensure the trial can be rolled out in full so that we can actually see what the benefits of that would be with that full evaluation.

Dr FLEGG: Minister, the Family Responsibilities Commission Act expires at the beginning of next year. The trial, as you describe it, has cost officially \$14.603 million, plus we heard earlier that there have been significant budget overruns. We have 17 Cairns based administrative or bureaucratic staff, plus additional temporary staff. It works out to around \$7,000 for every man, woman and child in those four communities. As the commission comes to an end, we still see school attendance rates in the 50s and 60s that nobody could consider acceptable. We see serious issues with service delivery right throughout every report that is written. We see what is described as a dramatic escalation of violence and mental health issues over the summer holidays.

CHAIR: Member for Moggill, could you please get to your question.

Dr FLEGG: My question is, Minister, who is going to take responsibility for this large amount of taxpayers' money—nearly \$7,000 for every person in these communities—and quite measurable outcomes that do not stack up?

Mr PITT: I refute the fact that the outcomes do not stack up. As the deputy commissioner said, the statistics do not always tell the story. There are plenty of things that happen outside of statistics to say that there are good things happening. I can give you a number of cases that I have been made aware of where we are seeing positive things happening. If you look at the school attendance issue—a question was asked earlier about the actions that are undertaken to try to encourage school attendance—it is the

little things that are being done which, unless brought to a parent's attention, may be things that they would not have thought to do. It is about saying to a parent, 'It is about maybe walking your kids to the school or walking them to the bus stop, or sometimes sitting in the class with them until they are settled.' These are things you will not find in the report but these are things that are making a difference on the ground.

We are seeing clients who have been asked to attend conferences on a range of matters. We have seen massive turnarounds. There was one client on the cape who was experiencing difficulties getting her three children to attend school last year. The children had 43 combined unexplained absences in term 3 and 19 in term 4. This year the children have totalled only three unexplained absences in term 1 and no unexplained absences in term 2. You have to try to approach this and get one person at a time and one family at a time. This is about rebuilding families and this is important work.

You quite rightly said that this is an expensive model, but we make no apologies for this model being what it is. This is a revolutionary model. It is one that we have done in partnership with people in the cape and in the trial communities, and it is one that we are doing in partnership with the federal government. This is something that is fairly radical and revolutionary, and it is a trial because we want to see what are the best elements of this model that we can go forward with. I put to you what would happen if we were not doing the trial. I think you would see dramatic differences in what is happening. I think you would see a very different scenario in the communities that have been involved.

I have a range of things that people have said to us. You only need to look at the *Four Corners* program on the presentation around the overall Cape York welfare reform trial. With regard to income management, Aurukun resident Kayleen Chevathun said—

They put me on a basic card and income management and it helped me a lot. That's why the kids they're going to school every day now.

This is not me speaking. This is not the deputy commissioner speaking. This is a resident who is coming forward and saying that this process is working. Earlier the deputy commissioner touched on the idea that people are moving to voluntary income management. It is important because they are seeing the benefits of it. I have had people in communities who are not involved in the trial talk about the fact that they would like to have something similar in terms of their ability to manage their own finances and to shore money away. These are things that are happening out of this process under the Family Responsibilities Commission.

I reject outright your assertion that these outcomes are unacceptable. Are the attendance levels acceptable? No, they are not, and that is why we are doing this work and that is why we continue to do this work. It is important because we know that there are issues. We are not shying away from this. This is why we are doing it. I note that at the time of implementation and introduction there was support from the opposition for this model and for this trial. I think this is something that we need to have bipartisan support on, like a range of issues when it comes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy in this state.

CHAIR: The member for Cook has a question.

Mr O'BRIEN: We have talked about analytical evidence and statistical evidence today. I just want to know about some of the more empirical and statistical evidence about community feedback, if you can, Minister, with regard to the Family Responsibilities Commission. Can you give us some details on the progress report on the consultations you have done about the commission's work within these communities?

Mr PITT: Thank you very much for the question. You are right: there has been a great deal of work done to get feedback on the trial as to the Family Responsibilities Commission and the work that it is being undertaken. I think you are quite right that there are plenty of people in the community who are doing good work in this regard. Where we have actually looked at community consultations with regard to the Family Responsibilities Commission and an extension of the trial, we can certainly say that we have been consulting with mayors and community leaders on the future of the overall trial. I can say that we have been keen to listen to people from local communities about where we go from here. The federal government has set aside dollars for the future of the Cape York welfare reform trial. The state government has safeguarded money in its budget also. That is \$1.6 million that we have set aside. But we are going forward and we are continuing to have that consultation.

We know that this is important work. We know that there has been some excellent work in terms of school attendances. Between semester 1 in 2008 and semester 1 last year, school attendance rates in Aurukun increased from 43.7 per cent to 62.1 per cent. For the same period, in Mossman Gorge school attendance rates increased from 74.4 per cent to 83.6 per cent, and in Hope Vale the rates rose from 84.4 per cent to 86.5 per cent. As you know, there is a proposal to extend the trial for another year, so it would go forward to the end of December 2012. That proposal has been informed by consultation with stakeholders including community members in each of the trial communities and also importantly

with the commission. I had a meeting only last month with the deputy commissioner and the registrar in Cairns. Service providers obviously are being consulted as well. This is all important feedback because, as we said, we want to know what is working and, if we are to consider an extension, we want to make sure that we are tweaking it and being responsive to what we need to do.

Mr O'BRIEN: I am happy to keep going. I am happy to share but happy to keep going. I want to ask in particular about parental and social responsibility through the Cape York welfare reforms. I think it builds on the line of questioning from the member for Moggill about who is responsible. In my mind, parents have to be responsible for the upbringing of their kids. I want to know some details about how the commission works in ensuring that parents are taking the responsibility that I think everybody believes they should be taking.

Mr PITT: I think you are right, member for Cook. This is all about rebuilding families and making sure that parents and those family units take responsibility. The mechanisms are put in place by the government and the support programs and policies are put in place. What we have, as you have heard from the deputy commissioner, is the Active Family Pathways program. It is an intensive case management framework which is based on a coordination model. Last year the commission identified a number of clients with complex needs who were not progressing with case plans due to the multiple challenges and barriers within the family units. What we are trying to do is maximise our clients' help-seeking behaviour and their adoption of some personal responsibility in relation to their issues. We want to see a comprehensive overview of the clients' life factors with a view to building on their strengths, addressing challenges and coordinating services to support the clients.

As I was saying before with regard to school attendances, it is about making suggestions. Sometimes they are things you will not read in a textbook—suggestions about how we can do things to increase school attendance that parents may not otherwise have thought of. It is about people coming forward for voluntary income management to say, 'We think this is a good model and I'd like to do it. How can I benefit from that and where can we go?' Some people have managed through that process to save up for a range of things and are providing things for their children they have never provided before. Again, these are all things that are happening because we have the Active Family Pathways protocols in place and the programs we are putting forward.

It is also about collaborating with other agencies. The FRC has its direct role, but let us be clear that this commission is a central plank to what is happening in communities—working with wellbeing centres and working with other government agencies to deliver a range of services. The services are there and we want to make sure that people are taking those up. The other important role the commission plays is ensuring that people are aware of those services and can take responsibility for themselves. Ultimately we want the commission to be able to provide the linkages and suggestions and we want people to take those services up and to run with them.

CHAIR: I call the member for Moggill.

Dr FLEGG: Mr Curtin, I notice that the figure for school enrolment notifications was zero in the budget papers. How hard do you think people have looked for nonenrolment? I cannot really see how we would expect schools to report nonenrolment, because obviously children who are not enrolled at the school have not had contact with the school. Do you think nonenrolment is in fact zero?

Acting Commissioner Curtin: Thank you for the question. Enrolment can be a difficult issue. What I can say on that topic is that there are continuous meetings with the school case managers in relation to school attendance. I do take the member's point with regard to the fact that the children are not at school so how can that be followed up. With the communities as they are—with people being aware of families within communities and of where children are placed, and if school age children are in the street when they should not be in the street—these things are brought to the local commissioner's attention. I can say that there have been some issues with regard to this factor and it may serve in some way to answer your point.

Sometimes when children go off to boarding school and then they are excluded or self-excluded from the boarding school and come back into the community, we need to follow them up to make sure they re-enrol in the local school or the high school in Cooktown. That is a process we are working towards now. Clearly, more needs to be done and can be done with regard to following them up to make sure there is an early re-engagement in the school process. They are the figures but I do see your point. Yes, more work is being done by the commission to follow up those issues of enrolment.

As you might be aware from your knowledge of the area, there is a real problem with the tyranny of distance when you have situations with flights. A child may come home from boarding school on the holidays and disengage from boarding school during that time by saying, 'I'm not going back. I don't want to go back,' so that has to be dealt with and then flights need to be arranged for the child to return. If that is not instant, there can be a lag time between that exclusion or self-removal and re-enrolment so we do need to address that to see there is continuity of enrolment with regard to children being enrolled at a school. Can I just make one point, and I do apologise.

CHAIR: Commissioner, we have gone over time.

Acting Commissioner Curtin: I am sorry. It is just in relation to the member's earlier questions with regard to school attendance. One of the key features that has impacted on occasions as well with regard to absences in the communities is the issue of funerals, and I am giving this information because it is a bit two part. Funerals can impact greatly on school attendance. In the case of Aurukun when there was that dip, there were a number of funerals—I think there were four funerals—throughout that term when there was that dip in attendance. The commission has worked very hard to evolve school attendance policies with regard to funerals—being one day for local funerals and three days for boarding schools. I just wanted to make that point.

CHAIR: Thank you, Acting Commissioner. I thank the minister and the acting commissioner, and we will now commence questioning in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services.

Acting Commissioner Curtin: Might I be excused?

CHAIR: Yes, you may.

Acting Commissioner Curtin: I thank honourable members for their questions.

CHAIR: And thank you very much for your attendance and contribution, Acting Commissioner. In relation to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services, I call the member for Moggill.

Dr FLEGG: To the director-general, page 3-4 of the SDS talks about homeownership. Can the director-general explain this to the committee: under the deeds of agreement to lease, how many Indigenous people have actually achieved personal homeownership?

Ms Apelt: I think this is a very significant question because the member may be aware that we have had quite a significant consultation process with Indigenous people in the deed of grant in trust communities, in particular around the notion of homeownership. This remains a policy aspiration for a number of people on those communities but certainly not everybody. The consultation in relation to homeownership has been about resolving policy matters around land tenure and also the nature of the leasing arrangement that is often referred to as homeownership.

In terms of the number of people who would have attained homeownership as I might experience homeownership in a freehold planning scheme, the answer to that in those communities where freehold is not the dominant land tenure arrangement is zero. But in terms of the number of people within communities who are interested in continuing to have discussion with government about the possibility of taking on longer term leases over community land in the interests of long-term certainty for perpetual leasing, those discussions are underway and I do not have the exact numbers to hand.

Dr FLEGG: I think you answered my next question as well there. Perhaps I better ask this next question to the minister. Recently I visited Aurukun where there is a principally federally funded program of house building in that community. Some pretty serious concerns were expressed to me within the local community and the local government area about how these houses are being built—that they are largely prefabricated in Townsville I think which takes away the opportunity to train apprentices and tradesmen, that because they are all being done at the one time they do not have the time rollover to train local people, and that there was very little local content and very little local job creation. Minister, what is the government doing? This sort of situation has plagued Indigenous communities, and it is similar I think to when the hospital was built on Palm Island. Very little in the way of local work was created in communities—

CHAIR: Member for Moggill, perhaps that question should be directed to another minister. The minister is free to answer however he wishes, but it seems to me that it relates to housing or employment rather than Aboriginal services.

Dr FLEGG: The question really is in relation to the economic viability and welfare of these communities which I think should come under the minister's concern. These projects are not creating training or employment and I want to ask the minister what he is doing about that.

Mr PITT: Mr Chair, I am happy to respond briefly.

CHAIR: Very well, Minister.

Mr PITT: I thank the honourable member for the question. It gives me an opportunity to talk about our remote program office which is doing absolutely wonderful work. You have raised the issue of matters rolling out all at once. One of the things that the program office is doing—just taking a step back here; and this is in fact its whole purpose for being—is that it is reducing red tape and working right across government in areas that involve planning, infrastructure, housing and a range of others. It is about red tape reduction, but it is also about ensuring we can get land tenure issues resolved which leads to town planning and better infrastructure.

This is important when you look at traditional builds. We could look at this and say, 'We have a bucket of money and we're going to throw it into communities and build houses as quickly as we can.' Obviously, we want to get houses on the ground as quickly as possible, but importantly what the program office is doing is that it is staging works. It is doing a rolling program over two years at this stage that is scoped out and planned which will ensure that there are different stages and timing of

builds to allow local people to have the maximum benefit of getting on to those. These works will go over a longer period than two years; they will go over a period of four years, which can in many trades be the life of somebody doing an apprenticeship and then going on to have a full trade and perhaps going into work of their own.

The other important role that the program office has been playing has been dabbling in the space of employment a little bit to talk about and give an audit of current skills. It is looking at people who are actually needing work and matching them with the opportunities of the builds. This is work that is happening, and I am very pleased with the work that is being done.

The matter of housing does rest with the Minister for Housing, but you are correct in the sense that this is a matter of concern to me. It is not directly my portfolio responsibility in that regard but of course I am very interested and I am taking an active interest in this.

Dr FLEGG: Page 3-5 of the SDS at dot point No. 5 mentions drug and alcohol problems. Given that we have withdrawn alcohol from a number of these communities that have a high prevalence of alcoholism, can you tell the committee where the nearest comprehensive inpatient drug and alcohol dependency treatment clinic is for residents of Cape York Indigenous communities?

Mr PITT: I thank the honourable member for the question. I suppose this is one of those ones I would be very happy to answer in a very fulsome manner if I was given the opportunity, but I am not sure how long I have got. You identify the fact that we have alcohol restrictions in place. On that point, first of all, I want to make sure that we understand exactly why we are doing that work because that actually leads to where we are going in the future. I take you back to 2001 when Justice Tony Fitzgerald did the MCMC report and he said—

When alcohol abuse is causing violence and violence is leading to the incarceration of offenders, the alcohol abuse must cease before violence and incarceration will end. If children are to live happily with their families in a harmonious and orderly community, the conditions necessary for that to occur must be created by the people who live there, who must make good parenting the community norm. The Government's task in such circumstances is to encourage the community to accept responsibility, to empower it to deal with its problems, to assist it to do so and to provide necessary resources, facilities and support.

This is still the case today. We are, as you say, limiting the supply of alcohol with the support of the communities, and we should be clear about that. This is not something that has been imposed on all communities. We are doing it with the support of the communities. Woorabinda as a community chose to go dry, and Pormpuraaw and Doomadgee chose to tighten their restrictions in 2008. We are supporting this through a range of new services. Over 80 new services since 2008 have gone into remote communities. We are working with communities, elders, elected representatives, community members and, importantly, community justice groups who have a legislative role in providing advice to government on these matters.

In terms of what we are doing with regard to alcohol and detoxification, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can access Indigenous specific residential rehab services at Pormpuraaw, Yarrabah, Townsville and Mount Isa; by the way, the Mount Isa facility also accommodates family members. There are also mainstream residential rehabilitation services available in Cairns and Townsville. What I will say though is that we have detoxification and alcohol support across our communities. That service is there; not all of them are residential rehab but those services are there.

We are not just going in and restricting alcohol without providing supports, and those supports do not just relate to detoxification; those supports involve providing diversionary activities and sport and recreation opportunities and a range of other family supports. This is a difficult area. It is not one that is without its challenges but it is important that we continue to do this. We are in this space because we are trying to reduce harm in these communities. It is about making sure that we are protecting the most vulnerable community members—that is, women, children and the elderly.

CHAIR: Minister, you mentioned Woorabinda, and I want to follow on from the alcohol management plan or reform program that you mentioned and which is all about improving safety, as you indicated. You dealt with some of the services, but do you have any detail on the outcomes for those communities, the real results? I guess one of my focuses here is Woorabinda, which is an area just outside my electorate, and some of the outcomes from those programs. I note that the next dot point was provision of \$5.7 million in alcohol reform services, so obviously there is quite a substantial amount of service provided and I just wondered about the outcomes for that.

Mr PITT: I thank the honourable member for the question. Where we are looking at Woorabinda specifically, since 2006-07 hospital admissions for assault related conditions have decreased steadily, and that has continued after the tightening of alcohol restrictions with the introduction of zero carriage—that is, when I referred earlier to the community going dry. It is a bit of an obtuse remark in that sense, but it is about having a zero carriage limit. This happened in July 2008. The rates went from 59.9 per 1,000 persons in 2006-07 to 26.9 per 1,000 persons in 2009-10. Of course, this is not just about those levels of violence, because there is another side to what we measure in terms of our key indicators—that is, school attendance. School attendance has remained stable since 2008. It has ranged between 78 per cent and 81 per cent attendance.

So there are things happening. We are making progress, but essentially this is about generational change. We have often said when it comes to our alcohol reforms that we must ensure we have our restrictions in place for as long as is necessary, but that certainly does not mean that alcohol reforms are forever. I take every opportunity I can when I am meeting with community leaders, whether they be men's groups, women's groups, community justice groups and of course the elected representatives—the mayors—when we have our round tables, to impress upon them that this is a two-way street. If there is a sustained reduction in harm, there will be a trigger to remove or lessen alcohol restrictions in those communities. It is very important that we do that.

Overall, they are working. Levels of violence are falling, school attendances are rising and most people are reporting that they do feel safer. But it is important to note that, just as carriage limits are not uniform across the communities, the outcomes are not uniform. In some communities there certainly is more work to do. There was a statement—I cannot remember when, but I think it was a couple of years ago—in the *Guinness Book of Records* about the community of Palm Island being the most violent place on earth outside of a war zone. This is what we are actually dealing with. There is nothing funny about what we are doing and this is very serious work. Yes, this is something that we would rather not have to do, but we have no choice and I can certainly say that we have the support of many community members. Sometimes we hear about people who do not want the restrictions in place. I can certainly say that there are as many, if not more, people who want them in place, and that was evidenced by those communities that have voluntarily considered strengthening restrictions or not having them lessened when given the opportunity.

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

Mr McLINDON: Thank you. My question is to the director-general. In relation to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services provided—and there is a range of social issues that are obviously confronting the Indigenous community; you only have to look at the rate of Indigenous people in the Townsville prison to see that—a lot of the focus has been on those involved in crime in Indigenous communities. What services are available for those victims of crime and what is their first port of call as a service? What are the financial implications and are they in fact increasing in this budget?

Ms Apelt: The member would be aware that the government has been revising an overall justice strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for the very reasons that you point out. The revisions will take account of a broader range of complexities that contribute to crime in the first instance but also take account of the fact that Indigenous people are more likely to be victims as they are also more likely to be incarcerated. For that reason, there has been quite extensive consultation, and that will continue for some time, in order to make sure that our next iteration of budget initiatives supports the reduction of incarceration of Indigenous people and also a reduction in the proportion of Indigenous people who are victims of crime.

In terms of the services that are already available, across the portfolio of the Department of Communities there is an investment in domestic and family violence services. There is an investment in early intervention and prevention family services which often are of support to people who have been victims of crime. We do support an organisation called Victims of Crime that also provide services to Indigenous people. But I think the point is a very significant one, because this is a key difference going forward with the way that the next iteration of the justice strategy will be designed, if you like.

The other element about the justice strategy is that it will take a very clear focus on a place-by-place basis because we do know that the issues, for example, that the minister has outlined for communities such as Palm Island need to be addressed in a very specific way which might be quite different to the issues that might be identified within the CBD of Brisbane, for example. So the new justice strategy is really listening very hard to the views of people across all of the areas across the state as to how the next response might be tailored so that it is more place specific but also takes account of the dual issues that you point out—that it is not only people who have been perpetrators of crime but it is also those people who have been victims. As the statistics show, in Queensland and Australia at this point in time those people are more likely to be of either Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin.

Mr McLINDON: Thank you, Director-General. Just following on from that, Minister—and I see the slogan 'a hand up and not a handout', and its intent sounds reasonable—in 1988 in the electorate of Beaudesert at Mount Barney there was an horrific incident that took place, and that was the gang-rape of a 14-year-old girl who in last year's budget received \$120,000. Minister, will you allocate funding in this budget to give a hand up to this woman, who is seeking truth and justice?

Mr PITT: I thank the honourable member for the question. The matters that you refer to are not matters that are covered under Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services. This may well be in the Department of Communities but is not a matter for me; it is a matter, as I understand it, for Minister Struthers. Am I interested in hearing more about it? I am not aware of the case you mention but, as always, if anyone comes to me with a particular example I am always happy to look into it further. But that is not something that would actually sit under my—

Mr McLINDON: Minister, that was in relation to the Heiner affair—

Mr O'BRIEN: Oh, come on!

Mr McLINDON:—and what I am suggesting—

CHAIR: Member for Beaudesert! Member for Cook! Member for Beaudesert, I think your questioning is out of order. The minister has indicated that it is another minister's responsibility and any questioning along that line I would rule as out of order.

Mr McLINDON: Mr Chair, thanks for your response. On that, Mr Chair, can I ask for a point of clarification. Following the director-general saying that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services actually does provide services for victims of crime, I would beg to differ and would assert that the following question to the minister was perfectly in order. So I seek your clarification. It is directly pertinent and it has budgetary implications within this portfolio, so I would ask for your ruling on that.

CHAIR: On the basis of that, the committee will adjourn to discuss the member's proposal.

Proceedings suspended from 10.38 am to 10.54 am

CHAIR: The question that was asked is ruled out of order and will be discontinued. There are six minutes remaining. The member for Moggill.

Dr FLEGG: Recently, I was recently in Aurukun—

Mr O'BRIEN: Did you stay the night?

Dr FLEGG: I am not sure how much accommodation was there.

Mr O'BRIEN: There is heaps.

Dr FLEGG: The police pointed out to me while I was there that no cars could be left in the town—that anyone visiting the town, including government service providers, had to lock their cars in the police compound. Council officers showed me community facilities that had been stoned the night before and there was a significant problem with very young children running riot. I note that the front page of the *Cairns Post* contained that again today.

CHAIR: Member for Moggill, you are in fact answering the member for Cook's query. Would you please put your question to the minister.

Dr FLEGG: Will the minister tell the committee how on earth, in that sort of lawless environment, you deliver services to the people of Aurukun? Can the minister—

Mr O'BRIEN: He is telling the committee—

CHAIR: Member for Cook, would you kindly discontinue your interjections.

Mr O'BRIEN: He called my constituents lawless.

CHAIR: Member for Cook, if you persist I will ask you to remove yourself.

Dr FLEGG: We obviously need to deliver health and education, police and other services. How do you provide those sorts of services and keep people safe in a functioning community when it is lawless to the extent that you cannot even leave a car in the community overnight?

Mr PITT: I thank the honourable member for the question. The simple answer is with great difficulty. There is no other way to put it. This is one of the challenges that we face. This is the reason we are working very closely with that community, particularly around alcohol management plans. That is why we have other work that we do with local government for night patrols and a range of other things. So there is nothing new about what you are saying.

I have seen today's *Cairns Post* as well. The first thing I did on seeing that report was put a call through to Mayor Neville Pootchemunka to speak to him. Unfortunately, I was not able to reach him so I spoke to the CEO, John Japp, and had a lengthy conversation with him this morning. I wanted to make sure first of all that the report was verified, because you cannot always believe what you read in the paper. But like any other community—and this is what I was mentioning to the CEO this morning—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, like any other people, have a right to feel safe in the community. This is why we are undertaking the work that we are doing. Improving community safety is one of our priorities and that is why, as one of the measures under our alcohol management reforms, we are working closely with communities, including Aurukun, on community safety planning.

Community safety plans are a significant action as part of our justice strategy that we have in draft form now out for consultation. The aim of the plans is to improve community safety through practical actions. This does not necessarily mean increased streetlighting—and, of course, that is a very important thing; it is about those other things. It is about the underlying causes of why activities may be happening that can lead to people feeling unsafe in their community or can lead to criminal behaviour happening. So those things are about working with the council and working with justice groups and, of course, government service providers who you quite rightly say are experiencing challenging environments to deliver the services which we know are so important.

These things may be including measures to improve school attendance. You referred directly to Aurukun. Aurukun is one of our communities under the Cape York Welfare Reform trial. It is one of our communities which has the ability for the Family Responsibilities Commission to work in that regard. We know that increased school attendance can lead to a whole range of benefits. That includes children having less time to be otherwise occupied. So diversionary activities like that and things like getting people involved in sport and recreation are all important, but, as I say, there are practical things like streetlighting that we also want to look at.

We have provided some seed funding to all of the communities to look at their community safety planning. This is a small amount to start that process rolling. What we want to do is get out of that process their ideas as to where they think they can do it at the local level. I know, after speaking with the CEO of Aurukun this morning, that they have concerns that this behaviour has been going on for a while. We are not shying away from that. That is a reality.

Of course, as part of my role I speak to all of my cabinet colleagues, including the Minister for Police. We are continuing to work with them on measures that can be put in place. I know that the council has been very proactive in this regard. They are spending I think in the vicinity of around \$800,000 a year on a night patrol. I can only imagine what would be happening if that was not there, because this is stuff that we have to tackle. So I do not refute the fact that there is this sort of behaviour going on. Is it tolerated? No. What is the secret? I do not know the secret, but I know what some of the ingredients are to try to address this and that includes what we are trying to do with our Family Responsibilities Commission and with Cape York Welfare Reform—trying to rebuild families, trying to ensure parents are taking responsibility for their children and their actions as best they can, like you would in any community anywhere in Queensland.

Dr FLEGG: Thank you.

CHAIR: The time allocated for the consideration of the estimates of expenditure in the portfolio of the Minister for Disability Services, Mental Health and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships has expired. Minister, on behalf of the committee I would like to thank you and your departmental officers. I have previously thanked you and the commissioner for your attendance and for your assistance today.

Mr PITT: Thank you. Can I just very briefly put on the record an acknowledgement and thank you to my department for their help with the preparation for estimates today and for the people who have been sitting at the table: Director-General Linda Apelt; Associate Director-General Tony Hayes, Deputy Director of ATSI Ron Weatherall; Acting Commissioner Rod Curtin; and Chief Financial Officer John Marsh. To the hardworking Hansard staff: as always, we appreciate your efforts. I certainly also want to acknowledge my ministerial office for helping me along the way. I want to thank the chair and the committee members for the spirit in which the estimates hearing has been undertaken today and thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The committee will now break and the hearing will resume at 11.15 am.

Proceedings suspended from 11.01 am to 11.19 am

ESTIMATES—COMMUNITY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE—HOUSING, COMMUNITY SERVICES, WOMEN AND COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AND CHILD GUARDIAN

In Attendance

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

Dr D Copeman, Senior Policy Adviser

Ms C Whitton, Senior Policy Adviser

Department of Communities

Ms L Apelt, Director-General

Mr D Short, Finance Programs, Housing Homelessness and Properties

Mr T Hodda, Director, Finance Programs—Child Safety and Community and Sport and Recreation

Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian

Ms E Fraser, Commissioner



CHAIR: Good morning, Minister. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

As I have indicated in the introduction to other ministers, I would ask that all persons have their mobile phones or pagers turned off or turned to silent. Minister, I would invite you, if you wish, to make an opening statement. The committee has asked that opening statements be no longer than three minutes.

Ms STRUTHERS: Thank you, Mr Chairman and members. This year Department of Community staff, in partnership with many non-government organisations, have been at the front line of the community recovery effort. My department alone has deployed around 2,800 staff. It has been a massive effort. This is as much a physical recovery as it is an emotional recovery. Our housing support, financial support and emotional support continue. Community recovery referral and information centres in areas of high need will remain open until December.

Our department has paid over 55,000 emergent assistance grants and over 10,000 essential household grants and structural assistance grants. There has been unprecedented hardship across the state but also a strength of spirit and a giving never seen before in Queensland. Many hundreds of people have been housed by my department and non-government agencies that we work with. We have installed factory built housing, headleased private properties and paid for temporary accommodation. We have done whatever it takes to rehouse people in need. I publicly thank my staff and the non-government partners we work with for this mighty effort. It has been a remarkable effort.

We also know that every dollar counts, and we are determined in our efforts to ease cost-of-living pressures. The Bligh government offers the broadest range of concessions for seniors and concession card holders of any state or territory government. We have increased concessions to almost \$1.4 billion across government in this budget.

Finally, today I am pleased to release *Opening doors: Queensland strategy for reducing homelessness 2011-14*. This strategy showcases the outcomes achieved by the new street-to-home initiatives and the youth housing and reintegration services. And if you look across the river you will see the Common Ground project emerging out of the ground in the aptly named Hope Street. The key point to note in this strategy is that youth homelessness is down by 30 per cent since 2001. We are making great progress in that area.

The Bligh government is committed to reducing homelessness and reaching the ambitious national targets agreed by the Council of Australian Governments. With unprecedented state and federal investment in housing, we have delivered well over 5,200 new, additional social housing dwellings, and over 30,700 houses—that is around 50 per cent of our stock—have received upgrades since June 2008. Our government is determined in its efforts to build a fair Queensland. I seek leave to table the strategy for the interest of members.

Leave granted.

CHAIR: We will now commence questioning in relation to housing, specifically. At the outset I call the member for Maroochydhore.

Ms SIMPSON: Nearly half of Queensland's social housing households have at least a principal tenant who is a senior. With pensions increasing under the carbon tax scheme, is the state government planning on taking its 25 per cent of the carbon tax assistance in the form of increased rent?

Ms STRUTHERS: I thank the member for the question. The first point I would make in relation to seniors in our public housing is that the benefit of being in public housing, and the reason I as minister and my department are so keen on public housing, is that the actual concession of being in public housing is worth on average around \$7,000 a year to people. It is much higher for seniors. If you take account of the maintenance that is covered by our department and the difference between what they pay in rent and a market rent, many of them are actually receiving more than \$10,000 a year in a concession. I think it is very important to point out to you that already seniors in public housing are getting a great benefit. It is important that they continue to get that.

In relation to a carbon tax, I say to the member that this government is taking the responsible decision of accepting that climate change is a problem. We need to deal with this. We need to take responsible action. The concern I have is that in Ashgrove and in Brisbane you mob say that, yes, climate change is a problem, but when you get on the road beyond Brisbane you are climate change deniers. You have one response for the city folk and one for the country folk. We are taking the responsible decision here of working with our federal colleagues to get the best possible compensation for people in Queensland. Our Premier has gone into bat through COAG. She is continually pushing for appropriate compensation for households and for industry in Queensland. That is the right thing to do.

Ms SIMPSON: How much is the state going to profit in regard to this, given that that means you are going to take a slice of the carbon tax compensation package off pensioners? How much of that is going to go back into state coffers? Will you confirm it is around about \$4.3 million?

Mr O'Brien interjected.

CHAIR: Member for Cook, I have asked you before not to interject. Before you answer that question, Minister, I would remind all members that a question in relation to the carbon tax is not, strictly speaking, applicable to the appropriation bills 2011-12. The carbon tax is presently not predicated to be introduced until 1 July 2012. Please ensure that any questions of that note relate to the appropriation bills into which we are presently inquiring.

Ms STRUTHERS: I thank you for that ruling, but I am very happy to respond to the issues around our public housing tenants, because one of the critical things to put on the record here is that it was a federal Labor government that increased the pensions by \$32 a week—it was a Labor government, after 10 years of this mob being in government federally. Pensioners had no relief, no increase. Let us be reasonable here. It is the federal government and our state Labor government that have acknowledged that every dollar counts to people—every dollar counts. A package at IGA of milk and bread for \$5 matters to these people. That is why we have increased our concessions budget. As I said earlier, we have one of the broadest ranges of concession packages for pensioners and seniors across the nation. We have increased that. In a tough fiscal environment we have managed to increase our concessions budget—so \$230 annually in electricity concession and up to \$120 in water concessions for South-East Queenslanders. This is a government that knows every dollar counts. This is a government that is determined to make sure people on low and fixed incomes have the relief they need.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, are you not just confirming that you intend to profit off the increased cost of living that many of our pensioners are facing and that you are going to take a slice of their pension—that they are going to be given a so-called offset for the carbon tax and you are going to take a bigger slice of that through the social housing rent?

Ms STRUTHERS: I refer the member to our record on this. When the federal government—the Rudd government, now led by Julia Gillard—introduced an increase to pensions, we quarantined a rent increase on our public tenants. So we did not increase rents. That is our record. Those are the values upon which we operate.

Ms SIMPSON: The 12-month moratorium on taking rent from pension increases in 2009 has long passed. Will this pension increase also be factored into new rental calculations with the carbon tax?

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydhore, I would remind you in relation to repetitious questions. If you continue those questions I will rule them out of order.

Ms SIMPSON: I will reword it. The 12-month moratorium in regard to pension rate increases has passed. There has not been an announcement as to the continuance of that moratorium. Will the minister please advise what is occurring with that?

Ms STRUTHERS: There will be no calculation of that increase in the assessable income for the calculation of rents. That is ongoing. That is a commitment we have made.

Ms SIMPSON: You have no intention to wind up the moratorium?

Ms STRUTHERS: It is ongoing. It is a commitment we have made to quarantine that pension increase in the calculation of rents. So that is a solid policy.

Ms SIMPSON: Will that include the increase that comes through as an offset for the carbon tax?

Ms STRUTHERS: The member has raised a question about the carbon tax. I understand that you have made a ruling, Mr Chairman. I can speak generally so I am not breaching your ruling. Rents are calculated in public housing at 25 per cent of income. There is certain income that is not assessable for the purpose of rent calculation. Our record is pretty clear on this, and it is a very good record. When the federal government increased the pension by \$32 a week for a lot of pensioners across Queensland that income was not assessable for rent purposes. Our record is strong. Look at the record of your federal colleagues. For 10 years or more they were in government and there was no increase in the pensions during that time.

Ms SIMPSON: Is the minister confirming that the government does not intend to take a slice of the increase that will come about via compensation for pensioners?

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, the minister—

Ms SIMPSON: We are still waiting for a yes or no, with respect, Mr Chair.

CHAIR: The minister has already answered the question. Will you move on to the next question, please.

Ms SIMPSON: I take it that the government does not want to confirm in regard to their future intentions on this matter.

Ms STRUTHERS: I will not be verbally by the member for Maroochydore. I am happy to answer. Again I say that we are very determined in our efforts to keep cost-of-living pressures down, particularly for pensioners and seniors across Queensland. We are working on energy efficiency strategies for public housing. We are doing everything possible to keep the costs of living down.

Ms SIMPSON: So you will not give a guarantee with respect to rentals, then?

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, the minister has already answered the question. She volunteered to give a further confirmation. The question has been asked and answered. Will you move on to the next question, please.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, what is the department's estimate of the cost impact of the carbon tax on the building program?

Ms STRUTHERS: These are early days yet in relation to any impact of the proposed carbon tax. Our role, first and foremost—and the Premier has led the charge on this—is to go in to bat to get the best possible compensation for householders and businesses affected in Queensland. That is what we have done and we will continue to do that.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, as this is a significant part of the capital stock, with any new building program it would be your duty as the minister to ask the question 'what will be the impact of this new carbon tax?' Have you asked that question?

Ms STRUTHERS: Our leader, the Premier of Queensland, Anna Bligh, has led the charge on this. It is Anna Bligh as Premier who sits around the table with the Prime Minister and Premiers from other states and territories to discuss these matters through COAG. She has gone in to bat for Queensland, she will continue to do that and she has our support.

We are unlike your mob: you are all over the shop on carbon tax. As I said earlier, you have one answer for the people of Ashgrove and Brisbane, where you pretend to be sympathetic to climate change issues, but when you are out in the country you are climate change deniers. You have members who say one thing while others say another. You do not have any consistent view on the carbon tax. We are taking the responsible decision of acknowledging that we have serious issues to consider into the future. If we do not take responsible action now, we face significant environmental problems in this country. The future of our children and their children is at stake. These are big issues that need responsible action. They are tough decisions; they are not easy decisions. Our Premier is leading the charge in seeking appropriate compensation. That is the right thing to do.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, have you and your department investigated the cost impact of the carbon tax on the building program?

Ms Apelt: Certainly the department has actually noted the Australian government's Clean Energy Future package. We have also noted, as the minister has identified, the comprehensive compensation package for the majority of Australians. In terms of a detailed analysis as to what the overall impact would be for the delivery of programs across the Department of Communities, we have not undertaken that exercise and, in my view, it would be premature to do so before we have further information to work with.

Ms SIMPSON: Director-General, wouldn't it be the department's and your responsibility, with the government, to be doing some modelling as to the potential impact if you are seeking compensation from the government in respect of the social housing program?

CHAIR: Before you answer that, Director-General, I would remind the member for Maroochydore that any question asked has to be relevant to the examination of the appropriation bill being considered. Can you identify how this question will impact on any buildings to be undertaken in the financial year covered by this Appropriation Bill, which is 2011-12?

Ms SIMPSON: Most certainly, Mr Chairman. The department has staff who would be undertaking risk assessments in regard to future costs. That work should be undertaken now, rather than after the costs are imposed. My question again is: what modelling has the department done, or isn't it seeking to put up a compensation bid to the federal government?

Ms Apelt: As I mentioned earlier, we have not undertaken an exercise of comprehensive modelling because we are yet to receive from the federal government the finer details to enable us to do that. However, when it is appropriate and we are able to do so, we would do the same cost-impact modelling in relation to this issue as we do with other issues.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, as the private sector has estimated it will cost an extra \$8,000 to build the average family home because of the impact of the carbon tax, what are you doing this year as part of your responsibilities to ensure you have the modelling to go in to bat for those who are the most socially disadvantaged, to ensure the housing spend is not gobbled up by the carbon tax?

Ms STRUTHERS: I remind the honourable member of what she said on 16 June, as reported in the *Courier-Mail*. The article said that she would not commit to more funding for social housing. That is your response to this. We are doing the responsible thing. It would be premature to instigate any detailed modelling on the impact of a carbon tax proposal that has not yet been bedded down.

Ms SIMPSON: As the responsible minister, you have not asked the question in regard to the upcoming costs, which have to be considered at this point in any negotiations with the federal government. Isn't that leaving the most socially disadvantaged at the whim of government?

Ms STRUTHERS: At the ministerial council I meet with the federal housing minister and the state and territory ministers to negotiate the national housing agreement. That is the appropriate forum for this sort of modelling to be done nationally. This has national implications. Housing is a national issue. It is an issue of national concern and that is the appropriate forum. We will base decisions around financial impacts on Treasury modelling. Each state Treasury will be working with the federal Treasury to do modelling on housing and other aspects of government service and program delivery. However, our agreement around the National Affordable Housing Agreement, NAHA, will be negotiated and dealt with later this year, and that is the appropriate forum.

Ms SIMPSON: Confirming that you do have discussions about the upcoming agreements later this year that will be occurring within this financial year, wouldn't it be responsible of you as the state minister to ensure that your department has done some modelling as to the cost impacts, given that it will mean there will be less social housing delivered?

Ms STRUTHERS: At the appropriate time we need to look at the cost impacts on housing and other aspects of our service delivery. That is what we will be doing. We will be working with Queensland Treasury officials and, because of the national implications, working nationally through our appropriate ministerial forums and the appropriate agreements we have with the federal government. I will be absolutely determined in my efforts to go in to bat for Queensland and Queenslanders in relation to any proposed carbon tax and its impacts. I can assure people in Queensland and tenants in our housing that I will certainly be putting a strong case forward around any potential impact there might be in relation to our housing program.

Ms SIMPSON: With respect, Minister, you have just confirmed that you have not done any modelling. Thus far, no modelling at all has been done within the department, even though this is a hot topical issue and the private sector knows it will cost an extra \$8,000 to build an average family home. Surely as the Minister for Housing in Queensland, you should have asked the question 'how much is this going to cost the building program?'

Ms STRUTHERS: No legislation has been passed around the carbon tax. It would be premature to instigate detailed modelling in relation to this. There are estimates. You have indicated a private sector estimate. Certainly there are ways that we can readily develop estimates of any impact and we will be working with our federal colleagues to do that. As I said, the appropriate forum for discussions with the Commonwealth government, around housing specifically, is discussions around our national housing agreement. Those meetings occur every few months where the federal minister gets together with state and territory ministers. You can be assured that I will be putting forward a strong case in relation to ongoing funding through that national agreement for social housing spend specifically and any impacts on any costs that might impact on the costs of delivering housing.

I do not know what your memory is like, but I can take you back 10 years or more to the Howard government. I was not the housing minister at that time—and thank goodness, because what a dry old period that was. There was no capital funding. We were starved of capital funding for housing. They are your colleagues. I do not know if you ever wrote to your federal colleagues or raised it in the state parliament. I do not recall hearing it. I have been here 13 years and I have never heard you get up in the chamber and go in to bat for more funding for social housing.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Member for Maroochydore, the member for Capalaba has a question that he would like to put to the minister.

Mr CHOI: Minister, as you know I am a very strong supporter of social housing. I put on the record my appreciation for your work and that of your department in terms of providing much needed social housing in my electorate of Capalaba. At times, the community may have some pretty inaccurate perceptions about the tenants of social housing. Has this been a challenge to you? How does your department manage those perceptions?

Ms STRUTHERS: I acknowledge the member's advocacy for social housing. He can be a bit of a terrier at my heels in relation to projects for his area. I think we work very well with his council to deliver good-quality social housing in the Redlands and the bay area.

From time to time it is a problem that people will make comment about tenants in a negative way. As minister, I am very proud of our tenants. We have 66,000 or so units of accommodation around the state and the vast majority of our tenants do the right thing. Occasionally we get problems, and that is where you will get some media attention, or issues where we have to breach a tenancy agreement or take action. It does concern me that there are some negative views about public housing and social housing.

We are in a new era of social housing. This department offers a range of supports. I think it is important to put on the record that the offer of long-term social housing is one of the tools in our tool kit and it is a very important tool. Along a continuum of action, we are able to provide a lot of assistance in the private market. Throughout the year a lot of our support has been through our new RentConnect service, assistance through bond loans and all that sort of stuff. Our department deals with many thousands of people who seek support and end up being supported in the private market as well.

I thank the honourable member for his interest in and support of public housing tenants. We have great programs that you support such as the garden awards and other things, where people take great pride in their public housing. Certainly we want to see those sorts of things continue.

CHAIR: Minister, in terms of affordability rather than the public housing itself, the last dot point on page 3-3 of the SDS refers to \$12.6 million in incentives to investors to provide new affordable dwellings under the National Rental Affordability Scheme. Could you give me an outline of how many properties that would allow to be built under that scheme in Queensland over 12 months? I am also particularly interested—as some of our discussions have carried on—in how many of those will go into my area of Rockhampton and Keppel?

Ms STRUTHERS: As I said in response to the earlier question, this is a new era in housing, and the supports that our agency can provide cover a range of areas. One of the new products that we have been able to work on with the federal government is the National Rental Affordability Scheme. NRAS is a stimulus to the private market because it is private investors getting involved in building housing, so it is a win for the construction industry and a win for jobs. It also means that, with those incentives from the state and federal government, we can bring housing to the market at 80 per cent of market rent.

You mentioned the \$12 million or so that we have committed this year. We are actually committing over \$93 million over the next five years, and we will see significant investment in NRAS properties over that time. I will see if we have something specifically on the Keppel electorate. While I am waiting on that, let me say that I visited Maroochydore a couple of weeks ago to meet with a family who were in a new complex in Maroochydore. The young woman, her partner and two kids were very happy to be allocated an NRAS property in Maroochydore, a new three-bedroom apartment coming in at about \$100 below the market rent. Her husband has taken on a course at the Sunshine Coast University and they do not have much income. So this was a real boost for them.

In your area, there are 74 NRAS allocations for the Rockhampton local government area as part of this current round of funding. A 20-unit complex was completed recently by the Queensland Affordable Housing Consortium and that was a 20 two-bedroom complex on Scenic Highway at Yeppoon. You would probably be familiar with that one. That is part of the 74 NRAS allocations for that Rockhampton local government area.

Mr O'BRIEN: This morning the member for Moggill was asking the minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partnerships questions about Aboriginal employment coming from the BER projects. He seems to have lost interest, but it was an important line of questioning and I would like to pursue it with you if I can. He, like me, is concerned that real jobs come out of the BER stimulus projects and the state government funded housing that is going into Indigenous communities. Are you able to

give me any figures about employment outcomes? Are you able to tell me what the department is doing to ensure that Indigenous people gain employment outcomes from the BER and the state government funded housing projects in Indigenous communities?

Ms STRUTHERS: I know that you are a very strong advocate of the Remote Indigenous Housing Program and have raised with me on a number of occasions the importance of the continuity of work that that program is providing and that there are real jobs and real apprenticeships. I can certainly indicate to you that we have exceeded the 20 per cent target that we have set for ourselves. Of the employment on these projects, 27 per cent is Indigenous employment. That is a really good outcome. You would know many of these people from your travels around the cape. Similar to when I visited Aurukun, Lockhart and other places, you actually see people on the job getting the benefits of the income and the training that is provided.

The Remote Indigenous Housing Program itself is a \$1 billion investment from the federal government over 10 years. That builds on our own state funding. That is continuing as well. Houses are being built as we speak in relation to not only that funding program nationally but also our own state build.

Under the Remote Indigenous Housing Program specifically, there will be 1,100 new homes over the life of that 10-year program and more than 1,200 homes will be upgraded. That is a lot of work. The great benefit of this program compared with previous efforts across the nation in relation to housing on Indigenous communities is the continuity of work that is being provided here. We can plan for a schedule of works on communities, which we are doing through our program office in North Queensland, and I am sure my colleague Minister Pitt would have spoken about this. The program office based in Cairns is able to coordinate work across government agencies to survey land, organise the land tenure issues, look at the infrastructure issues and the rollout of infrastructure that is needed so we are able to roll out the housing. So there are some new subdevelopments planned for some of our communities. All of that is jobs. All of that is economic activity. Then as our housing is rolled out, there are specific jobs in construction on those projects.

I have seen some examples of some of the work. In Hope Vale, for instance—and I have been to Hope Vale a few times now and have been very encouraged by progress there—the council had signed up eight new apprentices to work on the new homes, and the apprentices have recently completed work on 10 new homes. That story is being repeated all around those remote communities. I have been to Yarrabah and other places where the councils are really keen to get as much local employment as possible.

The other benefit of our program office with the schedule of works over a period is that they can build in other parts of government work as well. So anything that Education, Health or Police might be doing in terms of new police stations or police housing is all built into the program. This is probably the best opportunity, the best strategy that we have had given the significant investment available to us to generate the economic activity, the security of income and training that is needed for Indigenous people and to have that continuity over a long period. It is the best opportunity to get more housing on these communities. That plays a big part in closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage.

Mr McLINDON: Minister, do not underestimate the enormous task ahead in terms of the gap between the haves and have-nots that is dependent on the cost of living. The social housing waiting list is projected to hit about 33,800 in 2011-12. I see the state government has made that commitment of building another 1,500 homes over the next 12 months, but the projected waiting list in the same period will be about 3,700. This is more than double what the government intends to spend. One of the focuses has been on affordability for those who need social housing and, more importantly, the focus on the affordability for government. I wish to raise one quick idea followed by a question.

Back in my council days, I remember an innovative affordable housing presentation was given to us at Logan. It was by outoftheboxdevelopments.com. They have been operating for about five years now. They make one-, two-, three- and four-bedroom homes out of shipping containers—and you would not even know that they are shipping containers—particularly for the cyclone prone areas. This comes at a cost of less than 50 per cent of what the government is currently spending in terms of building those homes. Instituting something like that, an innovative approach in a 20-year plan, will result in us being able to catch up to the projected numbers that we have here. Are you willing to get your department to investigate measures like this? I know that only two days ago India announced that for US\$600 it could make homes that can be erected within a week and that can last for 20 years. Will the department look at an innovative approach like these, particularly in the cyclone prone areas, to be able to get more bang from the buck for the taxpayer and more people in homes with a roof over their head?

Ms STRUTHERS: I thank the member for the constructive ideas he has raised here. Let me start with the end part of your question. In relation to housing design and type, there is a lot of really good, innovative stuff on the market. As minister, I find that people will bail me up at functions and events and when I am out and about to show me their product. When I go to my son's school I have people bailing me up and giving me their business card. There is not a shortage of good product around in relation to factory-built housing or housing design types.

You are right; we have to be innovative about how we respond to housing into the future and we need to work with local governments in order for them to be responsive—and industry as well—to housing design. We cannot keep building three- or four-bedroom slab houses at a cost of \$450,000 or \$500,000 plus. We have to be innovative. We have to have planning laws and others that allow that innovation and we have to have an industry that is prepared to back that as well.

In relation to some of the product that you have talked about, it was very useful during the immediate flood recovery and cyclone recovery effort. We dusted off Damian Lavercombe, who had been in retirement for all of five days, and got him back on the job because he did such a good job after Cyclone Larry in Innisfail. He sourced a lot of the factory-built housing. Hutchinson in Brisbane and firms in Cairns and other parts of the state were able to provide us with housing at a good, low cost and was very good quality housing. When I visited the Tully caravan park, the Mission Beach caravan park and other places where we were able to restore this very quickly, I was really impressed with the quality of this product. It is important that we continue to be innovative about housing design and it is important that councils and others work with us on planning laws that allow innovation in that.

You also talked about demand in relation to housing. Let me respond to that. Every day of my work as minister is about how do we provide more affordable housing, how do we respond to the need? That is why in talking earlier I was making the very important point that this is a new era in housing. I remember being a social work student working on the north side of Brisbane. I was doorknocking houses that had been bought up by the then National Party or conservative government to put through a proposed northside freeway. There were probably 400 houses across Woolloowin, Albion and Windsor at that time where people had been displaced and the houses had been sublet to low income people. My job was to work with my university supervisor and another social work student to see if these people wanted to form a housing cooperative. They were successful. The residents eventually formed the Woolloowin Albion Windsor housing cooperative, the first housing cooperative in Queensland. Let me tell you, whenever I approached the then housing minister and the old housing commission, they were very clear: we are not a social service provider; we are a housing agency; we are not interested in any of this other stuff. Now we have a suite of products and services and a range of services to offer people.

Given the housing demand that is there, we were able to offer bond loans. Last year we provided more than 50,000 bond loans to assist people in the private market, over 2,800 rental grants and around 4,000 or so RentConnect services. That is where we have staff in our housing offices working with families and individuals to link them into the private market and offer support. There is a lot happening on the housing front. We are certainly trying to do whatever we can to ensure that we ease the housing stress for people around Queensland.

Mr McLINDON: Minister, in 2006 some \$50 million was put in to invest in Indigenous housing, which is something close to my heart, in six communities on the northern peninsula and Torres Strait Island. How much of that \$50 million is remaining? Has that program been completed?

Ms STRUTHERS: Do you mind referring me to which \$50 million?

Mr McLINDON: It was \$50 million in 2006. It was the Indigenous housing initiative which was announced in 2006.

Ms STRUTHERS: I might need to get some more information. While I am getting that, I mentioned earlier in a response to a question from the member for Cook that we have unprecedented investment in Indigenous housing. I meet regularly with the mayors from the cape and the Torres Strait to talk about the rollout of the social housing, the scheduling of works and the design. There is a lot of activity in relation to housing across the remote Indigenous communities. Cherbourg and other places are all progressing well. We have that investment through the Remote Indigenous Housing Program building on our own state investments. I might have to come back to you—

Mr McLINDON: I am happy to have an answer later.

Ms STRUTHERS: There is not a reference in the budget papers but—

CHAIR: Sorry, Minister. Member for Beaudesert, you asked the question. The minister was answering it. It most probably is not relevant to this Appropriation Bill if the question relates to 2006 unless it is moneys that you are saying are carried over.

Mr McLINDON: Yes, that is right. I wanted to see the carryover to see what stage it was at.

CHAIR: Perhaps you could show the relevance of that so the minister can answer it.

Mr McLINDON: That initiative that was raised—I am not trying to catch you out. If you want to answer it or put it on tabled documents later, I am happy for that to occur. It was a 2006 initiative that was going to be rolling out over a period. I just want to know if that money was, in fact, in this budget to complete those projects.

Ms STRUTHERS: Mr Chairman, during the course of the session this morning I am happy to get some more information. It might be hard to identify it. We have a bucket load of money in there—

Mr McLINDON: I am happy to take that—

Ms STRUTHERS:—and I am not sure which \$50 million he is talking about, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: The member has indicated that if you can come up with some detail—

Ms STRUTHERS: He may be referring to the Queensland Future Growth Fund. Our government committed \$500 million of state funds in 2007-08 for social housing some of which has been expended in remote Indigenous communities. That has allowed us to provide more than 1,600 new dwellings under that specific state spend on top of the federal spend. I am happy to dig around to see if we can find it.

Mr McLINDON: I am happy to put that on notice.

Ms STRUTHERS: There is nothing hidden. I want to tell you about all the money that we are spending. It is certainly a lot more than \$50 million.

CHAIR: Minister, we will set that down to detail on notice. I think the member for Cook has another question for you.

Mr O'BRIEN: I do. It is on a slightly different tack. Are you able to tell me about any programs that will help the people in my electorate of Cook find a home?

Ms STRUTHERS: Again, member for Cook, I thank you for your support. You are not shy about coming to see me and raising these issues. I know when we met a couple of weeks ago you were concerned about both the broader housing issues but also specifically homelessness. At that time I was able to tell you that, as part of our agreement with the federal government and our homelessness strategy, we had announced a \$1.56 million program over two years, the Street to Home initiative, for Mareeba and the Tablelands. That is a new initiative for your area. It has been a very successful program.

One of the things we have really come to understand is that you cannot apply a light touch to people in need. You actually have to understand why they are not sustaining a tenancy, what issues are going on in their lives that may be impacting on their ability to stay in the one spot and sustain that tenancy. So Street to Home is actually working with people, assessing their complex needs and working through those. So you will find in your area as that service gets up and running that there will be a whole lot of good support available across the Tablelands area.

Ms SIMPSON: I have a question going back to the Indigenous affairs issue.

CHAIR: I call the member for Maroochydore.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, I refer you to last year's failure to deliver federally funded Indigenous housing on time, incurring a \$3 million penalty for a failure to deliver 19 houses by the deadline. Given the removal of these funds from federal contributions for 2010-11 and 2011-12, has the state replaced these funds or left the communities to bear the shortfall?

Ms STRUTHERS: Again, I thank the member for the question. I am happy to go through it. Do I have a lot of time left, Mr Chairman?

CHAIR: You have three-quarters of an hour. But I would appreciate it if we could have some conciseness.

Ms STRUTHERS: I want to give a very detailed answer here, so hang on to your seats. This is a really critical issue. I said to you earlier that I meet with the mayors regularly. We sit around a table, generally in Cairns or one of the communities, with other ministers as well. On this specific remote Indigenous housing rollout we made it very clear at the beginning that one of the requirements of the funding from the federal government was 40-year leases on these properties. The federal government rightly wanted to secure their investment on these properties. It is taxpayers' money. They wanted to take the responsible decision and secure those leases. We did not necessarily feel that as a state we needed that. We have had good arrangements in those communities but that was the deal. That was made very clear to the mayors. Alf Lacey and others met with me on a number of occasions and expressed concern.

Over that period we had endless discussions sorting through that. We offered legal advice to the mayors to help them wade through the issues around those leases. We could not put a slab down or lay a brick or do anything until we had those lease agreements. One of the first leases was signed in April the following year. So effectively my department had from April to June to meet the target. I met the federal minister and I talked to her on the phone and discussed our concerns. We could not force these mayors to sign up. We could not force these communities to sign up to a federal program until those leases were signed and they had that agreement. So the mayors understood that. They knew that.

So I think it is a bit rich to say—I certainly felt as a minister that we should not have been penalised, but they were the rules. We knew that and the mayors knew that. We in fact had said to them very clearly that money may be taken back if it is unspent. Even though we only had that limited time, we actually did pretty well—62 houses were built in that year. I think our target was something like 68. I am getting some information here. There were to be 62 new constructions. We met the target set by the federal department of housing for 2011-12. It was a great effort by our agency to get houses built and constructed in effectively what was a very short time frame to do that.

I have not missed the opportunity. Any time I see Jenny Macklin or Senator Mark Arbib I say, 'We are doing well. We are on track. We have signed leases. We have done all that. We want some extra money for that thanks very much.' I am not sure that they are going to come to the party, but I am certainly in there giving it a go.

Ms SIMPSON: So, Minister, effectively Queensland lost that money. My question is with regard to the discontinuation of another new measure—the overcrowding in Indigenous communities. Given this is such a major problem, why has this performance standard been axed?

Ms STRUTHERS: What page of the SDS is the member referring to?

Ms SIMPSON: Page 5-28.

Ms STRUTHERS: I will refer you to the note on that page but I need to have a look at that as well. While that is being drawn to my attention, again I have the opportunity to talk about our investment in remote and Indigenous housing. As part of the Closing the Gap initiative with the federal government, we have unprecedented investment in housing. That is the way you reduce overcrowding—you give people jobs, you give them income and support and training, you give them more housing.

Let me just go through some of the progress and the schedule under the Remote Indigenous Housing Program. In Aurukun, scheduled for 2010 to 2012 are 17 new houses; Doomadgee, 13; Hope Vale 15; Kowanyama 16; Napranum, 17; Woorabinda, 19, and the list goes on, as well as refurbishments of existing properties. I might actually defer to the director-general to explain the discontinued measure. That is an operational matter. But I do urge the member to consider how much activity is going on in these communities to build more housing and reduce overcrowding.

Ms Apelt: You will note that within this year's SDS there are a number of service standards that have been discontinued, and that is the result of an overall audit to ensure that the service standards that are there actually are a good measure of efficiency and effectiveness. With respect to overcrowding, overcrowding is largely influenced by tenancy management practices. Until recent times, tenancy management has not been something that has been in the control of the department. But lately we have actually been working with each of the communities to sign up as part of the new housing agreement for tenancy management to be managed through the Department of Communities.

Until that happens, the issue of overcrowding is not necessarily something that can be measured as a reflection on the tenancy management practices of the department. Once communities have actually signed up to tenancy management—of which many are and that is happening with satisfactory progress—this measure will be revisited. But that does not mean to say that overcrowding is an issue that we do not keep an eye on. Certainly the issues of crowding influence the data that we collect on needs analysis for each of the communities.

Ms SIMPSON: My question is to the minister in respect of homelessness. Minister, how do you assess homelessness in each region across the state and has there been any effort to update it since the June 2008 regional profiles—a question which is relevant given that some of the recent allocations in this area have left whole regions off the list?

Ms STRUTHERS: I am not sure that the premise of your question is accurate but let me have a go at answering it. Basically in assessing homelessness we work on this nationally. Again, I mentioned earlier our ministerial council meetings. We work to definitions of homelessness and the count on homelessness is agreed to and administered through the census that is done every five years.

Our ABS review is underway now of the counting of the homeless across the nation including Queensland. There are various definitions of homelessness that we work with as well. For instance, at a practical level we have found that, even in the count on homelessness that has been done in the past, grey nomads have been popping up in the statistics as homeless when in fact they are mobile rather than homeless. So the review is actually looking into some of these issues.

But in general the definitions relate both to tertiary homelessness and secondary homelessness—those people who are both sleeping rough and living rough in relation to the streets around Brisbane and Queensland but also those who are in temporary accommodation, those who would be considered to be in substandard arrangements where they are sharing with others. It is a broad-ranging definition of homelessness. We certainly work to a needs based planning system in the allocation of our homelessness services.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, I have a follow-up question specifically with regard to homelessness on the Sunshine Coast but it does also refer to all regions of Queensland. It is concerning the lack of access to services for homeless men. I want to table an article in today's *Sunshine Coast Daily* about the gumboot man who has been forced out. Also, I will table a letter from a constituent who raised the issue saying that there is just nothing available for a lot of homeless men on the Sunshine Coast. What has been done to assess the homelessness situation in this region and how is that paralleled across the state?

Ms STRUTHERS: Firstly, let me respond to the media article, because I have seen that as well, and the fellow who is affectionately referred to as the gumboot man. I am sorry that I do not have his name. My department has been working with this fellow. Both St Vinnies and my department have

offered him assistance in the past and he has declined. I thank the woman who has been offering him temporary accommodation. It sounds like she is very upset that others have not been expressing the same sort of humanity and compassion that she has. But I want to reassure you—and I have checked this morning—that my department has had contact with this fellow, as have Vinnies on the coast. He has not wanted assistance. We cannot force people to take up the housing assistance available.

But I certainly want to say to you that, as I said earlier, I was on the coast recently. I visited a new complex at Maroochydore under the NRAS scheme. We are going to continue providing as much assistance as we can in the Sunshine Coast area. I met with staff and committee members of the Coast2Bay housing service. That is great news. The Sunshine Coast housing service has combined with the Moreton Bay regional housing service to form the one big growth company now. That is what we want to see. We want to see those non-profit housing companies grow and deliver the housing that they do so well. They are certainly very happy with their new structure and the greater capacity they have as well to provide housing assistance on the Sunshine Coast.

CHAIR: To go beyond that, Minister, homelessness obviously in society causes great stress, and there is no doubt that there are a number of people who are stressed. Are there specific programs that you can point to that will help those people find a home and get their lives back on track?

Ms STRUTHERS: Again, I refer to the document I launched this morning, *Opening Doors*. *Opening Doors* sets out our plan in relation to homelessness for the next three years. Our first priority is to prevent people from becoming homeless. That is where we then have to understand the issues that lead people to be homeless. One of the greatest causes of homelessness for women, for instance, is domestic violence. We have a strong program of support around the state and strong laws to deal with domestic violence. Our aim is to keep women and children in their own home so that they do not have to flee. But that is one of the biggest demands on our system state-wide in relation to homelessness for women—that is, women who have been violated by their own partners. So there are a range of programs that we are supporting.

As I said earlier, we have had unprecedented support from the federal government. The federal Labor government has put housing assistance very high on the national agenda. Now is a good time to actually get the new initiatives up and running. The Street to Home initiative I mentioned is rolling out in the member for Cook's electorate, as it is in others as well. The Youth Housing and Reintegration Service is a great new initiative. I have met with staff involved in that. Non-government agencies have received money to work specifically with youth at risk, particularly young people who are exiting care, both foster care and care of the state, as well as detention—young people who if they do not come back on track may pose a further risk to themselves or others. YHARS has worked with over 200 people since it was implemented last year and is doing great work in dealing with the complexity of the lives many of these people have.

Young people, for instance, are sleeping rough or couch surfing, as they call it, for many reasons. One of those is that they have come from a dysfunctional home. Another is that they have disengaged from school for a range of reasons. YHARS staff are able to assess in a fulsome manner what issues are going on in the lives of these young people and work with them across a range of issues, like the need for them to be trained, to get back into school or to find work, like the need for them maybe to get support to come off some sort of substance, whether it is alcohol or some other stuff that is going on in their lives.

There are some really innovative programs happening around the state, like the health outreach teams. There is great work and very encouraging work happening in order to not only prevent people from becoming homeless but also get them the housing assistance and support they need when they are homeless and help them sustain those tenancies.

I commend the 50 Lives 50 Homes project that Micah and others in Brisbane have been involved with. We had a barbecue here at Parliament House about six months ago where nearly all of those 50 tenants came along. They told me their stories. Many of them had been sleeping rough around Brisbane for quite a while. I remember one fellow said to me that he had been sleeping rough around the Riverside Centre and he was pretty cranky initially that people were wanting to move him on, but he realised they were actually there to help and he said that they persisted. I think that is the magic ingredient here—the capacity to offer follow-up support and be persistent. It is not easy to help overturn some of these issues that are underpinning that homelessness.

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

Ms SIMPSON: Mr Chair, I actually have a question to the minister in regard to the Capital Statement.

CHAIR: I am sorry?

Ms SIMPSON: We have not addressed some of the acquittals for the last financial year in regard to the Capital Statement as at 30 June.

CHAIR: The member for Capalaba has a question.

Mr CHOI: My wife and one of my daughters are architects, and they often comment about how well social housing is designed these days. In fact sometimes I think they are better designed than some of the products in the private market. Can you inform the committee about policies from the government that deliver quality social housing in Queensland?

Ms STRUTHERS: Again, I thank the member for his support and feedback on our housing. We do take great pride in our housing—in the design of our housing and in the environmental credentials of our housing as well. We want our housing to blend in with communities. Gone are the days of the old housing commission estates on the fringes of cities and towns around Queensland. We spot-purchase land. Under the Nation Building and Jobs Plan, we have been able to work with private developers to build right across cities and regions. The design is very, very good. I actually have some pictures of some of our housing if I am allowed, Mr Chair.

CHAIR: No. Perhaps if we could just have the answer to the question.

Ms STRUTHERS: I will pass these on to the member for Capalaba later on. They are very good quality housing. As minister, I have been extremely pleased with both the quality of our housing and the way in which we build in energy efficiency provisions within our housing. I pay tribute to our staff. In the last couple of years we have been rolling out thousands of new properties, and that has been a big ask. That means assessing projects, doing due diligence on projects and negotiating with contractors. It has been a really big effort. We have also focused heavily on universal design so our stock across the state, particularly our new stock, complies with, and exceeds in many cases, universal design provisions. They are available for people with disabilities and they are accessible. I think about 27 per cent of our stock, or at least our new build, is of universal design. That is a great feature of our public housing compared to the private sector.

CHAIR: I call the member for Maroochydoore.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, I refer to page 29 of the Capital Statement. How much was actually spent by 30 June on capital outlays?

Ms STRUTHERS: I might need you to be a bit more specific in relation to—

Ms SIMPSON: On page 23 of the Capital Statement you outline the total outlay for the department of housing. On page 29 there is no detail as to how much was spent as at 30 June. Can the minister now advise the estimates committee how much was spent as at 30 June?

Ms STRUTHERS: My advice is that \$892,000,907 was spent. I guess you are probably referring to some of the deferrals that are made. Capital works is a rolling program; it is not a strict time line around expenditure. Projects can be deferred as construction delays might occur or negotiations occur around due diligence in the early stages of projects. A significant proportion of our capital spend is capital grants to non-government organisations. I can go through some of the deferrals for you. Is that what you are seeking information on?

Ms SIMPSON: No. I am wanting to know what was the expenditure at 30 June.

Ms STRUTHERS: The figure I have is \$892,000,907. The advice I have received is that is the unaudited actual.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you. If I may also ask: what was the split between federal and state in regard to that expenditure?

Ms STRUTHERS: I might need some time to get that for you because, as I have said throughout this session, there has been unprecedented investment across our housing portfolio. The Queensland Future Growth Fund was a \$500 million investment in 2007-08. It was a three-year investment; that is still rolling out. We have got our federal government programs around remote Indigenous housing, the Nation Building and Jobs Plan.

While I am on that point, I do not think I have had the opportunity to say this morning, but let me remind the member that it is her colleagues federally who did not support the Nation Building and Jobs Plan in the federal parliament. Their actions would have denied all of those 4,000 new units of social housing being available to Queenslanders. There would not have been a build on the Sunshine Coast, there would not have been a build around the Redlands, there would not have been a build in parts of Queensland if your federal colleagues had their way. At no point in the chamber in the last two or three years have I heard you get up and have a go at them about that. I have not heard you get up and say to them, 'We need more money for social housing. I'm sorry my federal colleagues didn't support this'—

Ms SIMPSON: Has the minister got an answer for a basic question in respect of the state and federal expenditure by 30 June, or doesn't she abide by the rules in respect of financial years?

Ms STRUTHERS: I have some advice in relation to the estimated actual: Commonwealth spend, \$333 million; state, \$86 million; and others, \$162 million.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, in respect of the service summary on page 3-9 of the budget papers and in comparison with last year's service summary, could the minister advise what the actuals were in regard to the state and Commonwealth expenditure as well as other user charges and other revenue?

Ms STRUTHERS: The member would appreciate that there is some detail in the question she is asking. I might defer to the director-general or one of our financial gurus like Ian Fulton. The director-general can answer that.

Ms Apelt: We actually can provide that breakdown, but given there is a lot of detail involved we would not be able to do it just now. We can provide that detail to the member.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you. Minister, there are more than 30,000 people on the housing waiting list. Can you address what the state is specifically investing in capital works in the next 12 months, excluding A Place to Call Home? How much has this program decreased the waiting times in the last 12 months?

Ms STRUTHERS: Well, there is not just one specific program that is assisting in providing housing to people—

Ms SIMPSON: In respect of the state contribution, how much is the state going to contribute in the next 12 months?

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, you asked the question. Please allow the minister to answer it.

Ms STRUTHERS: I am happy to answer the question. Unlike the conservatives, we actually work in a partnership here with our federal colleagues. We actually have significant investment in housing under joint state-federal arrangements. As I said earlier, if they had their way federally, we would not have one cent of this money under the Nation Building and Jobs Plan. We would be relying on the Queensland Future Growth Fund and any other money we could get at a state level. We now have unprecedented joint arrangements and we are rolling out housing through those partnerships through the end of this year and we will continue.

I am not sure what sort of detail the member is requiring and I am not sure that I can provide it off the cuff right now. We may have to take something on notice. These are joint partnerships. The Remote Housing Indigenous Program is building on our own state program on remote communities. I will get the director-general to add some more detail and we will see how we go in responding to the issue.

Ms Apelt: In terms of the capital outlays for 2011-12, the Commonwealth capital outlay contribution to the overall program is \$333 million, the state contribution is \$86 million and other revenue will be \$162 million. As the minister indicated, these funds make up the overall budget that then informs the needs analysis that gets rolled out in a rolling capital works program. We do not delineate between which capital projects are Commonwealth and which are state because the funds are combined as part of the partnership.

Ms SIMPSON: So what will the state's contribution be in the next 12 months to the state building program for social housing?

Ms STRUTHERS: Well, \$86 million is the estimated actual, and a large chunk of that is the last tranche of the Queensland Future Growth Fund.

Ms SIMPSON: And that will be administered by the department in construction or will that include NGO expenditure in delivering social housing?

Ms STRUTHERS: My understanding across each of our program areas is that capital grants to NGOs are a significant part of that. Let me say that many of them are very, very appreciative of this boost to their opportunities—their investment opportunities, their opportunity to bring on board a whole lot of new housing. We are seeing the growth of the Brisbane Housing Co. and the coast to bay housing company. Those in regional parts of Queensland are doing really good work and are using this investment opportunity to build their own housing stock. They are all part of our One Social Housing System, so people on our social housing register get the benefit of the housing that Vinnies, Churches of Christ, our housing companies and others are able to bring online as a result of this investment.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, I certainly welcome the involvement of the NGO sector. I think there are many excellent organisations and that is certainly something I support. My question is: what will the split be between stock the state is delivering directly and stock the NGOs deliver out of state funds in the next 12 months?

Ms STRUTHERS: I might have to get some information on the specific breakdown of our capital grants to NGOs. I do not know if I can get that readily. The \$326.5 million in capital grant funding this financial year will add another 1,017 new units of accommodation to the social housing portfolio. I commend our non-government partners; they are doing a great job. They can bring a whole lot to this task as well. They get tax exemptions and things that government agencies do not get. They get philanthropic donations and support from their own respective agencies.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, you may have answered that and I may have missed it, but did that totality of product include an estimate of the dollar value?

Ms STRUTHERS: I think I said \$326.5 million.

Ms SIMPSON: For the state build of that particular program?

Ms STRUTHERS: My advice is that \$326.5 million in capital grant funding will be provided to NGOs this financial year. That is the total.

Ms SIMPSON: That is the total. So the balance is for the state's own build in respect of the state housing program in the next 12 months?

Ms STRUTHERS: Yes.

Ms SIMPSON: Just for the record, what is the state's own-build dollar value in the next 12 months?

Ms STRUTHERS: In this financial year \$254 million.

Ms SIMPSON: Of the state's own without federal contribution?

Ms STRUTHERS: Yes.

Ms SIMPSON: So that includes \$60 million from the growth fund and the balance being allocated?

Ms STRUTHERS: That is my understanding. If I am incorrect, I will correct the record.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you.

CHAIR: I call the member for Cook.

Mr O'BRIEN: My question is along a similar line to the one that the member for Maroochydore has been pursuing but it is more about local government, particularly in Indigenous communities. What specific benefits are there for Indigenous local councils and the traditional owners as a result of the BER rollout into those communities?

Ms STRUTHERS: Are you referring to the remote Indigenous rollout or the BER?

Mr O'BRIEN: Sorry, not BER; Nation Building in terms of schools. Sorry; I have confused the two.

Ms STRUTHERS: They are working together because as we build those buildings on schools we are also rolling out housing, and that is offering the continuity of work. There are a number of benefits, and I thank the member for his question. Across the building program, firstly we have had to sign up councils to those leases and to get the agreement to go ahead with housing. So as part of that package we offered rates equivalent payments and one-off payments as well. We are treating them like every other council, so they have had a package of financial support that has been very welcomed. So that is, firstly, one of the benefits as well. But then in terms of rolling out the housing across those communities, we have certainly been able to see reductions in the overcrowding issues and we have been able to see gains in employment opportunities across each of the communities. I think those benefits will certainly be lasting benefits and because of the 10-year commitment under the Remote Indigenous Housing Program we are able to schedule those works over a period of time.

Member for Cook, you travel around a lot. You know these communities well. Over the last couple of years you would have seen the benefits of this program and you will see it into the future—the new subdevelopments, the excitement around the new housing being built and opened and people moving in. I have been to many of those communities where mayors and others have shown me around proudly the new housing and what it is doing for communities. The other benefit is the housing upgrades. That is a bit of an untold story in all of this. Over the last couple of years—I think I mentioned it earlier—we have been able to upgrade over 30,000 units of social housing, and a number of those have been on Indigenous communities as well. So there has been enormous benefit in the quality of the housing, in maintaining the standards on the housing as well as building new housing.

Mr O'BRIEN: Just on the rate support that you spoke about then, is that ongoing support? Does that have a sunset clause or is that funding that is ongoing for those local councils?

Ms STRUTHERS: My understanding is that that is a standard rates agreement like any other council, and that is ongoing. That has been something that the mayors have been very pleased with and agreed to. So certainly one of the benefits is that their own income has been increased as a result of that.

Mr O'BRIEN: Is there any obligation on councils to spend that specifically on housing, or is it money that they can use on any range of programs?

Ms STRUTHERS: My understanding is that it is to be used on housing, but I will just clarify that.

Ms Apelt: Yes, it is.

Ms STRUTHERS: I invite the DG to respond.

Ms Apelt: The idea of the rates equivalent payments is to have, I guess, a relationship with the councils like we do with other councils throughout the state. With regard to the revenue that goes to the council coffers, if you like, councils use that for municipal purposes. Some of that might be the kerbing and channelling or beyond the gate type infrastructure that supports the housing infrastructure just like other councils do.

Ms STRUTHERS: Mr Chairman, I just want to make a correction. I said to the member for Maroochydore that I would correct the record if I gave an incorrect figure. She asked about the Commonwealth and state spend. The estimated actual for 2010-11 for the Commonwealth was \$568 million and the state \$131 million and another \$191 million which makes a total of \$890 million. I incorrectly provided the 2011-12 figures rather than what she had requested, which was the 2010-11 estimated actual.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you. Minister, in respect of the Commonwealth agreement for the Nation Building Program, you answered the question on notice with regard to what performance standards are required, but this answer did not provide the detail as to what was required by 30 June. Could the minister outline what specific performance criteria are a part of that agreement and those benchmarks in more detail?

Ms STRUTHERS: I thank the member for the question. Again I say to the member that her side of politics did not support this Nation Building and Jobs Plan, and I will keep telling everyone this because it is important that people know. Every one of those 4,000 units of social housing would have been denied to Queenslanders if they had their way in the federal parliament, but thankfully they do not. In terms of the agreement with the federal government, under the Nation Building and Jobs Plan we have certainly been meeting our targets in relation to the rollout of housing. One of the agreements was that the housing had to come in at an average of \$300,000 per dwelling. We have bettered that target. The Queensland auditor's report on our housing showed clearly and praised us for the fact that we had come in at around \$271,000 on our housing. Firstly, we have built it at an economical rate and we have built it efficiently and it is good quality. In relation to the targets themselves, I might need to get specific numbers for you. Is that what you are seeking?

Ms SIMPSON: I am wondering if there are actually any other performance standards that have some detail.

Ms STRUTHERS: It is a stimulus package, so the general agreement was that it was a stimulus to the private sector.

Ms SIMPSON: There was a general agreement mentioned, but there was no detail and one would expect that there would be greater criteria than just those words.

Ms STRUTHERS: There were not specific jobs targets, but we have generated over 6,500 full-time equivalent jobs through the rollout of this program, and that was one of the agreements with the federal government. It is a stimulus package through which housing has been provided. So in terms of the whole aim—and it has achieved that—in areas like North Queensland where the construction industry has been down around 50 per cent, our housing build has really helped that local economy. It is the same on the Gold Coast. There has been a lot of activity through our social housing programs on the Gold Coast that have been stimulated largely by the Nation Building and Jobs Plan. The target was an additional 4,000 new units of social housing and we are well on track to achieve that, and we certainly had a target around the upgrade of properties as well. If you want more detail, I am happy to provide it. We have now achieved the 75 per cent of spend. We achieved that at the end of 2010. We work with our colleagues very closely at the federal level and my understanding is that they are very happy with the progress on the Nation Building and Jobs Plan rollout.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, I have a question with regard to the department's selling program. What is the fee received for every sale of an accommodation unit—a fee set by Project Services or any other government agency?

Ms STRUTHERS: I might need to get some advice on that. I do not know what the fee might be or whether there is a fee. I am not accepting the premise of the question until I get some more advice.

Ms SIMPSON: I will ask the director-general. Can the director-general advise whether Project Services sets a fee for the sale of accommodation units under the department's program to sell housing units?

Ms Apelt: Project Services has a whole-of-government shared services role to act on behalf of the Department of Communities with a number of property transactions which includes the sale of surplus properties. There is an internal fee transaction that happens from the Department of Communities accounts to Project Services. It is an internal to government transfer fee arrangement.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you, Director-General. If I could follow that up and ask what is the average fee that Project Services charge the housing department of your department?

Mr O'BRIEN: Point of order. The fee that Project Services charge is not a matter for this minister or this director-general and therefore not a matter that should be considered by this committee. It is a matter for the Minister for Public Works, Minister Finn, in a question that should be directed to him.

Ms SIMPSON: With respect, it is coming out of the budget of this department and therefore it is a line item to be considered.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, there is a point of order and if you would please desist until the point of order is determined. I accept the point of order and if—

Ms SIMPSON: I will rephrase my question; thank you, Mr Chair.

CHAIR: If you would. Thank you, member for Maroochydore.

Ms SIMPSON: Has the department paid money to Project Services with regard to sales that have been undertaken at the direction of your department? How do you calculate the payment of these in your budget?

Ms Apelt: Every year we enter into a partnership agreement with Project Services and the fee structure depends on what the forward program is and the nature of the transactions that we will be asking our partner to undertake. That is an annual budgeting process and I will need to get the finer details for you if that is what you are looking for in terms of that.

Ms SIMPSON: I would appreciate that, particularly with regard to how much was part of your budget in the last year at 30 June with regard to the sale of properties given that that would be a cost that would be deducted from what you achieve at sale.

Ms STRUTHERS: Mr Chair, we might take that on notice.

Ms Apelt: I actually do have the fee here. There is an average fee in the last 12 months of \$3,000 per property.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you. In respect of the average price of acquisitions under the ERAP or the employment related accommodation program in Gladstone, would you be able to advise what that would be?

Ms STRUTHERS: Is that directed to the director-general?

Ms SIMPSON: Yes, if I may ask the director-general.

Ms STRUTHERS: Could you repeat the question?

Ms SIMPSON: Yes. What is the average price of acquisitions under the ERAP in Gladstone?

Ms STRUTHERS: Sorry, but what is the reference to the budget paper?

Ms SIMPSON: This is with regard to the capital outlay program with acquisitions for employment related accommodation.

Ms STRUTHERS: What page are you on?

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, I thought with regard to our briefings we did not have to provide line items specifically for a sale but we could ask with regard to it.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore—

Ms SIMPSON: Okay. On pages 28 and 29 you have an acquisition program and it refers to ongoing acquisition and construction but does not provide that breakdown. So if I may ask in respect of the capital program—

Ms STRUTHERS: Mr Chairman, we are happy to answer the question. It is just hard to understand the nature of the question if we do not have a reference.

CHAIR: Perhaps if the member could direct the minister to the particular—

Ms SIMPSON: In the capital works program on pages 28 and 29—

CHAIR: Pages 28 and 29 of what publication?

Ms SIMPSON: Of the Capital Statement where you have an outline of expenditure across the department. As we have outlined before, you do not actually provide that level of detail and therefore we are able to ask that here at the estimates process.

Ms STRUTHERS: If you can just give us a moment to seek some advice in relation to that. I will ask the director-general to respond.

Ms Apelt: The specific reference the member has is under the Remote Indigenous Housing Program for the NPA. There is employment related accommodation to the value of \$12.798 million. This is a vital part of being able to deliver on the capital works program for remote Indigenous communities. This is in some ways an ethical issue in that in order to provide certainty for workers to be able to work on the programs that we have funded through those communities we also need to provide reliable living conditions rather than take up valuable scarce accommodation available for the community. So there has been a provision made under the Remote Indigenous Housing Program.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you, Director-General. Following on from that, would we be able to have an outline of what the cost of those acquisitions have been in the various communities? We understand that there would be different costs across different communities but so we can be aware of what that may look like in the varying communities.

Ms Apelt: We can provide those details and I will provide those before the end of session.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you. Minister, I have a question in relation to question on notice 1068 in 2011 and I refer to the minister's answer with regard to vacancy in social housing across the regions, and I ask: how can there be no demand if there were more than 30,000 people on the long-term waiting list?

Ms STRUTHERS: Again I question the premise of your question here. Where are you referring to no demand?

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, in respect of this question, I am asking about the varying vacancy rates and ask for an explanation as to why there is such a variation in some of these vacancy rates given the continuing demand in these communities.

Ms STRUTHERS: Okay; I see what you are meaning. In relation to the question on notice you asked about properties that are vacant in our stock, let me just say that our vacancy rate across our public housing is around 1.3 per cent at any given time. That compares very favourably to the private sector of around 3.6 per cent. So as you can imagine, when you are the property manager of 66,000 or so properties, as people vacate you have to maintain them and you have to reallocate tenancies. So at any point in time some of our properties will be vacant. I think what you are referring to is that in that answer I gave a number of reasons why properties are vacant, and I included in that answer that it could be the normal end of a tenancy and the maintenance that is required or property upgrades. Part of our strategic asset review might be that we are assessing whether a property should be sold or demolished or upgraded or whatever. Properties are put up for sale as well and may be vacant. Where there is no demand—it would not occur very often—from time to time in some remote parts of Queensland where we have had one or two public housing dwellings there is not always demand in that town for that. So that is what that would be referring to.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The committee will now break, but before we break there was an answer from the director-general about some detail by the end of session. Perhaps that question could formally be put on notice so that we can deal with it in a formal manner. If the reply is available by end of session, then that is fine but those questions on notice are still available until five o'clock tomorrow afternoon. The hearing will resume at 1.30 pm.

Proceedings suspended from 12.46 pm to 1.32 pm

CHAIR: Welcome back, Minister, and your officers. We will now commence questioning in relation to Community Services. I call the member for Redlands.

Mr DOWLING: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I direct my question to the minister, if I may. I am just wondering how many young offenders under the supervision of the department either through probation or through parole were drug tested during the year 2010-11 and how many returned positive tests.

Ms STRUTHERS: I thank the member for the question. I will need to get some advice on that. If you are happy to move on to another question, I will come back to that one.

Mr DOWLING: My follow-on to that would be what provisions have been put aside to cope with the year 2011-12? So could you take both of those?

Ms STRUTHERS: Sorry, what provisions have been set aside?

Mr DOWLING: To address those issues for the 2011-12 year.

Ms STRUTHERS: Thank you. We will seek some information on that and get back to you.

Mr DOWLING: My next question is again to the minister. In adult corrections there are a series of programs to address the criminogenics of offenders. Yet there seems to be no evidence of such programs existing for young offenders. I am just wondering what rehabilitation programs are being offered to young offenders under supervision or in detention and how much of the budget is being set aside for those programs in 2011-12?

Ms STRUTHERS: I thank the member for the question. I am keen to respond to this because you have raised the issue about rehabilitation and programs. Your question seems to assume that there are not programs in our youth detention centres. So I am very happy to correct that. I have visited Cleveland on a couple of occasions and the Brisbane Youth Detention Centre on a couple of occasions as well and I have seen firsthand the wide-ranging programs offered to young people. Your question seems to imply that you believe that young people ought to be rehabilitated and do benefit from rehabilitation. I am pleased to hear that, because unless we address the causes of crime and unless we address the reasons young people are offending then we risk them reoffending.

At the Brisbane Youth Detention Centre and at Cleveland I have seen them in the workshops and I have seen them do job-skilling programs directly related to areas where they then can be positioned well to get trade and job opportunities when they leave detention. I have seen firsthand the educational programs and the commitment of those educators. I sat in on a group of young offenders at the Brisbane Youth Detention Centre having a session with an Indigenous elder who was talking to them about the importance of values and respect. That is an underpinning issue for young people who are

offending. Many of them at that point in time have a bit of a chip on their shoulder, a bit of an attitude for a range of reasons. It may be based on their own abuse or family dysfunction or whatever. But they present with a bit of attitude sometimes. This guy was saying to them, 'There is no place for that sort of attitude. We want you to respect other people in your community, white or black.' It was a really good session in getting these young people to dig deep and to think about the impact of their behaviour on others. So within these centres themselves there are extensive programs. A lot of effort is put into both the values and attitudes of young people but also practical opportunities to skill up while they are there and to get jobs or get back into school when they leave.

I have just got some advice. Did you ask specifically about the funding for programs?

Mr DOWLING: Correct.

Ms STRUTHERS: In relation to the youth detention centres themselves, I might need to seek some specific advice on that. I have data here on the broader funding to our youth programs but, in relation to these centres specifically, I might need to get back to you.

Mr DOWLING: If you would like to defer to one of your colleagues I am happy to take a response.

Ms STRUTHERS: In general terms let me say that our proposed spend for 2011-12 is \$19.5 million for prevention and early intervention services, which includes the young offender support service, Safe Youth—Safe Community, the very effective Griffith Youth Forensic Service, the Mater Family and Youth Counselling Service and others.

Mr DOWLING: We are still waiting then for a response to the first question. That will come later, will it?

Ms STRUTHERS: Just let me clarify: is that the question about drug testing?

Mr DOWLING: The question about the number of drug tests that were done.

Ms STRUTHERS: Sure. We will provide that.

Mr DOWLING: As a follow-on from the answer you have given, last year it was reported that there were more than 2,500 referrals for youth justice conferences, but there is no reporting on the outcomes of those—how many turned up, their success rate and failure rate, presumably. I would like the minister to touch on those referrals and whether or not there is any data that supports the programs that are currently in place that supports the outcomes.

Ms STRUTHERS: Thank you for asking about youth conferencing. We have reported in the service standards that out of youth conferencing there is generally about 95 per cent or 96 per cent satisfaction with the agreement. So I think you understand the process here. The victims of the crime are brought together by agreement with the offender and other significant people to go through the issues. The whole idea is to get the young people who have offended to face their victims and understand the impact of their behaviour, to get that attitude out of their head, to get the understanding that their behaviour—be it a break and enter at a local sports club or whatever—has a significant impact on a number of people. It gets them to dig deep. It gets them to feel ashamed. It gets them to feel a whole lot of things and for the victims themselves they get the opportunity to get a lot of hurt off their chest, a lot of anguish off their chest and face the victim. So it is by agreement only. Some people choose not to, but you have mentioned over 2,000 conferences. They are proving to be very successful in getting young people to face the consequences of their behaviour and agree to behaviour.

So it ranges from having to go to that particular sporting club where they may have graffitied or damaged property and go and work at that club or do some community service at that club. It involves agreements to very practical things. A young fellow I heard about had gone and done some fencing around a community service organisation. There are a whole lot of ways that these outcomes can be developed and agreed to. So there are over 2,000 cases. I cannot give you a general number of how many young people did particular activities, but I can reassure you that youth conferencing is proving very effective.

You talk to the police in your area. I have certainly talked to lots of police as I travel around the state and it is very encouraging to hear them say that young people are pretty shaken with this process, that they are shaking in their boots or that it is not a soft option. The police are referring a lot of these young people to conferences. A large majority of these conferences are police referrals. So we are very happy with the way they are developing.

I met with some people from Hong Kong. I have met them on two occasions now. They have come over to Queensland to be trained in our youth conferencing methods. I think you would agree that Hong Kong is not soft on crime. For them to send staff over here to train with our staff and for our staff to go to Hong Kong I think is a sign that this is a very important part of our youth justice system.

Mr DOWLING: Thank you.

CHAIR: Member for Redlands, before you ask your question, Minister, with regard to the question that was asked by the member for Redlands in relation to drug testing and the number of positive tests, I think it is probably wisest if we also put that as a question on notice, which allows you to obtain that information. As you are aware, those questions on notice have to be replied to by close of business tomorrow.

Ms STRUTHERS: Can I just clarify, too, in relation to a question asked by the member about the expenditure on our youth detention centres that the budget to operate the two detention centres and the services within these centres was \$38.305 million in 2010-11.

CHAIR: Thank you. We do have that question as a question on notice.

Mr DOWLING: Just as a follow-up to that, the core of the question, I suppose, was the repeat offence rate from those people who did the conferencing. Do we have baseline data there? It is all well and good that all of these people are doing the conferencing. We need to know that it is being effective. While it might be effective on the day and very confronting for all parties, we do not know the long-term benefits of that. Is it effective? Do we have some data and where is that reported?

Ms STRUTHERS: You have raised a very important issue. It is not data readily available to me within my agency. We report on the outcomes and the agreements of these conferences. We do not necessarily know in six months time whether that young person has reoffended. But we are working across government on a single person identifier system, whereby our youth justice data can be linked to police data and court data. I expect into the future we will have a much better way of tracking the pathways of young people through our system. Our own internal computer system—the ICMS system—is being upgraded to include that youth justice data, the youth conferencing data and, to link in with that, I think it is called the SPI project, or the single person identifier project, across government. I think that is being led through the Premier's department that project.

Mr DOWLING: Oftentimes the community sees our youth detention centres as more of a revolving door type of arrangement. There is not a lot of confidence in some respects for the hard-core group of young offenders—not right across-the-board—but for the hard-core young offenders. Given the millions of dollars that are set aside for the supported bail program, why are we still seeing large numbers of young offenders in our detention centres and on remand?

Ms STRUTHERS: I am happy to take that. That really has sort of political undertones rather than being about operational issues. I do not need to protect my director-general—she can do that pretty well; maybe I will let her decide—but, certainly, there is a political message there.

Mr DOWLING: I am happy for the minister to field the question. I thought it was more about specifics of expenditure—where it is being invested. While directional policy wise that falls to you but day-to-day operationally it falls to the director-general. I am happy for you to field the question.

Ms STRUTHERS: No, it is an entirely valid question. It just has a more political undertone. So I am very happy to answer the question.

Mr DOWLING: Thank you.

Ms STRUTHERS: Our strategies for bail support are very important in the youth justice system. All the evidence shows that if you can actively work with young people to understand their offending behaviour issues—you seemed to acknowledge that in an earlier question—you have a much better chance of getting them back on track. So funded services like YBASS—that is an acronym and someone will have to help me out with the full title; the Youth Bail Accommodation Support Service—has been operating for a long time and has a very good track record, particularly with Indigenous youth, in providing support.

We are certainly keen to ensure that as a condition of bail young people get access to support, particularly around housing. A number of the police and magistrates and service providers that I have spoken to have said, 'If we are confident they have a place to stay and a significant adult keeping an eye on them we are happy for them to be out on bail while these matters are heard, but if they don't there is a risk that they will be detained'. A high number of our young people are actually in detention on remand, their matters have not been heard. So it is important that we have an effective conditional bail system around the state. There are a number of very good programs that work with young people to get a roof over their head and help them out with a job or other needs that they have. I think that answers your question, but I am happy to respond further if you need it?

Mr DOWLING: Just as a follow up, if I may? You talked about the long-term success of that program. Where is that information recorded and how many people are, for want of a better phrase, regular clients of the bail program? Where is the recording of that and, again, how do you measure the success or failure? While I appreciate that in part it is support for people whose cases are not yet determined, I think it is important we know how many regular customers you have, or the department has, and how you measure that success and where it is reported?

Ms STRUTHERS: There are some specific programs, like YBASS which I mentioned, that are conditional bail programs specifically and then a number of other youth services provide a range of support to youth at risk and youth offenders. One of the ones we have funded in this budget is the Youth Opportunity Program in Cairns which works largely with Indigenous young people. We have evaluated and will continue to evaluate that program. In this budget we announced \$1.3 million a year to continue that program. ACT for Kids is the auspice of that program. There have been some really good results. In an evaluation of 112 young people who participated in that program in 2008 and 2009, half of them were not reoffending in a 12-month period compared to a control group. I hope I am clear on that. Basically, there is a 50 per cent success rate there.

Mr DOWLING: Does the data go beyond that first 12 months?

Ms STRUTHERS: The service standards record progress on conditional bail and the success of conditional bail. Successful completions of referrals to the conditional bail programs during the period are expressed as a percentage in our service standards. We have had about a 60 per cent success rate with Indigenous young people and 65 per cent with all young people. I will be corrected on that if I have expressed that incorrectly. As you would appreciate, you do not get 100 per cent success rates dealing with the complex needs, the complex issues, that are underpinning this offending behaviour—and that is not to diminish the seriousness of this behaviour. I as minister, my department and this government are very tough on crime. We have the strongest youth justice laws ever in this state. I introduced amendments to that legislation into the parliament last year. Whilst we are tough on crime, we also completely understand that unless you are tough on the causes of crime and tackle those you will not turn around that offending behaviour. Those rates, at around 60 to 65 per cent, I think speak fairly positively about the success of those bail programs and that Youth Opportunity Program in Cairns. I commend ACT for Kids. They do a great job in the child protection support services they provide, I have met with them in relation to their Referral for Active Intervention program, and now the work they are doing in the Youth Opportunity Program is getting some real results.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, already today we have discussed the importance of NGOs, the non-government sector, in delivering services here in Queensland. They are at the front line of many community services, yet so many organisations have to employ staff solely to deal with the ever-increasing red tape, and I ask: why are non-government organisations being left to carry the cost and burden of government paperwork?

Ms STRUTHERS: Again I would question the premise of the question. There has been a lot of work through the Compact, where non-government organisations have worked very cooperatively over the past few years with my department and me to achieve some real gains in reduction of red tape across the services sector. The premise of your question diminishes their work because a lot of these organisations are very, very pleased with the constructive input they have had into that process and what gains are being made. Some of our strategies in the past year or two in red tape reduction have included the reduction of common service agreements. We have reduced the number of agreements that are required for organisations that are funded to deliver a range of programs. As you may be aware, services attract funding from a range of different sources. We have certainly moved to one common service agreement for the programs we fund. We have transitioned a significant number of service agreements between government and NGOs to outputs rather than inputs. That is proving to be much more effective in giving NGOs the flexibility to spend the money they get in ways they deem necessary to achieve the outcomes that are agreed upon. We have commenced work on a single piece of funding legislation. I am working with my colleagues Curtis Pitt, Phil Reeves and others in relation to that. That will include Health and the other big funders of NGOs. That is a significant piece of work to reduce the red tape not only within my agency but across government. We will be coming to the House later this year with that one funding legislation.

In the Youth at Risk Initiative within my own department we moved from 1 July to realign what was 11 programs into one, giving services greater flexibility and clarity about their work with young people. We have developed a risk based approach to monitoring the performance of service providers. That will reduce the frequency of reporting for those low-risk services that are meeting all the requirements and ticking all the boxes. We have provided an online reporting tool in a number of areas of our department. I think you can see that there are a number of initiatives that have commenced in the past and are continuing that are proving to get great results in reducing that red tape and that burden on NGOs.

Ms SIMPSON: Further to that question, I have been talking to NGOs and it was they who raised with me the fact that they are still concerned about the level of red tape and the burden of paperwork and the cost of compliance. My question is in regard to the cost structure of the department. I reference the fact that the current cluster structure of the department has been implemented. I ask: what targets are there for measuring efficiencies in place for this new cluster arrangement and how much money has been saved since the cluster system was introduced?

Ms STRUTHERS: In referring to the cluster system, are you talking about the machinery of government changes that have brought Housing, Community Services, Child Safety and others under the one department?

Ms SIMPSON: Yes.

Ms STRUTHERS: Again I will speak generally while I get some specific response to your question. We have applied a No Wrong Door approach to service delivery. That is proving to be very effective in responding to clients who use our services. Basically we want our agency to be able to respond to clients if they have got a housing need, but we will also work with them to assess whether there are other issues that we can be helping them with. For instance, many women who are in need of housing are in that position because of domestic violence and we are dealing with those issues as well. We have been working across our agency on a No Wrong Door approach with significant benefits for the clients of our service system right around the state. You might just need to refer me specifically to the question you were asking about efficiencies or I can speak in general terms, or were you wanting the quantum?

Ms SIMPSON: I would actually like specifics and I am happy to direct this to the DG. You have departmental efficiency saving targets. In this budget in the strategy and outlook on page 101 it outlines what your targets are but it does not tell us what was achieved for the last year. If the Director-General perhaps could tell us what were the efficiencies that were actually achieved at 30 June this year and, specifically, how was that achieved.

Ms Apelt: There is an overall efficiency target set under the government's regulatory simplification plan. The Department of Communities is required to reduce the compliance cost to business, including the non-government sector, the community and government, by \$10 million annually from July 2013. We are absolutely on track to achieve that efficiency target.

Ms SIMPSON: Can I clarify that is in regard to business?

Ms Apelt: That is in regard to what is commonly referred to as red tape.

Ms SIMPSON: So external agencies?

Ms Apelt: External agencies and also in terms of the internal operation of the business. Achievement of that target is very closely monitored by the state Treasury. In addition to that, since 2009, with the establishment of the Department of Communities, as the minister mentioned, the whole philosophy behind the structure is to achieve a No Wrong Door experience for our clients. Already we are able to cite particular improvements of client service for our clients out in the community. There are lots of anecdotal arrangements. For example, when we have young mothers with a child safety concern, central to that concern might be the inability to get stable, affordable housing. What we are able to do now at the regional level is work as a whole-of-department to come up with solutions to support vulnerable people within the community. That certainly has been a very important part of reducing the cost of doing business.

I guess another example of an efficiency that has been achieved is that the number of senior executive officers within the department has actually been reduced. We have gone from three directors-general to one and we have gone from 64 SES officers to 58. But what we have been able to do is to redistribute that resourcing to the local level and strengthen our response in the housing service centres and also in our child safety service centres. In terms of the efficiency arrangements, there is very clear performance measures set out for the Department of Communities, most of which get reported in the annual budget documents. The service standards are about that. But there are also other efficiency standards that we are required to report to our Treasury which keeps a very close eye on ensuring that we are actually delivering value for money.

Ms SIMPSON: Supplementary to that, my question was in this instance specific to the department and its efficiency savings, I refer to page 101 of the strategy and outlook. It outlines there that for this year coming the department is supposed to save \$17 million and for last year the department was supposed to save \$15.32 million. Could the DG actually advise what was saved as at 30 June and provide that detailed performance outcome that you say you have to report to Treasury?

Ms Apelt: I can advise that the department did achieve its savings targets and I can provide further detail for the committee in terms of where those savings were drawn from the department. But in general, the savings have been drawn from the efficiencies that come with the clustering arrangement that you referred to. We are able to structure the business of the organisation with the clients' interest in mind first. We have worked from the ground up to ensure that we are able to deliver on a No Wrong Door experience for clients.

Ms SIMPSON: Further to that issue, because it is quite a complex structure rather than a fairly clear structure as to lines of responsibility, I would be interested to see the detail as to how that performance is measured in respect to the efficiencies. Do we have to formally put that on notice?

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms SIMPSON: We will formally put that one on notice.

CHAIR: Minister, I note SDS 3-3 refers to leading the community recovery response. I am aware of some of the work that your department did in Rockhampton and district. You were back there last week. Could you outline how you believe the spending by and work of your department has assisted in the recovery of people in the Rockhampton area?

Ms STRUTHERS: I did not have the opportunity at the beginning of this particular session, but in my opening remarks earlier on the Housing session I mentioned that it has been a mighty effort from my department and non-government organisations across the state. We have had over 2,600 or more staff on the front line of community recovery activity, including in your region. We all sat glued to our TVs as the water was rising in Rocky and around the region. We were very concerned for the people in your area.

Last week at Port Curtis I met with John and Diana Ritter. The aim of that meeting was for them to meet up with a donor to the Premier's relief fund, the Catholic Diocese of Rockhampton, which generously donated over \$100,000 to the Premier's relief fund, both through parish donations and from its own organisation. In talking to John and Diana, it was very clear that people have recovered reasonably well, but still there is some anguish. They are still rebuilding. For instance, John and Diana are still restumping their house and doing some work to flood proof it.

The will recovery effort has been an amazing effort. On a number of occasions the Premier has said—and she has said it basically from day one after we had been impacted so heavily across the state—that this is going to be a physical recovery and a reconstruction effort of mammoth proportions, but also it is going to be an emotional recovery. My department has been involved in both. We have been providing hardship grants and payments to people in your region. We have been providing emotional support and housing support. There is a range of areas where our staff have been very active in your local area and the broader Central Queensland region. If you want it, I have some specific information in relation to the range of assistance provided in Rockhampton and the broader region.

CHAIR: I think that is relevant to outlays from your department. Just before you give me that detail, as a follow-on from my original question, I note that for 2011-12 there is an additional \$20 million mentioned to help re-establish functioning and networks. That is NDRRA funding.

Ms STRUTHERS: I think you are aware, Mr Chairman, that the National Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements are a federal-state cooperative arrangement, with the federal government putting up about 75 per cent of the expenditure and the state 25 per cent. I will go through some of the support we have been able to provide in your region. Under the community recovery and wellbeing package—I think is the first time that the package has been activated across the nation; we announced it on 6 April having reached an agreement with the federal government—the Rockhampton Regional Council has received about \$450,000. It will receive a community development and engagement initiative package over two years to employ community development officers and fund local priorities.

They will also receive flexible funds of \$250,000 over two years to implement community development and engagement activities to support recovery, community rebuilding and future preparedness. This is to help lift the spirits of people and encourage them to support each other. I have attended some of those events. Some communities have held community festivals. I have been to some in Brisbane where, using funding under the NDRRA arrangements, people have brought the community together to try to share a bit of festivity and fun, as well as provide access to information and support stalls. That is the kind of thing that the Rockhampton Regional Council will be able to do in your region, as well as build on planning for the future. Fingers crossed, we do not want any more disasters, particularly of this sort of scale, but the reality is that we have to be prepared. Certainly a lot of individuals and families in your region have received significant financial support. I think over 1,300 payments have been made through my department to people in the Rockhampton LGA area.

Mr CHOI: Minister, my question is about youth justice. I am concerned about young people who are at risk of reoffending. Can you inform the committee what you and your department are doing to try to assist young people who perhaps are at risk of reoffending and try to get them some assistance to get back on their feet and back on track with their lives?

Ms STRUTHERS: I thank the member for his interest in youth. It might have been a year or so ago now when you invited me to your area to a youth festival as part of our Youth Week activities. The member for Redlands was there as well. You were really keen for me to meet people from one of your youth services, which had set up a mobile van. I had not seen it before, but they were hooked up to electric guitars and all sorts of things so that young people could have a bit of a soft entry into getting support through that service. They were doing outdoor activities as a way of engaging with young people. That is the kind of thing we need to see and we are seeing all around the state.

There is some very impressive work happening in your local area, around Brisbane and all around the state where very dedicated non-government organisations are working with staff in my department or with funds from programs in my department to try to engage young people back in school, engage them in skilling opportunities, engage them in work. We know if young people are learning or earning, they are less likely to get into strife and cause harm to other people. I accept that some young people cause enormous harm to themselves and to others. It is important that we have initiatives like our youth support coordinators in your region and all around the state. Those coordinators are engaged by non-government organisations to work actively with schools. This program is run in partnership with Education Queensland and my own department and they are getting great results. We are acknowledged nationally for the fact that the Youth Support Coordinator Program is reducing youth

homelessness as well. If we can reduce youth homelessness and get people settled into stable accommodation with significant other adults around them, looking after them and mentoring them, we have a much better chance of getting them on track.

I mentioned the Youth Opportunity Program operating out of Cairns by ACT for Kids. It is achieving great results, getting young people back into school, into work and halving the rates of reoffending. Those are the sorts of initiatives that we need to see and we are seeing. We need to build on that all around the state, including in your area. I thank you, member for Capalaba, for your support. I was very pleased to attend that youth festival. I am sorry I cannot remember the name of the service. I am happy to praise them and put them on record.

Mr CHOI: The Cage Youth Foundation.

Ms STRUTHERS: I say good on the people involved with The Cage. I was very impressed with the work they were doing and the way they were engaging actively with young people in the Redlands area.

Mr O'BRIEN: In that vein, I am interested in Far North Queensland. I am wondering what the government is doing to prevent young people in Far North Queensland from offending. Can you give us some specifics on that, please?

Ms STRUTHERS: Again, I know of the member's interest in this area and the active work he is doing to expand programs in Far North Queensland, both in remote Indigenous communities and also out of Cairns. I mentioned the Youth Opportunity Program. We have put an additional \$1.3 million into this budget to continue that program, because it is getting such good results. The Youth Justice Service operating out of Cairns services the remote communities. I have visited them a couple of times. They are doing great work. They use the internationally renowned and evidence based CHART, Changing Habits and Reaching Targets, and ART, Aggression Replacement Training, programs. Basically, they reduce reoffending by getting that attitude change I spoke of earlier, changing values and getting young people to understand the impact of their behaviour. In Far North Queensland, through our Youth Justice Service, young people on youth justice orders are signing up to those programs, which operate over a number of weeks. They have to make a commitment to the program as part of the agreement with their order.

There is a lot of good work happening in North Queensland. I have seen some really good Indigenous services using adventure based models, as well as some of the more therapeutic models and complementing that with the housing support that I have seen in North Queensland. As I said, and I think you have all made comments about this, unless you really tackle all the issues that are impacting on young people's offending, you are not going to turn around that behaviour. You cannot just lock them up, you cannot just give them a fine; you have to have a system in place that understands and deals with those issues. The profile of a lot of our young people who are serious offenders or serial offenders is generally one where they come from a home that was not the best; was not stable; was pretty dysfunctional. They have a history of abuse where they have been subject to abuse. Many of them are also on child protection orders because they have not been cared for appropriately. That is a very common picture for many of those young people. The aim is to work early to try to turn those around those antisocial behaviours that are harmful to others and to themselves, and get them back on track.

You have some great stuff happening in the remote communities. Yesterday I met with some people from Mornington Island. They are doing great youth work and there is a whole lot happening. That might be in the area of the member for Mount Isa, if I get my geography right. Similarly, it is happening across your community. I have been to Aurukun and other places. It is tough at times. Young people in those remote areas do not have the same opportunities that we have in Brisbane, the Sunshine Coast and other parts of the state. However, there is a lot of goodwill in those communities. The community safety plans and the other approaches being adopted show that people are really working hard at this effort to turn around youth offending.

CHAIR: Minister, in your opening statement you touched on administering funds in relation to assisting seniors or other people with financial stress. This is at page 3-10 of the SDS. What funding and assistance is available to help people cope with cost-of-living pressures?

Ms STRUTHERS: I have visited your community on many occasions and I know you have a significant seniors population around Yeppoon. They have chosen a lovely part of the world to settle and retire in. Your area has around 15,000 or so Seniors Card holders. In your area a lot of people are receiving the benefits of our concessions program. This year, we have increased that concessions program. In a difficult fiscal environment we were able to increase the electricity rebate to \$230 a year. We were able to increase a number of rebates to support seniors, including one that we introduced last year. I had some data to show that about 1,200 people have taken up the heating and cooling rebate. People with multiple sclerosis and related conditions can now access that rebate. In your area, a number of people are accessing those benefits.

You also have some great seniors' services. There are some people who are very active in your community. They are pretty concerned about some of the social isolation of others who are not so active. I commend those groups in your local area. We are very keen to continue to support people with

cost-of-living pressures. That is why we abolished the ambulance levy and people will see relief from that policy. Although that was not my department, my department administers a number of concessions on behalf of seniors and I am very happy that we were able to increase those this year.

Mr Chairman, I have a response to an earlier question about young people being drug tested. Young people in detention are only drug tested if they show signs of or the side effects of drugs. Queensland Health administers the test on behalf of my department. No drug tests occurred in the past 12 months.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. That was your question, member for Redlands.

Mr DOWLING: Can I ask a follow-up to that answer? You are saying that no offender in detention was drugs tested last year?

Ms STRUTHERS: That is the advice I have. I will get some advice on the policy underpinning that. But as I said, if they show signs or the side effects of drugs then we work with Queensland Health to administer a drug test. I would imagine that, because they are youth and because of issues around young people not being adults, we are not routinely or automatically issuing drug testing. I will check that out. You have raised an important issue here.

Mr DOWLING: There were another two components to that. They related to people on parole and/or on probation, and it is normally par for the course that they are routinely or randomly tested. I will concede that there may be a policy differential between adult offenders and junior offenders. Those two other components are outstanding. I appreciate that is on notice.

Ms STRUTHERS: We will get back to you about that but it is my understanding that because they are youth we do not routinely do that drug testing. If there is an issue and they are showing signs of it or the side effects of drugs, then we work with Queensland Health to do that. If you just bear with me for a moment.

Mr DOWLING: Absolutely. I am sure, without being clever about it, that drugs testing includes alcohol as well as other mainstream drugs.

Ms STRUTHERS: Our department does not screen young people for drugs before entry to detention centres. Drug testing may be tested in the community as part of a condition of a court order. Drug testing data is not collected as part of our systemic processes. Queensland Health screens all young people on entry to detention centres for general medical assessment. If a young person in detention has drug problems, the on-site Queensland Health staff would assess the young person and link with specialist services in Queensland Health and these specialist services would be provided.

My understanding is that we do take this issue very seriously, but it is not a routine drug-testing arrangement. We do work case by case, one on one with young people, particularly if there is a history of substance abuse. I get routine reports on activities in our youth detention centres and I am very confident and pleased with the reports I receive that we do not have a drug problem of any significance that I have seen through that reporting over the last couple of years. I guess, as that advice says, if there is a young person with those issues we would be working with them on a case-by-case basis with Queensland Health to deal with any of those substance abuse issues.

Mr DOWLING: As a follow-up to that, you said that unless it is a part of a court order for someone on parole you do not routinely necessarily drugs test. Minister, do you or your department have any idea how often that occurs that those conditions are imposed on parole, where they are subjected to that? I am operating on the presumption now that it would be valid or relevant if the offender was found on charges related to drug abuse and drug use or drug related crimes. I am just wondering if there is a prevalence there through the court system where they are imposing those kinds of conditions. I appreciate it is a different question, but it flowed on beautifully from your answer.

Ms STRUTHERS: I appreciate your question and the seriousness of the issue. Where people have a substance abuse problem you obviously have to deal with that if you are going to turn around their offending behaviour. My understanding is that this is more the province of the Attorney-General through the Children's Court and the court data. I will await some advice on that. It is my understanding that conditions of orders would be recorded by the courts. I do not have an understanding of the prevalence of those conditions. It would be at the discretion of the magistrate as to what conditions were imposed on the young person's order. I understand that that would be reported by Julie Dick in the Children's Court report annually.

Mr DOWLING: I appreciate that. I was hoping that because they come into your area of responsibility at the end of the process you maybe have an idea of its prevalence within your ministry. I accept that it is probably more an Attorney-General type of issue. It just lent itself to your portfolio. That is the only reason I ask that. Thank you.

Ms STRUTHERS: In finalising that issue, we do take those issues, as I said, very seriously. A lot of our youth programs are working with young people. I mentioned some of the adventure based activities that PCYCs and others run. I think there are about 48 of those now because I opened one recently in the Burdekin. They are doing great work in encouraging young people to have what is

commonly referred to as natural highs rather than drug induced highs. That is a great message to young people: get out there, get fit. You can see great results in Palm Island and places like that. There is a retired boxer—and I cannot think of his name even though I have met him a couple of times now—putting a lot of effort into those young people there to get them interested in sport, feeling fit, feeling good about themselves and therefore hopefully feeling better about others and more respectful of others.

Ms SIMPSON: I have a question following on from the earlier questions with regard to departmental efficiencies. Could the minister advise how many people across the department are currently employed at the SES level?

Ms STRUTHERS: I will get some advice on that. I am happy to take another question while we do that.

CHAIR: I think the member for Beaudesert has a question.

Mr McLINDON: In relation to the NGOs, community groups and council funded organisations, they are doing so much work. What I am seeing and hearing more and more is that they are really struggling to be able to raise money. Gone are the days when they can roll a barbecue out, paint a few faces, put some balloons out and raise a couple of thousand dollars. Public liability is absolutely killing these organisations which are doing so much good work. They find it really hard to raise money. In one instance, a group was up for \$7,000 just to use a park for one day. They only raised \$5,000 or \$6,000 so it was not even cost neutral. Is there a way that your department could look at the possibility of an umbrella type arrangement for public liability for NGOs, community groups or local government backed organisations to empower them to raise more money, which takes the impost ultimately off the taxpayer as well? Is that something that you could look at either in this budget or into the future?

Ms STRUTHERS: Again, I appreciate your interest in this area. That sort of expenditure for NGOs is causing them some concern. At the height of the insurance industry downturn in which a number of big companies were in strife, about six or seven years ago I recall our Treasurer and Treasury officials working with our community services agencies to work out a scheme through Suncorp to try to help with those public liability issues for NGOs. I am not sure where we are currently at with some of our supports. We certainly provide assistance by way of funding. Particularly with our output based funding, NGOs can use that money as they need to across those expenses. If anybody else can provide me with advice specifically in relation to public liability, I will get back to you on that. I understand; I hear those concerns. I was recently—and I do not think it is quite in your electorate—at the Caddies Youth Service at Jimboomba.

Mr McLINDON: Yes, it is just in my electorate.

Ms STRUTHERS: They are a great mob down there. We were able to give them \$150,000 for a youth worker just recently. That is a growth area, as you would know, into Flagstone, and Jimboomba is growing. When I was a kid that was where we went for a Sunday drive if we went out to Macleans Bridge or out to Jimboomba. It is booming now. There is lots of growth and lots of activity. That service at the Jimboomba community centre has a range of services including Caddies Youth Service.

Mr McLINDON: I appreciate the money you have given to Caddies Youth Service.

Ms STRUTHERS: They have got issues. Like other services, they basically have administrative funds across each of their funded program areas and they pull that in order to pay expenses such as insurance and public liability when they have events. I will check on where we are currently at. I would imagine that it is more that we provide the funding. That has been an input in previous funding arrangements. As we move to output based funding it is really at the discretion of the services how they use that funding.

I will just go back to an earlier question about our SES numbers. I think the member for Maroochydore asked about the numbers of SES positions. There are 58 and that does not include our director-general. So it would be 59.

Ms SIMPSON: If I can follow on from that, Minister, in respect of the department, you may have reduced the number of DGs but you increased the number of SES officials with the merger of the department; is that not correct?

Ms STRUTHERS: I do not think that is, actually. I think the director-general answered you earlier in relation to that. We have reduced the number of SES positions.

Ms SIMPSON: Within the annual report reference was made to a total of 33 SES positions and that increased in 2010 to about 60—on page 182.

Ms STRUTHERS: Are you referring to the budget papers or the department's annual report.

Ms SIMPSON: The department's annual report referred to an increase from 33 up to 60.

Ms STRUTHERS: My data is showing me a reduction. So let us just clarify that.

Ms SIMPSON: We will take that on notice to get clarification. Further to that, the director-general and the minister responded to my question on how they were meeting the efficiency drive. I note that the cost of supplies and services has almost doubled from \$233.3 million to \$534.7 million. This was also in the annual report. Perhaps the director-general could give us an update with regard to where these services were at on 30 June 2011.

Ms Apelt: I am very happy to supply the details of the supplies and services budget for—was it 2010-11?

Ms SIMPSON: For the end of the 2010-11 financial year.

Ms Apelt: We will supply that before the end of the session.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you. Is the cost of supplies and services something that is normally compiled prior to a budget estimates hearing?

Ms Apelt: Obviously supplies and services is a standard item that we do budget for on an annual basis. It does obviously feature in every annual budget for the department.

Ms SIMPSON: I ask a question, again in regard to NGOs. They have been asked to go and find efficiencies. We are told that the department has found efficiencies, but there is quite a substantial increase in the cost of supplies and services. Many non-government organisations are currently experiencing huge increases in operating costs, including electricity and fuel, at the same time that they are facing ever increasing demand due to the increasing cost of living faced by its hardened community. If Labor's carbon tax is passed, both costs and demand will escalate again. What will the minister do to help these vital organisations meet these costs and demands?

Ms STRUTHERS: The budget papers actually indicate that we have provided a 3.75 per cent indexation on all of those grants to NGOs. We are very aware of cost pressures. That is standard practice. We have a good record in this regard of indexing grants, and this year it was 3.75.

Ms SIMPSON: Is the minister satisfied that that is sufficient to cover the higher increases in electricity and water and in addition to the looming impact of the carbon tax and its costs upon these organisations?

Ms STRUTHERS: It is certainly equivalent to or above the CPI. On that basis, it is a reasonable indexation that is provided on those grants.

Ms SIMPSON: I ask the minister: in respect of the flood recovery, we all acknowledge what a wonderful job our volunteer organisations did as well as many outstanding members of the department as well. Particularly in relation to our volunteer sector and the NGOs in terms of their response, I ask: what lessons have been learnt in terms of the department's flood recovery response and how are these to be implemented?

Ms STRUTHERS: I thank the member for the question. Through our director-general we are leading the human and social services recovery stream within the overall reconstruction effort. Linda Apelt, as director-general, meets regularly with our NGO partners. Where would we be without the Red Cross, Vinnies, Lifeline and all the others that have contributed so well?

I was in Murphys Creek a few days ago. The volunteer at our community recovery centre was a guy who put up his hand for the Red Cross and came up from Sydney, and he is still here. He is going to live here now. He loves it. He calls himself a Toowoomba boy now. I did not realise that the Murphys Creek people probably relate more to Toowoomba than they do to communities at the bottom of the range. He is certainly a symbol of the great work that has been happening through our NGO partners.

Through this ongoing committee arrangement that feeds through to the Reconstruction Authority, we are working actively with our NGO partners to feedback and report on the learnings from the flood recovery effort. I am pleased to hear you acknowledge the great effort, because there has been unprecedented hardship and suffering but unprecedented effort. The logistics of managing this post-recovery effort have been enormous but extremely well done. The leadership provided across the state on this issue has been outstanding. I personally take the opportunity today to commend our Premier, because wherever I go at the moment people are saying what a mighty job she has done. She acknowledged herself that she is standing on the shoulders of giants. I think it is fair to say that we have one of those giants sitting next to me. Linda would not have got much sleep during that period in leading the human and social services recovery effort. It has been a well-organised, well-structured arrangement through the Reconstruction Authority and in the way that we have reported back.

I have a note here indicating that this subcommittee has been meeting regularly. It was instrumental in designing and developing the mental health recovery plan and the community development and wellbeing plan that we spoke of earlier. We are not waiting for the next disaster. We are not waiting until then. We have actually been able to implement plans as we go along and learn as we go along. We know, as I said earlier, that this is as much about physical recovery for people as it is about an emotional recovery. You would be meeting people whose spirits are low. They need to be lifted

and supported. In terms of our financial counselling package, again the human and social services subcommittee, as part of this Reconstruction Authority structure, was instrumental in identifying early on the need for enhanced financial counselling. We negotiated with the federal government through the Premier to get a significant boost to that funding as well.

The message in response to your answer is that it is not as though there is a report underway that will be available in 12 months time specifically. Some of that will occur, but we are doing a routine assessment of what is needed and following up on that. I commend those efforts. As you travel around the state you actually get very emotional when you meet these people, because you are meeting with people not only who are involved in the recovery effort but also who are needing support and you see how appreciative they are.

At Grantham the other day I met with Ken and Fran. You might recall that Ken and Fran were the couple who escaped out of their car as the water rushed through Grantham and they swam over to a leopard tree and clung to that tree for three hours. They are doing pretty well, but it does not take long to scratch the surface and know that Ken and Fran need a lot of support. Julie Johnson and her team have set up in the community the Grantham Community Centre facility, installed by our department. Next to that is the Grantham Community Recovery Centre that has been active and busy for many, many months now. We are learning all the time about what is needed and how we can do this better, but the important thing is to get it right now. I think there is some great work being done and there are some great signs that that work is improving the lives of people right now.

Mr O'BRIEN: Can I continue in that vein because, Minister, what I would like from you, if it is possible, is more specific information on the programs that you are running in Far North Queensland with regard to victims of Cyclone Yasi and the sorts of programs that your department will continue to support this year. You mentioned financial counselling. I am interested specifically in psychological support for people, because a lot of those people are hitting the wall now six months after the event. So I am interested in the specific support that your department is providing around that, as well as other areas of support that you are providing.

Ms STRUTHERS: Again, I am happy to talk about this area. I think it has been a massive undertaking not only through my agency but also through our non-government partners and others this year. Despite that effort, we have still been able to get on pretty much with business as usual. I think that has been a great credit to our agency.

Specifically in North Queensland and Far North Queensland, when I visited the Cassowary Coast a few months ago the mayor and others were working with NGOs to support people with housing needs. That is an ongoing need. People need to be rehoused if their informal relationships are breaking down, and the housing service through that council is working well with us to help people get housed. They are recipients as well of the community development and wellbeing package. That has been rolled out to 17 local government areas around the state.

There are other parts of North Queensland that are benefiting from the mental health teams there. That is more in Curtis Pitt's area and the Minister for Health's area. I can assure you that no-one is being left out here, and that is a very important message. As I travel around I keep reassuring people in Theodore and other places I have been to that no-one is going to be forgotten. This is unprecedented in the way that it has affected nearly 95 per cent of the state. But even the small communities are on the radar and getting support, and they are on the radar of the Reconstruction Authority as well. So there is a lot happening and a lot will continue to happen.

Mr O'BRIEN: Minister, does your department provide any support to people dealing with insurance companies in terms of people who may be having difficulty with their insurance company? Can you give us some details on any support your department can give in that vein?

Ms STRUTHERS: There has been individual support through the community recovery centres. Case by case people are being assisted. The Law Society and Legal Aid are helping people. The couple I mentioned earlier whom I visited in Grantham the other day, Fran and Ken, have free support through Legal Aid to pursue action against their insurance company and to get an outcome from their insurance company. So there is a lot of pro bono work or free support work being provided and that is the goodwill that continues. So there is case-by-case assistance.

In relation to the broader policy issues, they are being taken up by our federal colleagues as well. Anna Bligh has been pretty forthright in saying that this has not been good enough. Insurance companies in general have not necessarily treated people fairly and justly and in a timely manner. I think there is an inquiry underway at the moment—I will need to get some details for you. There has certainly been a lot of attention and the spotlight has been on the insurance industry to have a good look at this issue. Some people, particularly in the flood affected areas, have been caught with tight definitions around floods, storm surge and what caused the water. That has particularly been evident in the Lockyer Valley. It was quite a unique and tragic series of events there. All these issues need to be sorted through. But we are certainly helping people on a one-to-one basis as well as dealing with the broader policy implications of insurance industry guidelines and practices.

Mr O'BRIEN: Has that Legal Aid support that you mentioned also been made available to people in Far North Queensland?

Ms STRUTHERS: My understanding is that it is state-wide and that cyclone affected people as well are getting the benefit of that assistance. There are still free help numbers. Community recovery centres in high-need areas are still operating. Help is still available. People are still processing applications. As they get an outcome from an insurance company that may be negative, they are then looking to other options. Our centres are open until December. There is certainly a lot of support available to people right around the state.

Mr CHOI: Minister, I have a question on domestic violence for you. I would like you to explain to the committee what services are provided by your department to assist victims of domestic violence.

Ms STRUTHERS: Again, I thank the member for his question. I apologise that I could not attend a recent meeting that you had been active in convening in your own area, but I know that senior departmental staff attended and one of my ministerial staff attended. So I know that you have been active in your own area in supporting people who are affected by domestic violence and in getting support for your service system there, and that work will be continuing.

Right across the state we have a system of domestic violence services. We have integrated responses and, again, in this budget we have funded a trial specifically in Rockhampton. The member for Keppel is very involved in that project and knows a lot about it. I have been to Rocky a couple of times to see that project in action. We have integrated responses on the Gold Coast. Across government we are spending more than \$190 million across a range of service systems including health and the policing response to domestic violence.

We have launched the report *For our sons and daughters* that gives us a plan of action over the next few years. A key part of that was to review and strengthen the domestic violence legislation. That work is almost complete. I am aiming to bring to the parliament in the next few months significant amendments, changes, to that legislation. People around the state have had their say about that. The common messages that I have heard have been things like breaches of domestic violence orders need to be taken more seriously.

There was also a quite unexpected trend. I was around in the early days when the laws were initially being developed 20 years ago, in the late eighties. One of the unintended consequences of the domestic violence protection orders has been this trend of cross-orders or cross-applications where the police will attend to an altercation between a man and a woman and they end up putting orders on both parties and both have to appear in court. So what services have asked me to take on is for the police to take a pro-investigative approach to domestic violence matters—that is, taking the time to investigate who is most at risk here, who is the perpetrator of the violence and who is most at risk, and to pursue criminal charges. That is the concern that a lot of people working in this area have. In the Redlands and other areas there are a number of incidents where a criminal offence has occurred but that is not necessarily pursued. That is partly because in some cases, because of the emotion of the event, a partner will not necessarily take criminal proceedings against that partner. The domestic violence legislation is in place to offer a civil option, an option for a protection order to protect against further violence. We are strengthening the laws and I will be in the parliament with amendments later this year.

This is certainly a very, very important issue. I mentioned earlier in the session when talking about housing that one of the biggest causes of homelessness for women and women who have children is domestic violence. We want women to stay in their own home. Your area will benefit from the HomeStay program where we are trying to work with the courts. They have the capacity to order an ouster order, to order the perpetrator of the violence to stay away from the home, to keep the women and the children in the home. We have the capacity through the safety upgrades program for our service providers to work in a very practical way, to do a risk assessment of that home with that family. If they decide to stay there, we can offer things like security screens or a home to base security system—that kind of thing. We certainly link them up with the police. We build that rapport so that they are known locally to be in need and they can get quick action. So there are a range of ways in which we are working.

It is so important that we continue to maintain a robust response to this issue. In the past it has been seen by some or dismissed by some as a private family matter. What nonsense. Sometimes this can be a case of homicide, where women and children are killed. In some cases men are subject to domestic violence as well. But in the main it is violence perpetrated against women and children. We have to have their interests at heart here, and we do.

CHAIR: Minister, just on another point, we have mentioned youth justice and that some of the children in that system are not very old. I would like to see those young people stay in school. What programs does the department have—and I am not talking about Indigenous students but generally—to keep young people in education?

Ms STRUTHERS: I will come to that question in a second. Can I just respond to an earlier question where we were offering to provide further data. Mr Tim Hodda, our finance director, can answer the question on the supplies and services budget. So, if it is okay with you, I will invite Mr Hodda to respond to the member for Maroochydore.

CHAIR: That is fine.

Mr Hodda: Just for clarification, may I ask for a repeat of the question on the supplies and services budget please so that I can answer it to the best of my abilities?

Ms SIMPSON: This is the question we had put on notice in respect of the annual report at page 185, where the cost of supplies and services has nearly doubled over the year, from \$233.3 million to \$534.7 million. I was asking what the figure was for 30 June 2011. That has been placed on notice.

Mr Hodda: Can I answer the question in two parts. I just need to refer back to last year's annual report, if you do not mind. I can probably prepare that out of session for you. With respect to 30 June 2011, our annual statements will not be finalised until 31 August, after my director-general has signed off the statements after they have been audited by the QAO. They will be published in later September or October. As an indicative guideline, the budget as presented in our Service Delivery Statements for 2011-12 has a supplies and services budget of approximately \$693 million. That includes maintenance of over \$212 million, rates for our housing and other property portfolios of over \$120 million, and then a range of other supplies and services that support front-line service delivery. So we have things like office accommodation leases and contracts that support operations. So we are seeing a growth in those areas to support the increased investment in 2011-12 for our front-line service delivery as announced in the budget. We are increasing resources for disability services and child safety and protection, for example. So if we are increasing staffing we need to increase the support structures around that staffing. That is the principal reason for the increase in supplies and services.

Ms SIMPSON: If that is the indicative figure for 30 June, that would answer that question.

Mr Hodda: The indicative figure for 30 June per the published budget is approximately \$645 million. That is per page 3-21 of this year's SDS. As I said, my director-general will sign off the statements by 31 August for publication and annual report.

Ms SIMPSON: I have a question on the issue of domestic violence.

Ms STRUTHERS: I have another answer we can provide during this session, if you would like that. My director-general has a response to an earlier question from the member for Maroochydore.

Ms SIMPSON: As long as there is time for us to ask further questions. I want to talk to the minister about domestic violence and about our seniors. I know that we are starting to run out of time.

Ms Apelt: I have some further clarification in relation to the question from the member for Maroochydore about savings targets for the Department of Communities. The reporting on savings was for 2009-10 in relation to the \$10 million savings target. This applied to the department and reporting back to our central agencies. I mentioned Treasury, but the Premier's department also takes an interest in that savings target. An additional \$2.5 million was applied in 2010-11. The balance of around \$4.5 million relates to the savings target applied to the old department of communities and child safety which was carried forward in the base. That is just further clarification as to what those savings targets were as a breakdown. As I mentioned earlier, all targets were met.

With respect to the earlier question about ERAP, I would like to provide clarification—

Ms SIMPSON: With respect, there was another part of that question in regard to what was reported to Treasury—the specific breakdown on how those efficiencies were actually achieved.

Ms Apelt: The efficiencies were achieved through corporate savings across the whole of the department. Progressively, as I guess the clustering arrangement has come together for the Department of Communities, that has become an easier exercise because we have been able to achieve economies of scale, particularly with our procurement policies.

Ms SIMPSON: So a breakdown of what those corporate savings were so we get an indication as to how specifically they are achieved. I also appreciate that if you are going to be charged fees under the shared services initiative for, if you like, services you were previously doing in-house, that is hardly an efficiency that is transparent. So we should really see where those so-called efficiencies have been achieved.

Ms Apelt: We can supply that. Thank you.

Ms STRUTHERS: Just one other quick correction: I mentioned to the member for Beaudesert that I had been to Caddies recently at the Jimboomba Community Care Centre and provided a grant of \$150,000. It was \$120,000, but they were very happy.

CHAIR: They probably would have been happier with 150! Before the member for Maroochydore asks her question, I remind you that I have a question that you put aside to answer.

Ms STRUTHERS: We do have the breakdown of those savings for the member. Should we table that, if she is wanting to save time?

Ms SIMPSON: To clarify, about \$16 million in efficiencies were supposed to be achieved last year; is that correct?

Ms Apelt: There are several categories of efficiencies. I can provide the specific breakdown for each of those. We can table that.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you.

CHAIR: Do you seek leave to table that? Were you intending to table it, because you need to seek leave?

Ms STRUTHERS: I will just clarify the data. We will get back to you in a second. I will answer your question about help to get kids back into school.

CHAIR: Programs to keep them in school.

Ms STRUTHERS: Thank you, member for Keppel. I know from visiting schools in your area of your commitment to supporting young people and your work to support the Youth Support Coordinators Program. That is one area where we are achieving some good results in working with non-government agencies working in schools, particularly with that group of disengaged young people. That is a \$13 million program across the state in partnership with Education Queensland.

There are a number of initiatives in your area that I think are quite unique to your area, too. One of them that I knew was being developed but I heard has actually been launched is the Schools to Jobs Alliance. I think you and the member for Rockhampton have had involvement in that. That is quite an amazing effort. That is an initiative that has grown out of your community, where organisations are getting together with the schools, training providers and others to actually ensure that those young people that are at risk of disengaging from school or have disengaged are actually transitioning back into school or getting the support they need to get a job. I think you have a plan for 100 or so young people in that region getting support through that.

All around the state there are various initiatives. There is no one-size-fits-all. There are a whole lot of youth programs working with schools. The alternative education centres are not funded specifically in my portfolio, but organisations like Jabiru on the north side of Brisbane have some Communities funding and work with Education as well. They have set up an alternative education centre. It is across the road from the school.

It is funny how young people think, 'I don't want to be at school. I'm not going to go back to school, but I don't want to be too far away from it.' When we were setting up the learning or earning initiative a number of years ago, I remember going to Beaudesert and seeing these young kids that I had met at the community centre. They had disengaged from school, but when they heard that I was going to the school to see their new technical centre they wanted to take me there. So I went there with them to the school. I think that is the message all around the state.

There is hope for these young people. They are not necessarily full of attitude and bad behaviour. The vast majority of our young people are doing the right thing, and for those who get off the rails or get disengaged from school there is a lot of opportunity to get them back on track with the right sort of support. Usually it means a significant other person taking that interest in them. We are getting great results through the Youth Support Coordinators Program, and I am sure we are going to get great results through your new Schools to Jobs Alliance in Rocky.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, I want to go back to the issue of domestic violence. Given the shocking revelation today that Queensland has the highest rate of domestic violence homicide in the country and the fact that the legislation that is under review has taken about 18 months and we still have not seen it hit the deck, what is going to be done, practically and urgently, to provide protection particularly to the women who are living in fear of their lives? It has been known for some time that Queensland has the worst homicide rate.

Ms STRUTHERS: I am glad the member has raised the issue. I am keen to speak to this issue. Homicide trends are up and down year to year. I look at these figures pretty closely. I have a very keen interest in domestic violence. We have set up a death review unit within the Coroner's office to look at specifically, in detail, and investigate domestic violence homicides to see if there are systemic issues that can inform the prevention of deaths into the future. We are one of the only jurisdictions to do that.

We are not waiting for a review of the legislation to make changes. In fact, the feedback through the process of consultation on the domestic violence legislation is that it is working pretty well. I mentioned a number of issues with cross-applications and breaches and things, but, fundamentally, people said, 'This has given a lot of protection to people around the state.' As I said, it is primarily women and children.

One death, one incidence of domestic violence, is one too many. It is so important that we continue to change community attitudes, that we continue to change policing responses. There has been significant improvement in the past couple of decades that the legislation has been in place, but it is not all over, red rover, in terms of attitudes. There are still a lot of people who believe that these are private family matters. They have to be taken seriously.

Police are at risk when they go to some of these incidences. They have to take them seriously. But you know and I know that a lot of police will say, 'Oh no, not a domestic.' In some instances they are diminishing the fact that 'this will be a woman having a go at a bloke and it will be all over, red rover, and

they'll be back together the next day'. These are very serious issues. A lot of people are at risk in homes around Queensland. I think there are over 40,000 police occurrences in relation to domestic violence. I go to the police domestic violence liaison conferences from time to time. I look around the room and see that it is mainly women in police uniforms who put up their hands to take on the DVLO role. We need the blokes to take this seriously. We need the blokes to see that a lot of this behaviour is male violence. These are the fundamental issues that have to be dealt with here.

It is certainly very, very concerning that we have high rates of domestic violence right across this nation. It has taken a lot of hard work from a lot of our NGOs, our domestic violence support workers, our health workers and our court workers who day in, day out are dealing with this issue. Although I have raised some concern about some of the policing practices, there are some great police and there is great leadership from our commissioner on this issue. We are making great progress, but there is a lot of work to be done. The domestic violence death review unit in the Coroner's office has been operational since the beginning of the year. We will start seeing some of the results of their work.

Mr DOWLING: Minister, in a previous answer you talked about disengaged youth falling out of the educational framework. There is a program in the Redlands that has been running successfully for four or five years now. Their funding has come into question. I am not sure if it falls in your portfolio or in Education, but their funding has been in doubt now for the last two financial years. Is that a program you are aware of or would be supportive of picking up to give them some certainty? It is about picking up those disengaged young people from a very marginalised community in Russell and Macleay islands. RAMPS is about re-engaging those young people. The people have had some success there getting young people back to school. Is that something you might see as falling into your portfolio and can we get some certainty for the island community?

Ms STRUTHERS: If you want to provide a name—it is probably not appropriate at the estimates committee now—I am happy to receive a letter or a submission in relation to this service. I know the bay islands well and the great school at Russell Island. There are really good staff trying to do some great things, both educationally and in the broader community there in Russell Island. I am happy to have a look at it, and I welcome you sending me something on it.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, I want to go back to the issue of supplies and services and the fact that NGOs are being asked to tighten their belts. I refer to your comments last year. You said—

... it is important that services in particular locations or across an entity, such as some of the big entities like Mission Australia or whatever, look for efficiencies in their own organisations and service delivery. That is just a natural part of the development of organisations.

Given that we have seen a 30 per cent increase in the cost of supplies and services in the last year across this department, why does the government expect NGOs to find efficiencies and deal with government bureaucratic blow-outs at the same time?

Ms STRUTHERS: Again, I thank the member for the question. Our NGO partners receive grants for a range of purposes. As I said earlier, we have provided a 3.75 per cent indexation addition to that funding across our funded organisations this year.

We are always keen through the compact to work with NGOs to both reduce red tape—so that is partly our responsibility as a funding provider—but also NGOs quite willingly and of their own initiative find efficiencies within their own organisation. That is the reality of running efficient organisations. It is not rocket science. It is not anything that is unusual. I commend our partners. They have done some amazing work. Mission Australia and others are active in terms of jobs and skilling programs. They have a strong presence right around the state and interstate. There are a whole lot of organisations that are doing great work, but they certainly have a commitment from this department through that indexation that we certainly understand growing pressures on them.

A number of organisations, particularly our housing area, have been beneficiaries of unprecedented investment in housing. That then helps them in other parts of their program areas as well. As they get significant investment in some of those areas, they can shift moneys to other areas. Many of them are no wrong door like we are. They have multiple prongs to their agencies, so they are working to find efficiencies day in and day out. I do not think that comment is anything new or anything unusual. Services would expect that I would be saying things like that and that I would be working actively with them to improve their services both in terms of the funding they receive and how they deliver their services.

Ms SIMPSON: So it is correct to say that the department has increased its own costs by 30 per cent and yet you are indexing the agreements with the NGOs at 3.5 per cent, meaning that they have to find efficiencies but the department does not?

Ms STRUTHERS: There is a little bit of mischief going on there. We have not increased our costs by 30 per cent. If we had 30 per cent additional funding, we would be pretty happy about that. We have not increased our costs by 30 per cent. It is important that you correct the record in that regard or that my comment corrects the record in itself.

Ms SIMPSON: As at 30 June this year \$693 million has been spent in supplies and services.

Ms STRUTHERS: You are talking about services and what we indicated was that partly that is the rates on our housing. Councils have put up rates. We have to pay rates like any other owner of property. That is a significant cost to our budget, so that reflects the costs of running our agency. You are talking about a 30 per cent increase on that particular component of our agency, but your question was reflecting the whole agency. You said a 30 per cent increase in costs across the agency and that is not correct.

Ms SIMPSON: No, I said a 30 per cent increase in supplies and services because I was—

Ms STRUTHERS: No, you did not. Not in your question you did not.

Ms SIMPSON: Supplies and services was the issue I was referring to.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydhore—

Ms STRUTHERS: The director-general can clarify this anyway. If I could just ask the director-general—

CHAIR: Time has expired. I will give the director-general an opportunity to correct—

Ms STRUTHERS: Can I seek additional time—just a minute or two—while the director-general corrects this, because I think there has been a little bit of mischief put here and I just want to have that clarified.

Ms SIMPSON: With respect, I said supplies and services, according to the answer provided, had gone up by 30 per cent.

CHAIR: No. Member for Maroochydhore—

Ms SIMPSON: That is a huge increase.

CHAIR: The minister has asked for the director-general to speak. I am prepared to allow that time. Director-General, if you would like to speak.

Ms Apelt: Yes. I can provide clarification in relation to the two references to last year's annual report. The reason for the increase in supplies and services in the annual report is that the figure for 2008-09 includes three months of the new department and 12 months of the old department of communities as a result of the machinery-of-government change. 2009-10 is the full year of the new Department of Communities, which obviously is the much larger department of communities. With respect to the SES numbers, the 33 SES or equivalent officers that the member refers to are those who commenced work at the department prior to the 26 March 2009 machinery-of-government changes—for example, they worked for the former department of communities—and this is noted on page 183 of the annual report.

Ms SIMPSON: With respect, that is not the full answer because it was—

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydhore—

Ms SIMPSON:—\$534.7 million at 30 June previously.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydhore—

Ms SIMPSON: That still—

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydhore, time has expired. You are debating the question.

Ms SIMPSON: With respect, the director-general has not completely answered the question.

CHAIR: Time has expired.

Ms SIMPSON: There is a 30 per cent increase—

CHAIR: The committee will now break. The hearing will resume—

Ms SIMPSON:—on the previous 12 months.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydhore, the committee will now break. The hearing will resume at 3.15 pm.

Proceedings suspended from 3.03 pm to 3.20 pm

CHAIR: Welcome back, Minister. I do apologise for being slightly over time. We will commence questioning now in relation to Women until 3.45 pm. I call the member for Maroochydhore.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, in the Office for Women report at page 3-9 of the budget papers I note the average pay level in the Office for Women is now \$103,000 per staff member. I note that this has increased from the average level of \$88,500 last year. Has the performance of the office merited the overall increase in salaries?

Ms STRUTHERS: I will just wait for clarification of what you have stated there with regard to pay levels. I am very pleased with the achievements of the Office for Women this year. One of our very successful programs is expanding, the Women in Hard Hats program. Today I officially announced that we are reinvigorating that program with the Girls in Hard Hats program. I will be visiting the Gold Coast

tomorrow doing some trade opportunities with young women at the Gold Coast. I will be at Stretton State College the following week. My plan is to work with our industry partners and our government partners to actively promote that Women in Hard Hats program. So that has certainly been one initiative of the Office for Women that we have really elevated during the year.

The other programs that the Office for Women are involved in are around women and leadership. We are reaching a very good target now in relation to the number of women on boards. I think in the last 12 months or so that number has now increased in that 43 per cent of the new appointments on our government boards are women. With regard to women in leadership programs, I have attended events throughout the year that have included events like the Indigenous women's leadership program where they were participating in a directors program so they could articulate the board of directors course with the two-day program that they had here in Brisbane. There is a lot of activity. It is a busy office.

I have worked on a hub-and-spoke model with the Office for Women where we have outposted those staff to various key agencies. We have already had the outposted staff across the regions, but our aim is to ensure that all key areas of government—our employment programs, our skills development areas—are all including and actively promoting opportunities for women. So I am very pleased to commend the work of the Office for Women this year and I will certainly just check if I can give you clarification on that salary level. We might have to get back to you on that. Could you just give me the reference again that you are referring to?

Ms SIMPSON: You have 27 FTEs and a budget of \$2.78 million.

Ms STRUTHERS: So you have done your own calculation there?

Ms SIMPSON: We have based that upon the staffing and the budget.

Ms STRUTHERS: We will do a bit of work to see about that and we will get back to you on that.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, how many recommendations of the Mason report have been undertaken and is work on adopting the report complete?

Ms STRUTHERS: I had a question on this last year. The Mason report was undertaken a few years ago. I have met with Carolyn Mason. She presented a really good analysis of the work of the Office for Women and some directions into the future. It was not like other government reports with specific actions like a CMC report or whatever that you had to adopt. I had a good discussion with Carolyn Mason and indicated to her that my aim was a hub-and-spoke model for the Office for Women. I did not want an office that was tucked away in the city somewhere; I wanted to make sure we maximised the opportunity for our regional staff to have a stronger presence in the region and for our city based staff to be actively engaged in working alongside key people in DEEDI—our economic development area, our employment area, our skills area—and in the Department of Justice and Attorney-General around pay equity issues and industrial and work based issues, and that is what has been occurring. I do not hold up the Mason report—and I do not think Carolyn Mason would either—as the blueprint for the Office for Women for the next 10 years or so. It was not that kind of report. It was not commissioned while I was minister. I really believe that the Office for Women is on a good path now.

If I can go back to the point I made about the Women in Hard Hats program, one of the things that I think Carolyn Mason acknowledged in that report was that the Women in Hard Hats program should not necessarily be run by the Office for Women but if it was to continue it should go to DEEDI. I have actually been keen to retain it in the Office for Women and extend its growth and expand it across the state and, as I said today, to reinvigorate it with the Girls in Hard Hats initiative. I think Carolyn Mason would be very pleased to see that occur.

Let me just tell you a quick little story—Megan's story. When I was in Mackay a month or so ago I went to the Thiess complex and met some of the women who have been involved in our Indigenous Women in Hard Hats program with Thiess. They are now working in the Burton mine north of Mackay. In her story—and she wrote this when she graduated from the training program and got work at the Burton mine, and I will just extract a few lines out of it—she said—

Throughout my life I have faced many challenges—some that have been expected and some that hit me like a tonne of bricks. When I found out about this program for Indigenous women to become dump truck operators in the mines, I seized the opportunity. This is my chance to live my life for me in a whole new world with a whole new set of challenges where I have nothing to fear but everything to gain. I am a human being, a mother, a proud Aboriginal Australian and just like the other nine beautiful black sisters who were chosen I am deadly and I deserve this. To Thiess for this amazing opportunity to work with you, we look forward to a long and prosperous career as members of the Thiess team.

I met those women and asked them a bit about their background and their history. One of the things that they said clearly to me was that it had been an amazing opportunity for them to be part of the Women in Hard Hats program but also they were making money that they had never seen before. A number of these women were single parents raising kids and had been in retail and other work areas before. It was quite a different area for them to be involved in, but they were certainly benefiting from the greater income and economic security that this program provided them, and that is what this is all about.

Earlier this year we launched—and this year is the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day, a big year for us—Advancing Queensland Women, the Queensland strategy to advance women's interests. The Office for Women is really focused on economic issues for women—the economic security of women—and our Women in Hard Hats and Girls in Hard Hats programs are central to that strategy.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, the Mason report recommended the future focus of the Office for Women on policy development and disadvantaged women, and I refer again to the fact that based on the FTEs and the cost of the department the average wage is nearly \$103,000. Is it the minister and the department's view that disadvantage is banished by having an average salary of over \$103,000 in a select Office for Women?

Ms STRUTHERS: I think there is a bit of mischief going on here. I am sure the \$103,000 includes on-costs for salaries. I have looked at the scale of those staff members. There is AO4s, AO5s and AO6s. I will get clarification on that, but I am presuming that you have done your little maths session there yourself, divided a number by 27 and come up with your figure. I would presume that salary costs include all of the on-costs that go with salaries, and that is usually more than 25 per cent of the salary component. So let us put that mischief to bed.

Ms SIMPSON: It is an increase from \$88,000 last year to \$103,000 this year. So that is still quite a substantial increase.

Ms STRUTHERS: Let us put that little mischief to bed. The average salary of the Office for Women is not \$100,000. The on-cost plus salary may be, and let me get clarification of that.

But let me talk again about the good work of the Office for Women. In this 100th anniversary of International Women's Day, it is important that we take stock of the good work and achievements of women. I do not know if you recall, but in this place we have not had a lot of women. In the last decade, yes, we have, but there were not women's toilets even apparently in this building. I think it was—

Mr O'BRIEN: Joan Sheldon.

Ms STRUTHERS: Joan Sheldon would have had a loo to go to, wouldn't she? I am talking in the past, Jason.

Mr O'BRIEN: Joan Sheldon said that.

CHAIR: Member for Cook!

Ms STRUTHERS: Joan Sheldon might have recounted that experience, too, but I think it was Vi Jordan who had to put her shoes outside the men's toilets to let the members know that she was in the loo. We have come a long way, but there is still a lot to do. Women are 19 per cent behind in terms of pay equity compared to men.

The other issue that disturbs me is the continual portrayal of women in advertising. There is a billboard that has been up in my local part of town around Coopers Plains in Brisbane. It is appalling. I do not know whether I can show it for the benefit of members. There is a billboard there that has three women carrying tools. It is for a tool shop and it says, 'Imagine all 3 at once? We can....' What do you read into that? I certainly read into that that it is objectifying women and it is demeaning to women. Our Women in Hard Hats program is trying to create opportunities for women in the booming mining and energy sectors—the non-traditional trades, generally the higher paying areas. This is what will advance the status of women—getting those opportunities for your daughters, your granddaughters, young women you know and older women who can retrain into these areas. What this nonsense does is just say that women are really there for the sexual objectification of some men. I know many men who are offended by that as well. It is about time we stopped that sort of nonsense. In response to this billboard people have said, 'Why a Minister for Women?' Let me tell you why. Because that nonsense still continues. Pay equity is still 19 per cent behind men. We have a long way to go but it is important that we take stock. Our Office for Women is doing a lot of work to drive change, to make sure women have the opportunities that men have across various areas of government, including in our skills programs, our employment programs, and I commend their efforts. They have been doing some great work this year and they will continue through to next year.

I have the salaries. I will just read that out for the benefit of the committee. I will start from band 1, \$31,000 to \$35,000; band 2, \$39,000 to \$46,000; band 3—and there are two staff on band 3 at \$46,000 to \$55,000; band 4, \$55,000 to \$65,000; band 5, 2.8 FTEs at \$65,000; band 6, \$74,000; band 7, 3.2; band 8, two staff on \$94,000 and band 9, and I presume that is the director of the Office for Women, on \$100,000. So the highest pay level is \$103,000.

Ms SIMPSON: So in respect of the on-costs then, could the minister explain the differential in respect of the wages, because there has still been a substantial increase on that which occurred last year? When you look at the FTEs last year divided by the budget for staffing it was an average of \$88,000 per staff member and the average cost per staff member this year is \$103,000. So there is a difference there that the department needs to explain.

Ms STRUTHERS: Let me clarify. It is not an average salary of \$88,000.

Ms SIMPSON: But that is the average cost per staff member.

Ms STRUTHERS: The staff themselves are not on a band or salary of \$88,000.

Ms SIMPSON: It comes to \$103,000.

CHAIR: Member Maroochydore, would you please let the minister answer. You will have the opportunity to have a following question, but your time has almost expired.

Ms STRUTHERS: But there has been an enterprise agreement across the Public Service and the Office for Women, like all Public Service staff, has benefited from that. So those bands that are within that for their salary levels all got an increase and that explains the difference. But please, it is a mischief to say that the average salary is \$103,000.

Ms SIMPSON: Average cost per staff member.

Ms STRUTHERS: I have clarified that. I presume that that highest paid position at \$103,000 is the director of the Office for Women. The others are at lower bands at lower salary levels.

Ms SIMPSON: With respect, that still does not explain why the average cost per staff member is \$103,000.

CHAIR: The minister has answered your question, member for Maroochydore.

Ms SIMPSON: Not in respect of the difference in costs.

CHAIR: I call the member for Capalaba, Mr Choi.

Mr CHOI: On the subject of hard hats, mining and resources projects in Queensland at the moment are expected to support up to 130,000 jobs for Queenslanders over the next three years or so. How is the government ensuring that young women are able to also benefit from this future employment opportunity?

Ms STRUTHERS: Again, I thank the member. You have an understanding of this program and I know that you have talked to me about it with your background in the building industry as well. You see the benefits of it. When you go to job sites, you do not see many women. I think I can count on my fingers how many women plumbers there are in Queensland. I might need a couple of my toes; I think there are 12. That is phenomenal. In 2011 we have only 12—but I will be corrected; it might be 22—but it is not many. It is quite amazing that those trades, which are generally well paid trades and generally opportunities where not only you can develop a trade but run your own business, are largely open to men. With the boom in our mining industry and our energy sectors women are needed. There is no longer an option here. It is not about, 'Should I or should I not'; employers want women, employers need women.

I sat at a breakfast yesterday with a human resources manager from BMA and talked to her about the Women in Hard Hats program. She wants to follow it up really quickly, because she sees the benefit in it. She knows that it is important to not only recruit women and girls into these sectors but to retain them. That is one of the issues. The Office for Women actively works with our industry partners—the Women in Mining Network—and the Queensland Resources Council is actively supporting this program as well, driving change across our state in both attitudes and opportunities. It is very important work.

Tomorrow I will visit the Construction Skills Queensland and Lend Lease construction careers Expo on the Gold Coast and 20 young students there will have an opportunity to hear firsthand about these hard-hat industries. We have forums and seminars happening across the state. There is a Young Women's Forum where 40 young women from around the state—I think five or six of them from Far North Queensland, remote parts of the state, Central Queensland and other places—are coming together and they will have opportunities to meet women who are working in these hard-hat industries. To me, it is such an important program, because it is offering young girls and women an opportunity to break into some of the non-traditional areas and areas that will offer them greater income security.

I get very disturbed—I have nothing against hairdressers and child-care workers; they should be much higher paid, doing invaluable work—if you put up your hand to be a child-care worker, you are probably going to get about \$14 an hour. Yet if you put up your hand in year 12 or year 10 to go and work in the mines or to take on a trade, you are going to be making some pretty decent money pretty quickly. Young women do not necessarily get exposed to this understanding or these opportunities. We tend, through our school system, to reinforce some of these stereotypes. I recall working with a school in my local area to link them with the Construction Training Centre close by with some Try'a Trade opportunities and a big focus on vocational education and training for girls and boys. But they ended up focusing more on hospitality. I was personally disappointed with that, but that was their choice. I urge all schools and others who can embrace this to please do. Our Girls in Hard Hats program that we are advancing—and I guess elevating today as part of our Women in Hard Hats program—will be a really important way to both change attitudes and open up opportunities for women into these non-traditional areas.

Mr O'BRIEN: Trades are one thing, but I am interested to know what the government is doing to improve the representation of women in positions of leadership as well.

Ms STRUTHERS: Good on you. Thank you for the question and I know that you have a keen interest in this, and particularly in advancing Indigenous women in your area into leadership roles locally and opportunities for them to take part in those Indigenous leadership programs we have been offering through the Office for Women. We have specifically had a focus on supporting Indigenous women through the Office for Women. The member for Maroochydore mentioned earlier that the Mason report was encouraging the Office for Women to work with more marginalised women, and I support that and we have been doing that. We have focused our activities on women who are more marginal or most vulnerable but also on those broader economic opportunities for women.

Nineteen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women participated in the Indigenous women on boards workshops and I attended one of those in Brisbane about six or seven months ago. Eighty-three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women also attended the Indigenous women's mentoring workshops. The five-day accredited workshops were delivered on the Gold Coast, Beenleigh, the Sunshine Coast, Goondiwindi, Burketown, Weipa, Blackwater, Cannonvale and the Upper Ross. Our staff are getting out and about actively promoting opportunities for women. I have participated in a number of those programs and I know that you have been aware and been supporting women to actively participate in those. They are getting great results.

I read out the story earlier—the direct words from one of those women who had trained to be in the mining industry. If you do not believe me on some of this stuff—the member for Maroochydore seems to question some of this work of the Office for Women and undermines its efforts—they are doing great work and the stories like the women I read out earlier are signs of that very positive achievement.

Ms SIMPSON: With reference to the Mason report and the fact that it was actually the minister who claimed that last year—and I will quote the minister at this point—

If it has not been released, it certainly will be. It was a good report, and Carolyn Mason and her team are to be credited with good work. I feel satisfied that we have really taken their recommendations forward.

There are still a number of recommendations, though, that have really been ignored from the Mason report. I have to ask you: did the department really have any intention of embracing this report? Or is this just a consultancy they felt like putting out there to look like they were consulting with people about the office, rather than something that would practically bring change?

Ms STRUTHERS: Again, let me say that the Mason report has been a useful report. It commenced maybe three years ago now before I was minister, but I know Carolyn Mason well. She is a former director of the Office for Women. She was engaged because of her knowledge of both government and the sector. She is an incredibly wise, intelligent and knowledgeable person. We have adopted a lot of those suggestions and recommendations she came up with. As I said, I have met with her personally to go through that when I was minister. But it does not have the kind of standing of a CMC report or anything like that where government is required. It was our department at that point in time that wanted to have a review of the Office for Women and that is what we did. Carolyn Mason provided some very good suggestions, constructive feedback on the way forward. I think if you asked her yourself she would be surprised at the status and the elevation that you are giving her report. It was a useful report. It was value for money. It has presented some really good opportunities for us to move forward and I think we are going ahead in leaps and bounds.

I am not sure what you or the LNP have against the Office for Women. I am not sure why you are not embracing the Women in Hard Hats program and the Girls in Hard Hats initiative that I have announced today. In fact, if I had my pink hard hat here I would give you one. We might try to find the member a pink hard hat, because I would love you to wear it around those housing building sites on the Sunshine Coast and other parts in the state as you travel around.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister—

Ms STRUTHERS: And actively promote the Women in Hard Hats opportunity.

Ms SIMPSON: Quite frankly, that is flippant and tokenistic. We want to see real gains for women, particularly disadvantaged women.

Ms STRUTHERS: Let me read Megan's story—

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore and Minister! Would you please allow the minister to finish before you speak over the top of her.

Ms SIMPSON: I thought I was being asked to respond.

CHAIR: If you have a further question, please ask it.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you. The Mason report concluded that policy development and analysis must be at the heart of the Office for Women. Can the minister list all the policies that have been released by the office in the past 12 months and report on the progress of their adoption by government?

Ms STRUTHERS: What I would really like to offer is an opportunity for the member to visit the Office for Women and talk to them firsthand, because I think she is misunderstanding their role and I think the former shadow minister had the same issue as well.

Ms SIMPSON: I have actually been to the Office for Women.

Ms STRUTHERS: They are driving change across government. They are influencing the policies and programs across government. They have had a lot of input into the pay equity work that is being done through the industrial relations of our JAG department. They have been actively involved in our employment initiatives and our skills strategies. It would be highly inefficient—and I am surprised you are not cottoning on to this—of them to sit in an office and write policy. I want them out and about. I just read to you before and spoke about all the places they have been with these Indigenous women's workshops. They travel around. Our regional staff actively promote activities in their areas. The Women in Hard Hats program is one of those flagship programs and there are many other activities that they have been involved in.

Ms SIMPSON: Minister, ask how many women have had direct contact with the Office for Women?

Ms STRUTHERS: The indications of that are in the number of contacts by phone, our website and the number of women participating in workshops. But again, the reach of the Office for Women is in their direct contact in their own regions. So our outposted regional staff have daily contact with people in their own regions.

Ms SIMPSON: Are there performance measurements in that regard?

Ms STRUTHERS: Well, there are performance measurements. I will just get some detail for you in relation to the achievements for 2010-11 which will give you a guide to this. They responded to 3,270 calls, there were 1,878 email requests for information, 24,600 'find a service facility' user views, 58,348 Office for Women website information downloads, 992 women, and I guess some men, attended events and 2,811 requests for printed resources. That gives you a guide to some of the contact. The printed resources are regularly downloaded by members of the community. For example, from 1 January to 31 March the 'Separating from your partner' fact sheet was downloaded 2,604 times. They have a whole lot of useful information on a whole range of issues I have not touched on. But they are certainly there to provide assistance and are doing just that. Look, I would really like you to get down there and meet with the staff.

Ms SIMPSON: I have met with the head of the Office of Women.

Ms STRUTHERS: I am not sure why you don't understand their work then. Anyway, sorry, Mr Chairman.

Ms SIMPSON: If pink hats is their work that is really demeaning to the Office of Women. As far as reaching out to people who are disadvantaged, that is where we want to see the focus.

Ms STRUTHERS: Mr Chairman, she has no policy on women.

CHAIR: Minister, member for Maroochydore, the time has expired. The questioning in relation to the Office of Women is finalised. We now have a changeover to the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian.

Ms STRUTHERS: Mr Chairman, we will just ask Elizabeth Fraser, the children's commissioner, to join us.

CHAIR: The committee will commence questioning in relation to the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian. I would remind honourable members of standing order 117 in relation to restrictions on questions which name at-risk children. In accordance with the standing orders, members should ensure that questions concerning a child subject to the Child Protection Act 1999 or the Juvenile Justice Act 1992 are asked in a non-identifying manner or not refer to information that, if published, may likely lead to the identification of a child.

Ms DAVIS: My question is to the commissioner. I refer to cuts to the Community Visitor Program. More than 17,000 visits have been cut from the program with all except three regions experiencing decreases above 30 per cent. Can you explain to the committee why this has happened?

Ms Fraser: The numbers of visits in terms of the frequency with which we visit children has been reduced since February 2009 when we started a program whereby, because we had been visiting those young people since 2005 on a regular basis, I instituted visits on a monthly basis while we built up information and evidence about what was the status and circumstances of those children. At that stage, after five years, it was quite clear that in some instances some children were in stable situations and did not need to be visited quite as frequently. Some of them had a lot of attention and were involved in a lot of activities and they themselves were not looking for visits as frequently. So, what I said is for those children in foster care whom we visited and have established over a six-month period that there are no issues and are in stable environments we shift those young people onto a bi-monthly schedule. That, in effect, impacted on the number of visits that we are doing, but what it has meant is that we have been

able to then focus on visiting those young people where we felt that they needed to continue on with that monthly visit. We have been able to visit remote areas more frequently. In detention and residential facilities we still visit monthly. The actual final figure was 41,156 visits that we completed to over 7,604 children.

Ms DAVIS: In what period?

Ms Fraser: In the last financial year. I think the figure that was provided to you in the question on notice was an earlier figure because it went up to May. We also, additionally, did 3,766 site reports. So, yes, the number of visits has diminished slightly over the last two to three years, but in the last period it is relatively stable—that is, in terms of last year and this year. We had a bit of disruption with the floods when we had to do telephone contact with a lot of children to establish their safety and what was happening with them and some of those children were re-placed. The numbers in a sense are reflective, I guess, that some children are not in a situation where we think they need to be visited monthly and others are. That is essentially the situation with those stats.

Ms DAVIS: The reduced visits for some of those children, are they reviewed in the event that they do require increased visits and how is that reporting done in order to identify that those children do require more visitation?

Ms Fraser: It is only for children in foster care, not in residential care or detention. In fact, in detention we are often there on a weekly basis. What happens is that if there are six visits that have occurred and there are no issues and the young person we feel is in a stable situation then what we do is we move onto a bi-monthly schedule, but if any issue arises and the community visitor is pretty stable in visiting that child, then they would resume a monthly schedule.

Ms SIMPSON: I would like to ask the children's commissioner a question with regard to blue cards for volunteers. An organisation reliant on blue cards for volunteers, like so many in our state, has provided a list of more than 100 blue card applications and renewals that they are currently waiting on. I will table these. Many of the waiting times exceed 20 weeks. More than 60 per cent exceed 10 weeks. A number are at 26 or 27 weeks. I ask: why are volunteers and organisations waiting six months or more for simple blue card renewals?

Ms STRUTHERS: Would you mind tabling that for the commissioner's benefit before she answers? Could we have a look at it, please? I will allow the commissioner to answer but, Mr Chairman, if you do not mind, if I can just comment on the document itself, I am not sure what status this has. It just lists applications faxed and a time taken. It is not sourced or anything. I do not know whether we can base a response on this. Could I ask the member to clarify further what she is referring to here and who has provided this?

CHAIR: Members of the committee do not have copies of that. There are members of the committee who want to see a copy of it. Perhaps if we could get copies of that made.

Ms SIMPSON: I am more than happy to. The question is still relevant in respect of the waiting times for volunteers to have their blue cards processed.

Ms STRUTHERS: I am not diminishing the question. I think it is an important question.

CHAIR: Member for Maroochydore, could you indicate the source of that document?

Ms SIMPSON: It has been provided by an NGO. I have de-identified the applicants' names obviously for privacy reasons. But I have gained permission to be able to table their document minus the applicants' names. I do not have the permission of the NGO to reveal who that NGO is. With respect, there are substantial numbers of blue cards outstanding for NGOs, one whom has supplied this. This is an example of the number of weeks taken. They are reliant upon having a timely turnaround on blue card applications and renewals. They are just blowing out. This is indicative of this. I would hope that there is a system in place where these are tracked and that there is something being done to address that because many volunteers are getting frustrated and not wanting to volunteer any more.

Ms STRUTHERS: I have no problem with the question, but the evidence she is supplying to back up the question I am questioning. I am very happy for the commissioner to answer the question.

CHAIR: I think we can allow the question.

Ms STRUTHERS: I question the validity. I am not asking for an NGO to be identified, I am just asking for a validity check on the document for the commissioner to answer in a fulsome way. But if she wants to answer in general terms, I am sure the commissioner can respond in general terms. I just do not want to accept what the member for Maroochydore has submitted as some kind of evidence as being evidence.

CHAIR: That is fine. It has been sourced and I will allow the question to the commissioner.

Ms Fraser: Thank you. Just for clarification, if there is a particular NGO that has a list or concerns we are more than happy to receive that in detail because we obviously do not have those same confidentiality restrictions and we can work through with the NGO precisely what the circumstances are there. I guess I would just make the point that this year we actually processed a record number of

applications, 298,750 applications, which is actually seven per cent more than we processed last year. We are in touch with over 100,000 organisations quite regularly with respect to their partnership in this process. We do quite a lot of links and audits with organisations to just make sure that the registers and what is actually happening in terms of wait times et cetera is appropriate.

Nevertheless, as you would have seen in our SDS, unfortunately this year we did not meet our published targets. There were a few reasons for that. In part, we were affected by some of the issues of needing to work through some of the back-end changes that we needed to make to implement new legislative processes. In simplifying the front end you actually have to make some changes at the back end. That did take us a little bit of time to work through. We have also replaced our database after 10 years and introduced that quite successfully in November, but it did take a little bit of resource to make that happen. Also the record number of applications that we had I think indicates that we have not actually processed a lesser number overall in terms of this year's activity. Some of them have taken longer. In general, there are a range of reasons cards may take time, and unless I look at them in some detail I am not sure whether the ones on that list are affected by the way in which the organisation has managed that, the applicant or whether, in fact, our timeliness has been an issue.

The floods did impact on us. But what actually has been very pleasing, and it has not impacted on our stats, is that in the May-June period we were actually able to process over 70,000 and we are back on a very strong basis. This month I looked at the stats—and we are only part the way through—but we are back to 70-odd per cent being processed within our benchmark of 28 days for those people who have no criminal histories. If people have histories it can take a while and on that list I am not sure who has histories and who has not. I guess the other aspect is that we did process in the volunteer area nearly 9,000 more volunteer applications in the last financial year than we did in the previous year.

In terms of overall numbers, I am not sure that people have not been going through the process, but it has taken a little longer. We have tried to work with organisations, communicating with them, talking with them, prioritising where they had urgent people coming forward, particularly students, foster-carers and people working in the voluntary reconstruction areas. We have had a lot of understanding from a lot of those people. Certainly when we have spoken, nobody has indicated to me that the situation has fallen apart in quite the way that you have presented to me. I am happy to deal with that group and try to work it through if that is an issue.

Ms SIMPSON: A common complaint I am hearing from the community sector is that when they follow up their applications, which are not acknowledged, they are told they were not received. Why is there no basic system of acknowledgement for applications so that people know that the documents are received?

Ms Fraser: Normally when people submit their applications, we have been processing them and working them through. As I say, with some of the challenges that we had and the delays that we had, especially in being able to enter some of the applications during the flood period and catching up with that entry into our database, they may have got that response when they rang in. Ultimately, normally we enter them into the database as soon as they are received, which means that they can then get a response from that process. To date we have not gone into the process of sending out regular acknowledgement letters that we have received applications, because I guess it has not been an issue raised. It is something that we can look at, but it would obviously add to the costs in terms of expenditure, especially with the numbers that we are talking about. However, we have a contact centre where people can get in touch with us and see what is happening with their application. At this stage, we do not have an automatic acknowledgement letter that goes out.

Ms SIMPSON: A standard police check from the Australian Federal Police costs \$43 and takes up to 15 days to deliver. Why is the blue card so much more expensive and so much slower?

Ms STRUTHERS: Who is that question directed to, member for Maroochydore?

Ms SIMPSON: I am sorry; to the commissioner

Ms Fraser: I think you would be aware that the consideration for the working with children check is much broader than a police check. In this state it includes spent convictions, it includes interstate histories, it includes investigative information, it includes disciplinary information and a whole range of other information is required. Basically, working through that process, if there is a history, can take a bit more time.

Ms SIMPSON: Commissioner, recently there has been publicity about a case involving an application for a blue card that was knocked back by the commission. That decision was subsequently overturned by QCAT and a blue card was issued to someone who had a murder conviction. Does the commission have concerns about the way the legislation is framed or has it sought to address this issue, because obviously it is of concern if a convicted murder can acquire a blue card?

Ms Fraser: I can speak generally about the tribunal process and what is happening there. There are some issues with me speaking with respect to individual applicants and their history. There are fairly strict provisions in my legislation that prevent that from happening. I would highlight that sometimes it is

important to look at the accuracy of some of the offences that have been reported. On the public record, the QCAT does publish some of its material. The particular case that you are referring to was a manslaughter charge, not a murder conviction.

Ms SIMPSON: My apologies.

Ms Fraser: That puts the tribunal in a different sense. It means that under the act it is treated in a way that the commission is required to establish an exceptional case as to why that person should or should not work with children. In terms of what is happening with QCAT generally, we prevented about 677 people from working with children last year. Of the people who have a review right—and some people do not because under the act they are actually disqualified up-front from having a review option—32 people sought to review the decision that I had made, which, in a sense, is approximately 11 per cent. Of those, 29 have been finalised in this last financial year. I would make the point that in seven of those cases, my decision was set aside for the applicant.

In some instances, I think the way the act operates is that it acts strongly to try to exclude some people up-front. It does not apply any review rights to some people with very serious offences when I issue a negative. For others, the act has placed an opportunity for people to have that natural justice opportunity to take it to the tribunal. Where that setting sits I think is always going to be a matter for government, parliaments, discussion and debate, and possibly the community standards around that may shift or alter over time.

In the context of whether I think people should have appeal rights, yes. In some instances, clearly I have made a different decision and, therefore, I am not necessarily madly keen that those decisions have been overturned, but I accept the fundamental right of people to have that process looked at and reviewed. When we then look at the decisions of QCAT, we have an opportunity, if there is an error of law, to seek to have that appealed again and reviewed. If there is no error of law and it is just that somebody else or another group of people, in that appropriately constituted frame, have made a different decision we are in a situation where we have to overturn that. Whether or not that is appropriate or at the right point is something that has to be monitored and set by parliament.

CHAIR: Yes, Minister?

Ms STRUTHERS: Mr Chairman, on that point I would like the opportunity to speak. The member for Maroochydore has raised a very important issue. I want to give an undertaking. I am presuming that she is referring to a recent case that was reported in the media. I am very disturbed by this case and the outcome of the QCAT decision. I want to publicly state that I will be working with the commissioner if any further legislative changes are needed in order to prevent this sort of matter from arising in the way it has and I am very keen to do that as a matter of urgency. I am not as constrained as the commissioner is by what I say in relation to this matter. I thank the commissioner for explaining the process and her appeal rights in this process.

My understanding of this particular matter is that the tribunal has made a finding that this particular fellow can get a blue card. I am appalled by that. There is a history of domestic violence. A woman—I will not describe the detail—was killed at his hands. She was his partner. An 18-month-old child existed in that relationship. That child presumably has not been in his care. If he could not care for his own child, how can he look after others and be around children in a paid role? I am very clear about this particular matter. I am very concerned and disturbed by it. I am pleased that the member has concerns about it.

Ms SIMPSON: I do.

Ms STRUTHERS: I seek her bipartisan support in working to assess whether there is a need for any legislative changes. I give my undertaking to this committee and publicly that I would be very keen to bring any changes as a matter of urgency. It may not need that. I have not had an opportunity to look in detail at the legislation as it impacts in relation to this matter. I will seek advice from the commissioner.

I say again, and I said this earlier in relation to questions about domestic violence, that this issue has to be taken seriously. This is not a private family matter. In some instances it is manslaughter, homicide, death, death of children. We cannot continue to dismiss or diminish it. I am not speaking of this case in particular, but any instance of domestic violence has to be taken very seriously, particularly where children are impacted. It is very important that the effect on children living in domestic violence is given the full and due consideration that it deserves. They are very impacted by being in that environment. I encourage the commissioner to fully assess her appeal rights. I have discussed this with her. I thank her for the consideration she has given to this matter.

CHAIR: I should indicate that, if there are still appeal rights to be carried out, it may well have some sub judice application. We may not take that area any further if that is still to be determined.

Ms Fraser: I would make one other comment on that, without commenting on the particular case. The other aspect of it is the notion that there is a sentencing review and the commission is quite active in looking at that, because clearly what we can do, how we operate and how we actually determine decisions is governed by what the classification of offence was in the first place. In this instance, as you

said in the beginning, if it had actually been a different serious offence in the context of murder and was classified in that way, the onus of the decision making would have been in a different frame. Looking at the appeal end of it may actually be the end of the process. In some instances, I think the strength of the system is also dependent on how the offences are classified in the first place and what the actual convictions are and the penalties that are imposed at that point.

CHAIR: Commissioner, could you clarify something for me. I know the member for Capalaba has a query as well. Did I understand you to say that you have 296,000 applications in a year?

Ms Fraser: Yes. Last year we had 298,750 to be more accurate. That was a seven per cent increase on the previous year. In general terms, it is a very big processing arrangement, the system. We are regularly processing, and have been for the past three or four years, well over the 270,000 mark.

CHAIR: Arising from that, and Minister perhaps you may be able to enlighten me on this, I note SDS page 3-32 states that in 2011-12 the commission will 'review and where practical automate additional processes to further streamline the blue card system'. How automated are you now? Are you fully computerised or is there still some manual handling?

Ms Fraser: Yes, there is. At this stage we obviously have a database that we enter applications into and as it moves through that is how that occurs. We have been looking at opportunities for increasing automation, particularly at the front end so that people can actually submit their applications in an electronic format. There would be some work to do in making that happen, because the system is not exactly like a licensing arrangement where you apply for a driver's licence. The system is a partnership where there are regulated organisations that provide services. They have to submit the application for the applicant and know who it is who is working for them. Then the application comes through to us and we process it. We have to work through a few things there.

One of the things that does cause delay for us is that often when people submit an application it is not correctly filled in. One of the common errors, for instance, is people put today's date instead of their date of birth. Obviously, that is an issue for us when we are seeking criminal histories. It means we have to go back to the applicant and reconfirm their date of birth, because clearly it is incorrect.

Another error is that they give an incorrect title to themselves. Our view is that if we could work to get that front end to the point that the applicant actually has to fill it in and cannot move further unless they get it right, that could stop some of that and assist that process. We have a pilot at the moment which is looking at some fill and print work. We are doing some of that with a couple of our NGO partners to see how that would work for them in their context.

The process at the moment is fairly manual in that sense at the front end and even as we move through the process. The links to the criminal history are obviously automated but with the new exemptions that were brought in and with the legislative amendment we have some areas where we are still doing manual exemptions—that is, with respect to teachers and police.

CHAIR: It does not matter if you do not have this figure, but what percentage or what fraction of applications that you receive would be incorrectly filled out?

Ms Fraser: We call it a request for information and that statistic is about 12½ per cent. That statistic has been going down over the last three or four years because we put quite a lot of effort into working with organisations to try to assist them to correct that. In fact, two or three years ago it was up above 20 per cent. Through educative workshops that we have done with organisations and applicants that is driving down. We are particularly looking at those areas where people get it wrong and trying to, in a sense, highlight the importance of that and the quality assurance work that needs to go on before people actually submit the applications. It has gone down but 12½ per cent is still quite a big number on the figures we are talking about.

CHAIR: It is still fairly high. In the context of the number of applications you get that is quite substantial.

Mr CHOI: Minister, the commissioner commented that last year she had close to 300,000 applications, and that is quite a huge figure. I have two questions, one to the commissioner and one to the minister. On top of that, according to page 3-34 of the SDS, the commission also has over half a million cardholders who you continue to monitor. I ask the commissioner: how do you do that? Then I ask the minister: how does that compare to other jurisdictions in other parts of this country?

Ms Fraser: Once the application is entered into our database—because the system operates on screening at the beginning and then they go into the database—if there is any change to that history we find out. We get daily feedback from the screening authorities, the police, in terms of any change of history. As we are processing and once we have issued a card, we are clear then. If someone is issued with a blue card and if they then commit some offence that comes back to us. We then get in contact with the organisation and indicate that there may be a change of history. If it is serious, we can suspend that card, otherwise we work through that process. At any one time that figure can go up and down. During the year we were certainly monitoring over 500,000. I think there were about 514,000 blue card holders on the database who were working in regulated employment.

With respect to other jurisdictions, Queensland's system is recognised as being the most robust because it has the elements of monitoring, screening and a legislative requirement for organisations to do risk management, which is obviously dealing with making sure that what is happening in their current context is in the interests of children.

Ms STRUTHERS: In response to the second part of your question, how do we compare, the commissioner has touched on that in relation to other jurisdictions. Recently I met with a delegation of parliamentary members from the Western Australian state parliament who were examining our system here—the commission. I spent an hour or so with them and they met with the commissioner and other people in Queensland involved in the blue card process and the other aspects of the commission. They gave it a big tick. They were keen to adopt as much as they possibly could into their model in Western Australia and update, upgrade and improve their system.

Publicly today I endorse the comments made by the commissioner. Effectively, we have a world-class system operating in Queensland that is nationally and internationally renowned. I think the commissioner rightly is very modest here, but it is a phenomenal effort. That daily monitoring of over 514,000 cards with police charges and other information coming in nationally now under the new exchange of information is a phenomenal effort. The risk management work done with over 400 organisations around the state is a phenomenal effort.

I thank you for your interest in the work of the commission as well as other members who have raised questions about the commission. We can be very confident in Queensland. We have a very robust system. As I said in relation to an earlier question, I am very keen to undertake any assessment of any aspect of the legislation that may need amending to tighten the system even further. I am very keen to do anything that is required urgently in relation to the issue that the member for Maroochydore raised earlier.

We do have a very good system. No system is fool proof. Having a blue card does not guarantee that someone is safe. It is one part of a system. The commissioner knows that. Her staff knows that. That is why they are actively out there doing educative work, doing that risk management work with hundreds of organisations around the state.

Ms SIMPSON: I have a question for the commissioner. Why is the system based on organisations sponsoring the prospective volunteer or employee? With the current delays being experienced this means people have delays in commencing employment or volunteering. Why can we not see a system where someone can apply before they are offered a job to make job seeking and volunteering easier?

Ms Fraser: Just to briefly explain, you have to be applying to work in regulated employment in order for me to have the capacity to seek information about your criminal history. That is the trigger. People can clearly signal that they want to volunteer or if they are in paid employment they can actually seek to work in that environment. The organisation does its risk management and they can put in their blue card application and they can commence. That is for paid work.

In the volunteer context, if someone is wanting to volunteer and work, they cannot actually work with children but they can certainly work in the voluntary organisation while the organisation is sorting that out and they can put in their application. However, they need to be connected with regulated employment. The issue is that there needs to be some check and balance in the legislation as to when you can go and seek detailed information about someone's personal history and start to process that. The trigger in the act is that they need to be seeking to work with children and have actually commenced that process. I guess it is a bit of a protection for the ordinary citizen that I do not just go around seeking criminal history information about anybody because I feel like it.

Ms SIMPSON: That is actually not really what I was asking. I think this is about where you have someone who is intending to work in that sector or be a volunteer, but they are not currently engaged or they have not been appointed to that job. They are seeking to cut the time involved in them coming on board as a volunteer or working with children by starting the blue card application process earlier. Therefore, they are giving permission, if you like, for their history to be checked by putting that application in themselves. Would the legislation, therefore, have to be changed to enable that person to do that before they are formally attached to an organisation or attached to a voluntary role?

Ms Fraser: Not specifically. If they are genuinely looking to take up a volunteering role, all they need to do is contact an organisation and say, 'I want to volunteer.' Then they can submit their application, unless the organisation is going to say to them, 'No, we do not want you.' They have to have the organisation's linkage to that.

Ms SIMPSON: So if they are seeking employment in that sector and they have not worked in that sector and do not have an active blue card, there would still be a delay in the processing of the blue card when they go forward to seek that employment?

Ms Fraser: At some point the person is making a decision, 'I want to volunteer'—

Ms SIMPSON: Or work in that area.

Ms Fraser:—or work. If they want to work as soon as they are involved in seeking that work, they get the organisation to say they are seeking that work, they endorse that, the application comes in and that can be processed. They can actually commence working with the organisation under a risk managed frame prior to that whole process being completed. In the voluntary sector, it is a 'no ticket, no start' in the sense that they cannot actually start volunteering with children, but they can certainly start volunteering with the organisation and put their application in at the same time. I am assuming most voluntary organisations in that sense would not just take someone off the street and have them working with children the next day. Most of them would be managing that risk in a different frame.

Ms SIMPSON: This comes back to the issue that we raised earlier. I am hearing concerns from the NGO sector in respect of the time that it is taking to renew blue cards as well as new applications. This is something that is seeing them lose volunteers, particularly new applicants.

Ms Fraser: Could I just answer the question on renewals?

Ms STRUTHERS: Sure. Before you do that, can I just respond to an issue. There are policy issues involved in what the member has asked. I would be concerned if there was any dilution of the current safeguards. If individuals without a sponsoring organisation applied, you do not have that safeguard that the commissioner has described of the risk management strategies that organisations go through—

Ms SIMPSON: That is why I am asking.

Ms STRUTHERS:—and the fact that they are a sponsoring organisation. I would suggest to the member that the proposition would really then be diluting the impact of these safeguards if anybody could just apply because they were thinking about volunteering.

Ms SIMPSON: I think, Mr Chairman, I should respond and make it quite clear what I am asking in respect of the current legislation and what could be achieved—that is, whether people could start the process before they have employment or before they are formally engaged through an organisation. It would still be in the hands of the commission to hold the final release of the blue card until they are actually engaged in that particular role. We are hearing about a number of delays for people both with work and also with volunteer organisations who are keen to start. They are saying, 'Surely we should at least be able to put in our application early.' It would still be possible to maintain all the checks of protection in respect of that person and their application by not actually releasing that application until it is appropriate.

CHAIR: That question relates more to policy. Perhaps you could indicate whether or not—I would ask the minister—

Ms SIMPSON: I think we needed to clarify what was actually being asked with regard to what the law meant.

CHAIR: I believe that that is more properly a question for the minister.

Ms STRUTHERS: The commissioner can probably add to it as well. I appreciate the sentiment of what is being expressed. I am not in any way challenging that. I understand the frustration and I hear of this myself. I think the commissioner very rightly explained why there have been some delays currently and why there have in recent months been significant improvements to that.

In response to the specific suggestion, I would be a little concerned about the potential for diluting the safeguards. If someone applied because they wanted to volunteer and they then decided not to or they moved away from Queensland or whatever and their application was on hold, I would imagine that the commission would then have a whole lot of on-hold applications. Maybe you could have a 12-month time frame on that. I think there are some operational issues that the commissioner understands better than I do. I raise that concern that the legislation is structured in such a way as to provide as much by way of safeguard as possible. As I said earlier, the blue card is not the be-all and end-all. If a person has a blue card it means the person has been through all the appropriate checks, but it is important that organisations have their own risk management strategies. You can go back to the commissioner. I just wanted to make that point about the risks there.

Ms Fraser: I might make two points. Hopefully the way in which it operates now is clear. The other issue is in the voluntary area and making sure that the people who put in their applications actually follow through, because obviously costs for us are incurred in processing and receiving the applications. Volunteers do not pay. If they then do not continue on, we have incurred the cost of processing their application for someone who does not pick it up. Some consideration possibly needs to be given to that in that frame.

With regard to renewals, I did want to put on the record that, for people who are renewing, 16 weeks before their blue card is due to expire they should get a letter from us advising them that if they want to they can submit their renewal. If they submit their renewal form before the 30 days expire, they can continue on in whatever they are doing whilst we are processing, because they are still on our database and we are still monitoring them and if there is any change in history then we are actually making sure that there is no problem there. If they do not come back within that 30 days then we move

to take them off the database. If they then want to submit what they think is a renewal, they are actually then moving into a whole new fresh application. That can cause delay. But we have certainly worked with our organisations and applicants to try to make them clear about the fact that there should not be any disruption with renewal in terms of their capacity to continue either volunteering or working.

CHAIR: Thank you, Commissioner. The time allocated for consideration of the estimates for the portfolio of the Minister for Community Services and Housing and Minister for Women has expired. I think the time allocated to all of your areas has now expired, Minister. I would like to thank you, your ministerial staff, your senior staff and the commissioner for your attendance today and for your assistance to the committee.

Ms STRUTHERS: If I may, Mr Chairman, thank you and the members of the committee for the constructive way in which we have been able to discuss my portfolio. There have been a lot of achievements. We have covered a lot of territory today. I just want to clarify too the Office for Women salary issue raised earlier by the member for Maroochydhore. There was a four per cent increase through that enterprise bargain. In dollar value that was \$90,000. So that explains the increase that the member spoke about. But thank you for the good spirit in which you have conducted the session today. Thank you for your chairing. I thank my director-general and staff. It has been a big effort this year with the community recovery effort. I thank the commissioner. They were flooded too. They were affected but have carried on extremely well. I also thank my staff.

CHAIR: The committee will now break and the hearing will resume at 5 pm.

Proceedings suspended from 4.32 pm to 5.01 pm

ESTIMATES—COMMUNITY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE—CHILD SAFETY AND SPORT

In Attendance

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

Mr S Gay, Principal Adviser

Department of Communities

Ms L Apelt, Director-General

Mr T Hodda, Director, Finance Programs—Child Safety and Community and Sport and Recreation

Mr B Klassen, Deputy Director-General (Acting), Sport and Recreation Services

Mr K Yearbury, Chief Executive Officer, Stadium Queensland



CHAIR: It now being 5.01 pm, I declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

I welcome the minister and all of your relevant officers. If you wish, you may make an opening statement. The committee has asked that opening statements be no longer than three minutes.

Mr REEVES: Thanks, Chair. In Queensland we continue to implement innovative and new initiatives to support our most vulnerable children and young people. Since 2004 we have come a long way, basically rebuilding the Queensland child safety system. We have increased the budget by 400 per cent to \$733 million—almost \$700 million more than when the LNP was last in power. We have also more than doubled the number of child safety staff in Queensland.

To address the Indigenous overrepresentation, we formed the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Safety Taskforce. One of the outcomes of this task force is that in 2011-12 we will invest \$10.1 million to work more closely with approximately 2,600 vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to provide early intervention services.

We have invested \$55 million over four years on the Helping Out Families pilot initiative, designed to keep families together. Since the program began in October 2010 to the end of last month, we have handled 1,478 referrals and we are working closely with 322 families to identify their needs and refer them to support services. We have embarked on a process to evaluate this initiative's further potential and the first two stages of this process are now underway.

We are keeping abreast of the latest research and program development to come from the Wood inquiry in New South Wales, the Bath inquiry in the Northern Territory and the Munro report in the United Kingdom. We are looking at comparisons between their systems and Queensland to ensure, where appropriate, we could learn from their findings. I am pleased to be part of a government that is delivering new and innovative initiatives to improve and enhance Queensland's child protection sector.

Local sport and recreation clubs are the lifeblood of our communities. The Queensland government is helping clubs in disaster affected areas through our \$14.4 million Sport and Recreation Flood Fightback Plan. We have allocated \$2 million worth of equipment grants to sports and recreation clubs who sign up to the 'Positive or it's pointless' campaign, which aims to deter negative attitudes both on and off the field.

Chair, I would like now to take the opportunity to table the Off-Road Motorcycling Management Strategy. In response to the CMC inquiry into off-road motorcycles, the Queensland government has decided that it is necessary to develop a strategy on how best to manage the use of off-road motorbikes and their impact on the community. The one-size-fits-all approach to noise laws in the current legislation is obviously not working. Therefore, changes are needed so that the management and enforcement practices are relevant to needs of the local community and all those who enjoy off-road motorcycling.

An off-road motorcycling chief executive task force has now been established and we are working with the council of mayors to establish the off-road motorcycling facility at Wyaralong, which I know the member for Beaudesert is interested in. At the end of the day, the Queensland government wants to create an environment whereby off-road motorcycle enthusiasts and the communities can co-exist.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I would once again remind honourable members of standing order 117 in relation to restrictions on questions which name at-risk children. In accordance with this standing order, members should ensure that questions concerning a child subject to the Child Protection Act

1999 or the Juvenile Justice Act are asked in a non-identifying manner or not refer to information that if published may likely lead to the identification of a child. The committee will commence questioning in relation to child safety. I call the member for Aspley.

Ms DAVIS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, what is an acceptable case load for a child safety officer?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. As I have said previously in the House, child safety staff do an incredible job. More than 2,500 Child Safety Services staff across Queensland are working hard to support our most vulnerable children and young people. As child safety minister, I have travelled the length and breadth of Queensland meeting with staff in all child safety service centres and regional offices and have met with hub staff. During these visits I seen first-hand what a wonderful job these front-line staff are doing.

I am pleased to inform the committee that child safety officers' case loads have been reduced since 2004. When the report was handed down in 2004, child safety officers were averaging 32 cases. As of March 2011, child safety officers working with children with ongoing intervention now average about 22 cases. I am also pleased to announce that, as a result of this budget, we will have 20 more new staff members in child safety service centres. This will help in addressing the case loads. But the reduction in case loads from 32 to 22 is reflective of the significant increases to the budget and staff that the Queensland government has made to Child Safety Services since 2004.

Ms DAVIS: Thank you, Minister. It is good to see that there has been a reduction. I bring to your attention that, although the state average was the 22.4 as you have just indicated, Toowoomba North is 32.8; Cape York South, 29.7; Atherton, 27.6; and there are a number that sit above the 22.4. I appreciate and I agree that child safety officers do a wonderful job. But, given those numbers, why are those officers that you speak so highly of given such a high and unmanageable number of cases?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. As I have said, child safety staff have done a marvellous job in the work that they have done. But they have done that because we have increased every year the number of child safety staff. In fact, in June last year I announced that 35 more front-line staff would be employed. A further 24 staff were also reallocated from existing resources. That came on top of the 10 front-line positions that were reallocated for existing resources. On top of that now is the 21 new staff members that I have announced today as a result of this year's budget.

I am pleased to announce—and I know that the member for Cook will be very happy about this—that 10 of these new officers will be appointed to Far North Queensland, with dedicated officers joining Atherton, Innisfail, Cairns North, Cairns South, Cape York North and Cape York South Child Safety Services. I am sure that the member for Cook will appreciate this. I have met with him and with some child safety officers in that region. One new officer will join the north coast and Central Queensland regions, 1.5 will join the North Queensland region and 5.5 full-time equivalents will join the south-west region. The south-west region will also receive an additional team leader position.

Mr O'BRIEN: Can I jump in there? I just want to know the specific roles that these new officers are going to undertake. Are they administrative or are they online officers?

Mr REEVES: These are front-line child safety officers. They will have case loads. They will do the normal work of child safety officers. Of the 21, there will be one team leader position in the south-west region.

Mr O'BRIEN: So there are no senior positions. These are all just online child safety officers. They will doing the same role. There are no additional roles or specific roles. It is the cavalry arriving.

Mr REEVES: These are in addition to those child safety officers who do a tremendous job in those particular areas that I spoke about before. This will have a great impact on case loads for those particular areas. Obviously we have chosen those areas to tackle the case loads where staff are needed the most. The additional staff will be front line and work in those case load areas.

Ms DAVIS: Minister, when will those child safety officers actually commence work in those areas?

Mr REEVES: Obviously we have made the announcement. So the process of employing these staff will be put in place, and as quickly as humanly possible that will occur.

Ms DAVIS: Minister, given that there are a number of areas around the state where you cannot get child safety officers to fill positions, how are we to believe that you are going to get enough responses to actually place people in those areas?

Mr REEVES: I am very confident that our recruitment of child safety officers will be effective. I should state that the vacancy rate for child safety as of today is only 1.91 per cent which is comparable to most of the Public Service. Most of the Public Service on my understanding is about two to three per cent. So to have a rate as low as that in child safety is, I think, testament to the hard work that we have been doing with retention and recruitment of child safety staff, bearing in mind, as I said previously, that it is not the easiest job in the world. These people deal with some of the most extreme circumstances imaginable. I think this calls on all of us—government, political parties and the community as a whole—to make the positions as attractive as possible for these child safety officers because of the hard work that they do on a day-to-day basis.

Ms DAVIS: Minister, just to clarify, those numbers that you cited of one per cent or 1.5 per cent are child safety officers or is that across the department?

Mr REEVES: Across the whole of Child Safety Services the vacancy rate is 1.91 per cent.

Ms DAVIS: Minister, I am really interested in knowing how many vacancies there are for child safety officers.

Mr REEVES: The total number of vacancies across the whole of Child Safety Services is 42. Now we have—

Ms DAVIS: Question on notice No. 756—

CHAIR: Member for Aspley, would you please let the minister finish his answer. You can then ask your further question.

Mr REEVES: If I remember rightly, the question on notice was asked in May. What I am giving to you now are the most accurate, up-to-date figures. As at today, for the whole of Child Safety Services, which has 2,585 staff, there are 42 positions vacant.

Ms DAVIS: The answer to question on notice 756 was that there were 28 child safety officer vacancies and 12 team leader vacancies. Can you give me now what those figures are as of today?

Mr REEVES: I will have to see if that information is readily available and I will get back to the committee.

Ms DAVIS: Thank you very much. I would like to speak about investigations and assessments. Forty-five per cent of approved I&As were not finalised within a two-month period in September 2010. What is the current figure?

Mr REEVES: Could you repeat the question?

Ms DAVIS: With regard to investigations and assessments, 45 per cent were not finalised within a two-month period in September 2010. I would like to know what the current figure is.

Mr REEVES: For the year ended 31 March 2011, Child Safety Services recorded 20,975 notifications, I&As. Of those 20,975 notifications recorded by Queensland for the year ended 31 March, 82 per cent—

Ms DAVIS: Excuse me, Minister. Could you slow down just a little bit so I can understand what you are saying? Thank you.

Mr REEVES: Eight-two per cent were finalised, while the remaining 3,796 investigations and assessments, being 18 per cent, are in progress.

Ms DAVIS: When the time frame is missed by 100 per cent—I have some documentation here that I can table—what does the department do to fix that problem?

CHAIR: I would remind the member that she is here by leave of the committee and that for any tabling of documents she must seek leave.

Ms DAVIS: I seek leave to table the document. There are more copies, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: Perhaps if the copies were readable they would be able to be tabled. They need to be in a larger format.

Ms DAVIS: I am afraid I do not have that.

Mr REEVES: Maybe if she untables it, I can just try to respond to the question.

Ms DAVIS: That would be great. That would be terrific, thank you.

CHAIR: Sorry?

Mr REEVES: If she untables it, rather than table a document that no-one can understand, I will just explain to her why some delays occur.

Ms DAVIS: Thank you, Minister.

CHAIR: Member for Aspley, I am sorry, but I cannot even read the document that you have sought to table—I have not even sought leave as yet—because of the font size.

Ms DAVIS: Okay.

CHAIR: So perhaps if you could frame your question to the minister and give him that detail, he has indicated that he would be prepared to give you the answer.

Ms DAVIS: I am not sure that you need the document to answer the question.

Mr REEVES: I am happy to answer.

Ms DAVIS: What is the department doing when they are just completely missed over a two-month period, when they are not even attended to?

Mr REEVES: Child Safety Services has a tough job, but what I can say from my visits around Queensland, to all service centres and all regional offices, is that they are committed to the important role that they play. I have been absolutely inspired by the passion, professionalism and dedication shown by Queensland Child Safety Services staff. I take this opportunity to commend them. I note the constant criticism of their hard work by the LNP. Since 2004—

Ms DAVIS: Point of order, Mr Chairman. I have never, nor has the LNP, ever criticised the work—

CHAIR: Member for Aspley, you are here by leave. If you continue along that line you can be asked to leave. There is no point of order. You have asked a question of the minister. The minister is answering the question.

Mr REEVES: Since 2004 we have increased the budget by more than 400 per cent and doubled the staffing for Child Safety Services. Today I announced 21 more. This has enabled us to better deal with the increasing number of reports of child abuse and neglect. We would love it if there was not an increasing number of reports, but the fact is that there is. The fact is that it is not just in Queensland; it is Australia-wide and in fact worldwide. Today in Queensland we have more staff and better coverage than ever before. We also have a far greater number of reports to Child Safety Services than ever before, demonstrating a greater awareness of and, more importantly, a confidence in the Queensland child protection system by Queenslanders. Our hardworking staff have been able to access regional and remote communities to ensure our children and young people are safe and protected.

However, in some circumstances families will actively avoid Child Safety Services staff. They will actively avoid police, whom we work closely with to ensure the safety of our children and young people. In some circumstances—I can confirm that it has happened before—families are actively avoiding Child Safety Services and police in a number of Australian states. But we have a strong relationship with our interstate counterparts which enables greater collaboration on these occasions. Sometimes reports received of child abuse and neglect will not contain enough information about where a family is or who they are, even though the concerns they have reported reach the threshold for investigation.

Despite the efforts of our staff, it is sometimes not possible to commence investigations within the required time frame. The committee can be assured that Child Safety Services is committed to ensuring the protection and wellbeing of Queensland's most vulnerable children and young people, and I can give you an assurance that our staff work very hard to investigate all reports that reach the threshold. I call on the LNP and others to stop criticising and start supporting Queensland's hardworking Child Safety Services staff.

In regard to the question about positions vacant, as of today there are two team leader positions vacant and 18 child safety officer positions vacant.

Ms DAVIS: So on top of that you will add the new child safety officers, so that will now be 38; is that correct?

Mr REEVES: No, no. Those positions already exist.

Ms DAVIS: Yes, but they are not filled.

Mr REEVES: They are vacant. They are in the process of being filled. As of today those 20 positions are vacant, because there is an interview process underway. So they will be filled. And on top of that there are 21 new positions. But they are already counted in the system, so I do not want to double-claim.

Ms DAVIS: Yes, but the positions are not filled.

Mr REEVES: If you want me to, I will double-claim them, but I do not think it is appropriate.

Ms DAVIS: I do not think you need to claim anything. With regard to licensing, how many out-of-home care services are receiving placements of children before licensing processes are complete?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. We have a thorough licensing process. It is very important that we do so. But at the same time, as I have stated, we have over 8,000 children in out-of-home care today. It is a record number and it is a record number Australia-wide. It is important that we endeavour to find the best available location to protect those children and young people. Obviously the best location is in their family home, but we know that if they stayed in their family home they would be harmed, abused or neglected.

From there, obviously we look for foster and kinship carers to look after those children. They are not always capable of going there, for a range of reasons. Some of the children and particularly young people that unfortunately have to come into the child protection system have very, very complex needs and are unable to be cared for by one foster carer, are unable to be put into that type of situation. So we have to look for the best available spots.

We are committed to ensuring the highest standards of care. The majority of placements are made with licensed non-government care services and department approved foster carers. The granting of a licence means that a placement provider meets the statement of standards. Licensing alleviates the need for child safety officers to make a determination against the statement of standards each time.

The licensing process requires demonstration of compliance, independently verified, with 11 service standards. I can advise that 10 services have received their invitation to apply for a licence as at 30 June. Of these 10 services, three have lodged a properly made application and are going through the licensing application process. There are currently 14 prospective services that have not yet been invited to apply for a licence but may be entering the licensing process in the future.

Ms DAVIS: So the answer to the question, which was how many out-of-home care services are receiving placements, is—

Mr REEVES: Total?

Ms DAVIS: I want to know how many are unlicensed but are still receiving placements of children.

Mr REEVES: I will get that information and get back to you shortly.

CHAIR: Minister, I take you to another area of the SDS, relating to disaster recovery. Page 3-3 talks about the government's community recovery response. Can you advise the committee what assistance was provided to affected foster carers, children in care and NGOs?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. Obviously the disasters had an impact on a lot of services. Two Ipswich child safety service centres were affected. The one that was most impacted was the Goodna child safety service centre, which was totally flooded. A small number of carers were impacted on in some way by the disasters. Approximately 62 suffered more than substantial effects. This included two terrible cases: one carer in Tully lost the roof of their house and the house of a carer in Innisfail burnt down following Cyclone Yasi. In both of these cases, temporary housing was arranged by the Queensland government and ongoing support is currently being provided. Thankfully, the children have remained living with their carers, which is very important. When you think that those children had been through a disaster, the worst possible scenario would be if they had to be removed from the carers they had bonded with.

In circumstances where child safety service centres were themselves affected, other offices around Queensland took up the vital support role to protect our most vulnerable children and young people. I should add that during that time we kept focused on those on the front line, but some of our administration and management staff in central office were involved in the whole community recovery. I think a third of the whole Department of Communities staff were involved at one point in time in community recovery.

CHAIR: A third?

Mr REEVES: A third of the staff of the whole Department of Communities were involved at some time in community recovery. With 98 per cent of Queensland's councils being declared natural disaster areas, our focus in the whole Department of Communities was to get people's lives back on track as quickly as possible, and that was the focus.

CHAIR: And that involved foster carers? That was the point of my question.

Mr REEVES: Yes.

Mr O'BRIEN: Minister, can you please let us know what you and your department are doing to reduce the incidence of Indigenous overrepresentation in the child safety system?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question, not only because of the electorate that he represents but also because of his passion in this area. I know that he feels quite strongly on this. We are acutely aware of the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system. This is a very serious issue that is not unique to Queensland. Many child protection systems in Australia and in the Western world face challenges similar to the ones we face in Queensland. That said, Queensland has some unique policy initiatives to help address the issues of overrepresentation.

In my opening statement I mentioned Indigenous family support services. When I first became child safety minister I was approached by the Indigenous child protection sector, and after their representation it became evident that there was a better model of service delivery that ensured Child Safety Services maintained its statutory responsibility and provided increased support to families before they reached crisis point.

We reallocated existing funds to provide new early intervention and prevention services known as the Indigenous family support services and maintained the important statutory role that recognised entities play. The Queensland government has a strong record of supporting recognised entities, which have traditionally been the Indigenous controlled organisations that provide cultural advice and significant decision-making points in the child protection system. In 2011-12 we will invest \$10.1 million to support the 11 recognised entities and \$10.1 million to support the Indigenous family support services. This is a significant increase since 2009 when we invested around \$11 million to support approximately 132 staff. Today we are investing a total of \$20.2 million and supporting 190 staff for both services across Queensland.

These reforms were discussed in depth during last year's estimates and I am happy to inform the House that the rollout of the new Indigenous family support services has, by and large, been positive. The services are established in hubs throughout Queensland and collectively they have the capacity to assist up to 2,600 Indigenous families. This means that an additional 2,600 Indigenous families have access to secondary support services run by Indigenous organisations. When you consider this in addition to the \$55 million Helping Out Families initiative and prevention pilot in the three South-East Queensland locations, it is clear the Bligh government is committed to providing greater support to families before they require the more intrusive child protection response.

We are also ensuring staff at these Indigenous family support services receive support and training to continue to increase their skills and capacity to respond to families in need. Last year during estimates I announced non-recurrent funding of \$110,000 being provided to the peak body to enter into an agreement with Triple P International to train 40 staff with an Indigenous specific Triple P course. The training was very successful and I was pleased to approve a further \$55,000 to train an additional 20 staff at Indigenous family support services in the world-renowned program. An additional \$73,200 was also approved last year to provide accredited training in family and domestic violence responses through the Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research at the Central Queensland University. I want to extend my thanks to Di Harvey and the team from our Indigenous child protection peak QATSICPP for their collaborative approach to ensuring that the Queensland government and this sector continues to provide positive outcomes for vulnerable Indigenous children and young people.

In December last year I launched a comprehensive plan—a blueprint for implementation; the Queensland government's response—Together Keeping our Children Safe and Well. Together Keeping Our Children Safe and Well was produced by the Queensland Aboriginal child protection task force established in October 2009. The blueprint supports the intent of the comprehensive plan such as the need to engage with Indigenous communities, support families early and build localised capacity, knowledge and participation to create change in the social norms at the community level. The government will continue to provide support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to help keep their children safe.

Mr O'BRIEN: Thanks, Minister. Just on that similar line of questioning, I have opened a couple of these safe houses on Cape York Peninsula with you and I know there is another one in Doomadgee at least. It has probably been nearly 12 months since we opened up some of those. Have you got any data at this stage or any anecdotal evidence on whether those safe houses are working and what they are doing?

Mr REEVES: There is no doubt that these safe houses are working. Probably the best example I can give you is a practical example. I am probably telling you something that you already know because you were sitting in the room when we met, but the rest of the committee would not know. I think we were sitting at Napranum with the mayor. He spoke about a young Indigenous person who came back to Napranum to go into the safe house while at the same time the family support service worked with the family, which had some large and complex issues to sort out. It gave the family hope that the children were back in the community and it turned that mother around, and these were the mayor's words and not mine. As a result of that, a few months later they were able to reunify them and those children were back living in the family home. But what really impressed on me that it works is when the mayor said that it did not just impact on that family but gave motivation to others whose children have been removed in other parts of Napranum that there is light at the end of the tunnel. They saw that if they worked hard with that family support to get their life back in order their children can come back and live with them. We all would agree that that is the best place if they can live there safely.

CHAIR: Minister, before I call the member for Capalaba, in answer to a question from the member for Aspley you said that you would get detail back today. What we are doing is putting them all as questions on notice.

Mr REEVES: I have that answer if you want that.

CHAIR: I am indicating that it should be a question on notice. The reply is required by 5 pm tomorrow. If you have the answer now, then you can give that.

Mr REEVES: We have 158 licensed care services. Some 24 are in the process of being licensed and are operating. A child can be placed in the care of an unlicensed care service under section 182(1) of the act when it is in the best interests of the child. An initial assessment is made when it is in a care service that is in the process of being licensed and I am confident that Child Safety Services staff make the right judgement in that regard.

CHAIR: I call the member for Capalaba.

Mr CHOI: Minister, you have two portfolios—being Child Safety and Sport. Some would argue or perhaps have the opinion that that is an unusual combination. Have you found any synergies since you became the minister between Child Safety and Sport?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question and maybe the member for Beaudesert will want to hear this because I know that he has made a couple of comments in the House regarding this. I think there are many synergies between the two portfolios. I have always said that sport

and recreation is about young people reaching their full potential, and that is exactly what Child Safety is all about. Child Safety is about children and young people reaching their full potential. Unfortunately, sometimes for those children and young people to reach their full potential they have to be removed from their family. Since becoming minister I have worked very hard to ensure that there are opportunities for children in care to participate in sport and recreation, whether it was through inviting many of the foster and kinship carers to events such as our Find Your 30 events that have been held across the state or whether it is through children in care sports grants.

In 2009-10 I allocated \$1 million to support children in care participate in sport or recreation activities. This initiative recognised that participation in sport and recreation teaches important values and life skills including self-confidence, teamwork, communication, discipline and fair play. The assistance is provided by reimbursing carers up to \$300 per child for expenses associated with sports and physical activities and recreational activities including the cost of lessons, registrations and club fees and team uniforms. So far 2,828 children have benefited from this initiative by being assisted to participate in a wide range of activities including football, soccer—depending on your definition there; many call soccer football, but rather than get into that debate I will leave that for later—softball, hockey, gymnastics, dance, cheerleading, swimming lessons, equestrian, BMX, karate, Girl Guides and Scouts. We have seen some positive outcomes for so many children. As part of this initiative, Child Safety Services also provided sport equipment kits to the value of \$1,000 each to seven funded safe houses and to the 80 residential care services in Queensland. Under our *Toward Q2: Tomorrow's Queensland* we want to make sure that we are contributing to the healthiest people. I think it is very important that children in care have as much access to sport and recreation as any child and young person has, and I have been passionate about that all of the time.

CHAIR: Minister, the member for Cook has a final question, as has the member for Beaudesert.

Mr O'BRIEN: I have many more questions.

CHAIR: If it is a follow-up question from that, fine.

Mr O'BRIEN: It is.

CHAIR: I will call the member for Cook and then the member for Beaudesert has a follow-up question also from that question.

Mr O'BRIEN: This question is something that is raised with me a lot, Minister, and it is about Indigenous kids who have been removed. Quite often the parents of those Indigenous kids who have been removed come up and talk to me. A lot of them are trying to get their lives back on track and to get their kids back, but what they worry about while their kids are away from their care is how they remain connected to their kin and culture. How does the department help keep Indigenous children and families connected?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. We are committed to ensuring that when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families services delivered are respectful, culturally appropriate, timely and maintain those connections with families, communities and culture. For an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child, his or her family, community, clan, traditions and customs are integral to the development of a sense of identity. The cultural support plan, which forms part of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child's case plan, ensures that a child maintains their links with safe and protective family members and their community and their cultural supports. Where a child is identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander at the time of the initial case plan, a mandatory field in ICMS for a cultural support plan is generated. The cultural support plan captures a great deal of information about the child's family, such as the personal history, kinship or community structure, cultural heritage, arrangements for contact with family and significant community members, and opportunities for the child's participation in cultural activities and experiences.

Child Safety staff are incredibly hardworking individuals who are dedicated to ensuring some of our most vulnerable children and young people reach their full potential. It is imperative that we maintain a highly professional and responsive workforce as part of this in ensuring staff receive appropriate training. Child Safety Services staff must complete foundation studies in culture and Indigenous engagement which is offered by the Department of Communities to train staff in engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Recognised entities also play an important role in the development of cultural support plans. As I have said, this year the Department of Communities has invested \$10.1 million in that. Obviously ideally we would love it if those families do not have to have that child removed, and that is why we are focusing on that \$10.1 million in Indigenous family support services to try to reduce that number.

CHAIR: I call the member for Beaudesert.

Mr McLINDON: Yes, Minister: you know it is coming. Following on from the previous question from the member for Cook, Queensland unfortunately has the tag of being the foster care capital of Australia per capita, as you would be well aware. The government's own statistics show that in the last five years the number of intakes has jumped from 62,500 to 108,900 and child concern reports have gone from 28,800 to 87,900. It would be fair to suggest that in a five-year period this is skyrocketing and

spiralling through no fault of yours individually, but the reality is that this is the response that government is going to need to proactively look at rather than reactively. In your response to the synergies of Sport and Child Safety, after listening to the previous minister today in terms of youth justice, communities and families—and I pose this question to both yourself, Minister, and the director-general—from a political and departmental point of view, would it not make sense to have these synergies together in terms of not only financial savings but also the human toll that it is having across Queensland? Would it not make much more sense to have the Sports portfolio in tourism and entertainment and Child Safety with families, youth and community care to ensure that there are not only cost savings but also—

CHAIR: Member for Beaudesert, could you please get to your question.

Mr McLINDON: I am wrapping up. I know; I just had to get this one off my chest, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: It is almost a speech, so please get to your question.

Mr McLINDON: So, Minister, do you not see that separation of those departments would attack this acutely and actually make sure that it does not double in another five years from now?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. One thing you should realise is that it is one department and child safety and youth justice and sport, amongst others, are all part of the Department of Communities. We have a focus within the department of no wrong door, and it is important. Sport as we know is a driver in our community. Sport can drive health benefits. Sport can drive education benefits.

Sport is an economic driver, as you have said, but I think sport's main focus is on what it can do in the community. You only have to go to different parts of the community to see how sport has been used to drive communities together, to link them. I am very comfortable with Sport being part of the Department of Communities, because it can be the vehicle through which we can get change. History shows that sport is not just about what you see on the television. Sport is about how it can build a community and how, from wherever that child has come, from whatever undesirable conditions that existed within that child's family, they can reach their full potential. That full potential might be that he is playing for the under 11Z football side or that full potential might be that they play State of Origin, or end up playing for the Firebirds, or play for the Beaudesert wombats softball club. As a community, the vehicles and opportunities, which I explained before, show a great link between giving children and young people the opportunity to reach their full potential. Why should not children in care have an opportunity to reach their full potential? I think sport more than any other can help that.

Ms DAVIS: My question is to the director-general. With reference to the discontinued measures that appear on page 5-25 of the SDS, why has the statistic for the number of children in care been discontinued and where will this now be reported?

Ms Apelt: As the member will have noted, there are a number of discontinued measures this year and that is the result of an overall audit of the performance measures to ensure that those that remain in the SDS are true efficiency and effectiveness measures that are an actual reflection of issues that are within the control of the department. With the particular measure that you have identified, the determination was made that that statistic is not one that is necessarily in the control of the department. It is a demand-driven statistic. So it has essentially been discontinued as it provides limited information on the efficiency or effectiveness of the department.

It is nevertheless, though, a statistic that is monitored. It is important information that is of interest to the department but, in terms of the purposes of the actual budget document, it does not represent an efficiency or an effectiveness measure. However, this measure will continue to be published separately, including on the department's 'Our performance' website.

Mr REEVES: Can I add further that today in Queensland the Bligh government reports on over 150 data measures annually with more than 80 of these being reported on a quarterly basis. This data is reported publicly through many forums, including the Child Safety website. When the former incarnation of the LNP was last in government they reported on state-wide measures. However, only one measure was reported on a regional breakdown, and that was the number of children in care. I have stated previously in parliament, including in answers to questions on notice, that the LNP reported on only one measure. I should clarify today to say that there was only one measure broken down on a regional basis. I am correcting the record today as I believe that it is important that there be no confusion about that issue.

Ms DAVIS: My next question is to the director-general again. I refer to the figures of the total number of young people in care and the increase in numbers to 7,900, which the minister has spoken about here today. It is an increase of nearly three per cent. The minister has spoken about the increase worldwide of children in care. Could you clarify whether this is the result of higher notifications or it is an average higher length of stay in care?

Ms Apelt: Once again, this statistic is a reflection of a number of issues. First of all, it reflects the demand that comes to our attention through the number of substantiations. So we receive a number of notifications from people of children who they believe need to come to the attention of Child Safety.

However, with those children who end up in care—whether that is out-of-home care or care with intervention from the department—there is an increase in population, for a start, which obviously has a natural flow-on effect. There is also I think a greater community awareness about the interests of the child. So more notifications come to our attention. Also, in terms of the professionalising of our workforce and our systems, we have much more sophisticated decision-making tools now to assist the staff in making decisions about whether or not it is in the interests of the child to be in out-of-home care.

Ms DAVIS: Could you tell me whether the average length of care duration has increased or decreased over, say, the past three years?

Ms Apelt: We do have that data. I will need to get some clarification of that for you.

Ms DAVIS: Thank you.

Mr REEVES: I should add that the reality is that children and young people are coming into the system younger and staying longer than ever before. It is not just a Queensland issue. Part of that is because of the identification and people have confidence in reporting the concerns that they have early. That is why our Helping Out Families initiative, particularly with the Health Home Visiting system, is going to have, I believe, a big impact.

Ms DAVIS: So Minister you are saying that it has increased? The length of stay has increased over the past three years? Is that what you just gave me in your answer?

Mr REEVES: We will get the actual statistics for you, but the reality is that worldwide, but particularly in Australia and particularly in Queensland, children and young people are coming into care earlier and staying longer. But that is why the Helping Out Families initiative, which I note you did not support in the House when it was voted on, will have a major impact. It will have a major impact because of Health Home Visiting, which will visit every child in the pilot area who was born in that period of time and the family has constant contact with them.

Ms DAVIS: Again to the director-general, with reference to notifications and substantiations, can you provide a breakdown in percentages—and you may not be able to give them to me straightaway—of the number of cases involving primary neglect issues as opposed to those involving abuse?

Ms Apelt: We collect the data but I would need to look to see what is involved in pulling that out. As the minister indicated, we do collect a lot of data and publish relevant data for the public interest on our website. But in terms of that one I will need to check whether or not it is actually available and what would be involved in retrieving it.

Mr REEVES: I should add there that we may not be able to get it for you. As I have previously said in answer to a number of questions on notice, it is not a situation that we are going to get a Child Safety officer to sit down and go through every single database and grab that information. If that information is readily available with one push of the button, then we have no hesitation in giving it to you. But I am not going to, or the department is not going to, assign Child Safety officers if they have to go into individual databases for different measures that you may or may not want.

Ms DAVIS: So you are unsure whether that would be—

Mr REEVES: That is why we will check first before we give a commitment that we will get that. Quite frankly, I want child Safety Officers focused on protecting children and young people and working with the families and the foster carers, not going through every single file to get a statistic that they would have to mark off manually.

Ms DAVIS: So would you not ordinarily want to know that statistic as a matter of course? I am not suggesting that you assign a person to go through that; what I am asking now is would you ordinarily want to know that statistic and would it be on your database so, at the flick of a switch, you could get it for me?

Mr REEVES: We are forever increasing the amount of data that we get. We are now up to 150 measures and that is increasing—the 150 measures that we report annually and the 80 that we report on on a quarterly basis. That is open for everyone to see. But it is not just simply putting a data field in and it will work; you have to balance that. But if you have a look at our statistics compared to most of the other jurisdictions throughout Australia, we are head and shoulders above.

CHAIR: You talk about the data. At page 3-11 and page 3-12 you provide a range of child protection data. Could you give us an outline of those data trends and the government's response to those data trends? I will give you an example about data trends that mystifies me slightly. If you have a look on page 3-12, your target or estimate for 2010-11 for total substantiations and total number of children subject to ongoing intervention are shown but then your estimated actual was substantially less in some cases. Yet your target estimate in 2011-12 is more than your estimated actual.

Mr REEVES: Which one was that? What page is it?

CHAIR: There are actually two of them that show that trend.

Mr REEVES: What page?

CHAIR: Page 3-12, total substantiations. It goes 7,000, 6,700 and 6,500. The total substantiations in that instance go down. Further down you have the total number of children subject to ongoing intervention, 11,910, and the estimated actual was 11,200. That shows a slight increase but not to the target or estimate for 2010-11. You mentioned 150 data sources. The main question is, one, what do you use to capture that data and, two, with the data that is used here, what has been the government's response to those trends?

Mr REEVES: The reality is how we capture that data is that Child Safety Services staff enter that. ICMS is an individual's case. If we have the right measure, we report on a holistic model of those different data trends. I will ascertain those figures but, obviously, they would have looked at the demand previously. This is a new measure, this one, with regard to substantiations. In 2009-10 it was 2,635 and in 2010-11 it was 2,500. So it was going down. With our structured decision making we are getting better decision making by the Child Safety officers with regard to substantiations and the like.

While I am answering your question, we have some data with regard to harm type. Bear in mind that this is the most current year ending March 2011. It is from April to March. Physical abuse and neglect, 1,920 of a total harm type of 6,004. I will let you do the sums, because I do not have a percentage. So it would be about 30 per cent—just under 30 per cent if my quick arithmetic is right.

With regard to the chair's question, we are committed to continuing to improve the child protection system with regard to data. As I have said, there are 150 measures annually and 80 of these measures are reported quarterly. We are able to do this via our Integrated Client Management System, which is a state-wide web based information system that is aimed at providing a clear, real-time picture of each child known to Child Safety Services.

I should say that the main purpose of ICMS is not coming up with data, the main purpose of ICMS is having an individual's file, for want of a better word, that any child safety officer can from time to time access. So, for example, if they were in Cairns and they shifted down to Beenleigh then a child safety officer would have the full history of that individual in the ICMS. That is the purpose of ICMS. But a subset to that is that we are able to do some state-wide data and regional data in that regard.

CHAIR: To follow on from that—and I realise the member for Redlands has a question as well, as I said—I still have a little bit of a difficulty with trends and how data is extracted because although they are shown as trending down based on that data, the actual total intakes has trended radically upward. To me it does not fit.

Mr REEVES: The intakes have increased and I believe people are more confident in reporting, but I have got to be honest, some of what people report is not a Child Safety matter. Obviously it is a Child Safety matter because it comes to Child Safety and they have to make a judgment on that. That is not just a Queensland problem. I think New South Wales are up to 300,000 intakes, for example. It is about better informing those who are referring or those who are intaking about what is a matter of concern.

Mr DOWLING: I am sort of following on that same vein. You said how the duration is longer. One presumes that that is because you are getting them younger and you have them for a period of time. It suggests that they do not actually break the cycle, they do not get out of that system of Child Services. You also highlighted the data and the 150 measures as alluded to by the chair. Everything that you have said suggests it is getting worse. We have lots of measures and lots of milestones and indicators after the event. My question is what is happening upfront to try to break that cycle, to try to stop that trend? Because clearly it is unacceptable that you and your department need to have 150 measures. It is needless that you and your department have to have such a growing expanding thing by your own admission. What are we doing upfront to break that cycle?

Mr REEVES: Obviously the member has not heard about the Helping Out Families initiatives that I have spoken about today. The Helping Out Families pilot that we are piloting at the Gold Coast and Logan, \$55 million over four years in the pilot area, is dedicated to reducing abuse and neglect and creating a healthy and safer home. It is about giving that early intervention so that those families do not come into the child protection system. It is about a coordinated approach. They have worked extensively with the families. That is one part of our early intervention. We have a range of other early intervention services, early years centres and a range of other services. But it is focusing on trying to ascertain, by having this initiative, whether it does make a difference on that trend increasing. Unfortunately at the moment the trend is increasing and that is why we have made the commitment to early intervention. On top of that, across the whole of the state we have the Indigenous family support services, which is about early intervention prior to those children or young people having to be removed. That is what we are focused on. I agree with you, but unfortunately your side of the House voted against it when it came to parliament.

Mr DOWLING: If I may follow up, with all of the programs that you are currently running, and I accept there are lots of programs, they are clearly not working. When are you going to review those and re-evaluate them? You have talked about this new program this afternoon. What about those existing programs that have clearly not worked? How do we know they have not worked? What are the assessment tools? When will you be reviewing the entire process?

Mr REEVES: You obviously did not hear my opening remarks. This Helping Out Families initiative was last year's budget initiative. It started in October and January this year. I have already stated that we are evaluating that service as we speak and we will ascertain whether we believe this pilot Helping Out Families initiative can be put out to the rest of the state. But we want to make sure that it does work. We want to make sure that it does make a difference.

Mr DOWLING: With all due respect, I referred to all of the other programs your government has had in place over many years that clearly have not reversed the trend. The trend is getting worse, which has forced your hand again to introduce this new program and, yes, there will be some time that it will need to bed down and some evaluation. I am talking about all of the existing programs, because you have not cut any programs, you have not reduced or re-evaluated or gone through and had some housekeeping, for want of a better expression.

Mr REEVES: That is not correct. I mentioned today that we reallocated money out of Recognised Entity and put it into early Indigenous family support. We have the RE service which has been evaluated and it is very successful. It is not just in Queensland. It is not in isolation. If you look at all the trends, worldwide trends, it is increasing. Let us be realistic here. Let us say that, yes, over 8,000 children and young people are not living home today because they are within the child protection system. That is over 8,000 children and young people who are protected because they are in the child protection system. If they were living at home they would have been abused, harmed or neglected. While you can do the negative because that is what you are good at, the positive is that because of the hard work of child safety staff, because of the investment in placement services and the great work foster and kinship carers do throughout the state there are over 8,000 children and young people tonight in Queensland who are safe. Quite frankly, we are getting to places that we never used to get to in the past. We are protecting more children than ever. It is the government's, the opposition's and the whole community's responsibility to protect children. But ultimately, if families are not going to protect their children, if families are going to harm or abuse their children, then government's and Child Safety Services will step in. I must say that I would much prefer over 8,000 children being protected tonight than 8,000 children in their homes being harmed, abused and neglected.

Mr DOWLING: That was never in question, Minister, never in question at all.

CHAIR: Member for Redlands, the minister has given the answer. Perhaps we can do without the editorial. I call the member for Capalaba.

Mr CHO: Minister, page 3-4 of the SDS refers to the Evolve program. Can you explain to the committee what sort of services are provided in this program?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. Just before answering that, in 2004-05 there was 10.5 per cent of children exiting care—that is those that been in care for five years or more. In 2009-10 it was 13.8 per cent of children in care. That is listed on our website. That answers the question that was asked. The Evolve service is a targeted program of behaviour support services to children on child protection orders who have severe and complex behavioural problems. As I mentioned before, some of these children and young people have been through the most undesirable circumstances imaginable and they are very complex. This service provides intensive support to this particularly vulnerable cohort of young people. As announced in last year's budget, an increased recurrent funding of \$2 million comes on line this financial year to expand the Evolve program specifically in Toowoomba and the south-west region.

I welcome the opportunity to talk about the Bligh government's commitment to ensuring the safety and protection of Queensland's most vulnerable children and young people. Evolve Interagency Services enhances our ability to help children who have complex needs by providing them with expert therapy and behaviour support. Evolve is a new program jointly delivered by Child Safety Services, Disability Services in the Department of Communities, Queensland Health and the Department of Education and Training. The Bligh government has allocated \$25.761 million to Disability Services and Queensland Health to deliver Evolve Clinical Services to help children overcome the trauma of child abuse. Child Safety Services plays a key role in the Evolve program, including taking responsibility for local referral and review panels and steering committees. The Evolve program has been very effective in improving outcomes for children and young people. Children's lives have been enhanced through increased placement stability, improved behaviour and increased engagement in education programs and social activity. Carers say they are better able to manage children's behaviour through the additional support provided by Evolve staff. The increased program coverage with the additional investment of \$2 million for 2011-12 will provide support to foster and residential carers, family members and other professionals to enhance their capacity to care for and support children with complex needs. This includes greater capacity for Evolve to service children residing in the Goodna Therapeutic Residential Service.

The collaborative relationships developed with our partner agencies and their commitment to increasing direct services to deliver capacity through the Evolve program is resulting in better outcomes for children with complex needs. Child Safety Services recognise that families need more help to care for a child with a disability within the family home. Evolve Behaviour Support Services' early intervention

provides medium-term, early intervention therapeutic support services for children with a disability who have complex behaviours and therapeutic support needs and are at risk of being relinquished by their families to the child protection system. The establishment of this new service stream is a positive step to help keep families together and reduce the number of children with a disability relinquished to the child protection system. Evolve targets children and young people with complex behaviours to provide a tailored response to any behavioural issues. This dedicated service continues to deliver great results by working intensely with children and young people. The Bligh government is committed to providing new and enhanced responses for vulnerable people and young people in care and the Evolve service continues to provide intensive support where it is needed most.

Mr CHOI: Who activates the Evolve program, is it the child safety officer or the foster parents?

Mr REEVES: The child safety officers work with the stakeholders, Disabilities, Education and Health, and they have a meeting where they discuss the cases and which ones should be in the Evolve program. Obviously the child safety officer would work with the foster carer when we are talking about children with foster-carers and take on board what their concerns are and then a decision is made whether the Evolve services they believe would make a difference. Also a number of the young people in the Evolve services may be in group homes and are not just with carers.

Mr CHOI: Is there any age limitation on that service being provided?

Mr REEVES: I will just check on that. No, there is no age limitation.

Mr O'BRIEN: I want to change the line of questioning for a moment, if I can, please. Late last year we changed the adoption legislation in Queensland. I just want to know what sort of analysis the department has done on how the implementation of the new legislation has gone?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. I think as a parliament, not just as a government, we can be very proud of the changes that were made to the adoption legislation. Unfortunately it was not totally supported by those opposite. Without doubt it was one of my proudest moments in parliament. It fundamentally has changed people's lives. I have had people come up to me who I have known for years in my community who I didn't know were adopted—and neither should I have. They have spoken to me about how much this has changed their life. They now had information about their life that they never had before and it had fundamentally changed their outlook.

As you would be well aware, the act commenced on 1 February last year as the result of an exhaustive consultation process. Some would say it was well overdue after 40 years and the 2008 *Future adoption laws for Queensland—policy paper*. The reforms in the act enabled people who were previously subject to information objections to receive identifying information for the very first time. The Adoption Bill allowed the Expression of Interest Register to remain open so that people interested in adoption can express interest at any time, rather than only during limited periods as has been the previous practice. Eligibility to adopt a child was widened beyond just married couples to include couples either married or in de facto relationships of at least two years duration.

Between 1 February 2010 and 31 May 2011, 1,395 applications for adoption information were received by Adoption Services Queensland. Services have been provided to 1,496 individuals for the same period. Those services have included releasing information to people who were previously restricted from receiving information, providing mediation services, supporting contact between individuals and families, providing critical medical information and working with the adoptive families to meet the needs of children in relation to their adoption and family history. As you would appreciate, when people first receive identifying information about an adopted family member, member of their birth family or if they themselves were adopted, it can be a highly emotional experience.

Adoption has ongoing and significant repercussions in people's lives. In recognition of this, the Bligh government established the Post Adoption Service Queensland. The Benevolent Society, the highly regarded non-government organisation service provider, was awarded the tender for this comprehensive service and began providing services in January 2010, just before the commencement of the act. The Post Adoption Service Queensland provides a range of face-to-face and telephone counselling services, therapeutic groups and intermediary services to individuals affected by adoption. The Post Adoption Service also runs regular adoption connection meetings in regional and metropolitan areas, and provides information, resources and training for other professionals in the community. Since the commencement of the act on 1 February 2010, they have received over 3,700 inquiries and are currently providing services to 300 regular clients. In delivering the reforms to adoption legislation, the Bligh government has balanced the right for information with the right for privacy, to ensure fair and accountable adoption practices in Queensland.

Mr O'BRIEN: One of the more controversial issues that comes up around adoption is the time that it takes from when the application is received to information being provided to the adoption applicant. Can you explain what process is undertaken to provide information to applicants?

Mr REEVES: The reality is most of the time factor issues are a result of dealings with other countries, where the overwhelming majority of adopted children come from. We need to make sure that we have a balance there. We have to thoroughly check and recheck applications. This is a really serious

step in people's lives and it is a really serious step in the life of the child, particularly one who comes from overseas. We need to show our international adoption partners that we have gone through those rigorous steps. I can understand that people do get frustrated with the length of time that takes, but ultimately most of that is out of our control. We have to wait for a child to be put up for adoption by one of our international partners. Ultimately, it is not just a matter of picking the person next in the queue and saying, 'You're right for this child'. We have to balance that child's needs before anything else. Ostensibly, that is why it takes a considerable amount of time.

I must say that the directors-general and I have the absolute pleasure of attending international adoption days. In fact, there is one coming up shortly. It is humbling in the extreme to attend those events. What really impresses me about the people I have met who have adopted internationally is that they go beyond the call of duty to ensure that the culture of their child is very much a part of their day-to-day life. It blew me away to see that firsthand and to meet those people. They do an unbelievable amount of work to ensure their children who have come from a different country keep their culture and are involved in that culture within that community, as well as being a part of Australia.

Ms DAVIS: Minister, why does the child safety system, under your watch, allow children as young as 12 or 13 to self-place while in care?

Mr REEVES: Many children and young people, but particularly young people, whether or not they are in the care of Child Safety Services, are complex. Adolescents can go through very turbulent periods. There are concerns that young people in care may leave their department approved placement and self-place in high-risk environments, just as there are many young people who are not in the care of Child Safety Services who leave their families and self-place. It is very complex. It is very difficult, but we always make sure that young people are as safe as humanly possible.

When a young person self-places and refuses to return to his or her approved place, we work with that young person to try to identify the reasons for the self-placement and to see whether there are other placements that we can put that young person in. If a child or young person is missing or their whereabouts is unknown, obviously we report it to the police and we work with the police extensively on the issue. Just like families that are not part of the child safety system, it is a difficult period but we work as extensively as we can to make sure that the child or young person, in particular, is as safe as can be.

Ms DAVIS: As the mother of three children, I appreciate that there are some difficult adolescents. What is of interest to me is that 12- and 13-year-olds are children. They are making decisions about where they live, whether or not it is appropriate, when they are in the care of the department. I am not sure that they have the wherewithal to do that. More importantly, if you are a foster carer you are obliged to obtain a blue card. What processes are in place within the department, whether it is through the commissioner for children or someone else, to screen individuals or cohabitants with whom those young people may live? What are you doing to ensure that checks are made that the people with whom these young and vulnerable children are living are appropriate carers?

Mr REEVES: Where possible, Child Safety Services is in regular contact with these young people to ensure their safety and wellbeing. We continue to negotiate with the young people for a more suitable placement or supported independent living arrangements if we are concerned about the placement. A jointly formulated safety plan and contact arrangements between the child safety officer and the young person will also be developed. Actions to monitor the immediate and ongoing safety of the young person is likely to include contact visits by the child safety officer or the child safety support officer, and the use of community agencies and services and safety resources. Child safety officers will link self-placing young people with other services in the community such as youth services, to ensure that the young person is supported. Child safety officers will continue to emphasise to the young person that the placement he or she has selected is not an approved placement and that they may be placing themselves at risk.

We have established therapeutic residential services to provide safe places and support for young people in case they are experiencing physical, psychological and emotional trauma. These services are not intended to physically detain young people, but rather to provide them with a safe, therapeutic and secure environment and deliver intensive care to young people with extreme and complex needs. These services also work closely with Evolve Interagency Services, which we spoke about before. Obviously, under the Community Visitor Program, the community visitor also will make contact with that young person.

However, I am not going to say it is easy, because it is not. But what is the alternative? The alternative is that we lock that young person up and say, 'You must stay in that position.' We used to have a system like that and we had a Forde inquiry about it. We cannot lock young people into circumstances that they do not want to be in, for whatever reason. Child Safety Services has the same powers as any parent to keep a child in place. Like you, I am a parent of three children. They are not yet teenagers and I am not looking forward to my three girls becoming teenagers. As a parent, I have the same power that Child Safety Services has. If one of my children—and I hope it is never the case—wants to move out of home and into a place that I regard as unsafe, I would do whatever I can to work with my daughter to show her why it is not a safe place. Ultimately, as parent, I have the same powers as Child Safety Services.

Ms DAVIS: Unless I missed it in your answer, no formal screening is done of the individuals who the child self-places with?

Mr REEVES: Obviously, if a child self-places and that person or persons want to become carers, we would go through that process. However, let us be realistic here: in the circumstances you are talking about, whether we would get all the information about that person would be questionable. The child safety officers will work with those young persons to try to get them into a safe place. Ultimately, the police can remove that young person if we believe there is a risk of a crime being committed against that young person. However, if they go back there, it will just be a merry-go-round of picking them up and taking them back. We have to provide the support and services to try to place that young person in a safe place. I am not going to sit here today and say it is easy. Anyone who says it is easy needs to put a policy on the table, because I would like to see it.

Ms DAVIS: I have not suggested at all that it is easy. All I am asking is, if a child self-places in a home, it appears to me that whilst the department liaises with the child there is no liaison with the individual or individuals that the child is staying with.

Mr REEVES: I did not say that.

Ms DAVIS: Can you tell me briefly—in fact, you can tell me yes or no and we can move on to the next question—is there screening done of the individuals with whom a child self-places whilst they are in the department's care? If it is overnight, I understand that that is difficult. However, if the child is staying with an individual or individuals over an extended period, does the department insist that those people are checked, whether it is a police check, getting a blue card or whatever screening needs to be done to ensure that that child is in safe circumstances?

Mr REEVES: The department can do a child protection history check. Obviously, we would advise the police if there was a concern in that regard. Ultimately, if it is not an approved placement, the key would be for Child Safety Services to work with the young person concerned, to try to convince that young person that they are in an unsafe place and there are better options, which obviously would not be just going back to where they have run away from. Initially, you would try that, but ultimately Child Safety Services would look at other options that may be available for that young person. You can remove that young person and put them back in a placement, but ultimately it is just like if a young child of yours or mine did the same thing.

Ms DAVIS: So what success have you had in taking them out of these unsafe circumstances?

Mr REEVES: Obviously that is looked at on a case-by-case basis. I do not have a statistic in that regard about success—

Ms DAVIS: It is either successful or it is not. I am not asking for a statistic. Do most of them come back to a safe place?

Mr REEVES: I do not have that information. I am not going to get Child Safety Services to go through 8,000 files to find out about individual cases—

Ms DAVIS: There are not 8,000 children who are self-placing.

CHAIR: Member for Aspley, would you please allow the minister to finish before you make your comments?

Mr REEVES: Ultimately, if one does not agree with the system as we speak, one should come up with an alternative policy. I am still waiting for the opposition to come up with an alternative policy. They did have a discussion paper some 14 months ago. But, wacky do, it has gone from the computer. We have had three different Child Safety shadow spokespersons in a period of seven months. There was a discussion paper, and we were trying to get a policy. Now we do not have a discussion paper. It has gone—gone from the computer, gone into the ether, just like the last two Child Safety shadow spokespeople obviously. It is all very well to criticise the work that Child Safety Services is doing—it is all right to have an alternative—but put an alternative on the table. We are still waiting for an alternative.

Mr DOWLING: The role of estimates, with all due respect, Mr Chair, is to exercise the budget process and to interrogate you and your position, not to put our own position. The minister clearly does not fully understand the process.

CHAIR: Member for Redlands, I am fully aware of the budget process. The question was asked by your own—

Mr DOWLING: I call on the chair perhaps to advise the minister.

CHAIR: I beg your pardon?

Mr DOWLING: I would ask the chair: are you going to advise the minister?

CHAIR: Member for Redlands, please do not interrupt. The question was asked by your spokesman. It was answered by the minister. It was not asked in terms of appropriation incidentally; it was asked in relation to a process. The minister answered that question. If the member for Aspley has anything further she wishes to ask it is open for her to ask it.

Ms DAVIS: I will not ask any more questions on that particular matter.

CHAIR: The member for Cook has a question he would like to put to the minister.

Mr O'BRIEN: There has been a lot of talk today about the department dealing with children in families where things have gone wrong. I would like to know what the department is doing to try to stop things getting to that stage. What is the department doing to assist vulnerable children and families through early intervention strategies? Can you tell us what you are doing in that regard?

Mr REEVES: Early intervention and prevention is one of our major focuses within the whole Department of Communities. As I have previously stated, the Bligh government allocated \$55 million over four years to implement the new early intervention and prevention initiative to help families. This is on top of the other early intervention that we have within the whole Department of Communities such as referral for active intervention, targeted family support, neighbourhood centres, youth support coordinators, the south-west youth mentoring, Indigenous family support and family intervention services. That is just within the Department of Communities let alone what we do in Health and Education, such as the early years centres. Ultimately, the rollout of the kindy program is an early intervention and prevention program. It is secondary in nature in that it is a program related to education, but it will have a major impact on developing families.

Under the Helping Out Families initiative, families are assessed and referred to support services to help deal with issues including parenting, alcohol abuse and budgeting. Another significant investment includes the 49 family intervention services provided by our non-government partners. Family intervention services provide practical, commonsense assistance to families who require ongoing case management support by Child Safety Services. This include the re-unification of children from out-of-home care, placements where Child Safety Services has decided it is safe to do so and is in the best interests of the child. Obviously, the key there is that the trigger that brought them into the child protection system is no longer present. That is why we have the family intervention services. This year we have allocated \$20.6 million in that regard.

The Queensland government is committed to refining programs and responses to intervention and prevention to reduce the risk of children entering the child protection system. Our community organisations and carers help ensure that neglected children and young people receive the necessities such as food, shelter and education opportunities for the future. Additionally, \$10.1 million has been allocated to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family functions program to provide family support to some of the most vulnerable children. As we said, early intervention has the best effect.

I notice that both the member for Redlands and the member for Aspley are very quick to criticise, but they have a lack of policy themselves. They sit on the sidelines with one meaningful contribution to Child Safety policy. I should actually say that they did have a policy once. Their last substantiated policy—

CHAIR: Perhaps, Minister, we could have the question answered. If you have finished answering the question, we can move on.

Mr REEVES: I was just going to talk about the policy in the 2006 election campaign.

CHAIR: No. I am sorry, Minister, but that is not relevant to the Appropriation Bill. I will pull you up there. The member for Capalaba has a question as does the member for Beaudesert.

Mr CHOI: In terms of children transitioning from care, can you elaborate a little bit more about what initiatives are available to assist them?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. Improving the outcomes of young people transitioning from care to adulthood and independence is very important. The transition into adulthood is, therefore, a critical development event, and they need support and services to guide them through this phase of life. The Bligh government has funded a transition from care service for 90 young people in the Beenleigh, Logan and Goodna areas. This has been implemented over the last two years through joint funding of \$500,000 a year from the Department of Communities and the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation. In addition, the Youth Housing and Reintegration Service and after care services have a strong focus on engaging young people in education, training and employment activities. This ensures young people transition to greater independence and stability.

Young people moving out of care and into independent living also now have access to essential information thanks to the new resources satchels funded by the Queensland government. The satchels contain the Go Your Own Way kit. It was launched in November last year by the CREATE Foundation and the department. It provides a range of resources to prepare young people for life as independent adults. All young people in the transition-from-care age group are able to access financial support to assist them in the plan for the future. This funding can cover the cost of things such as setting up for independent living, driving lessons, essential skills such as learning how to cook, and training or employment related activities. Throughout the past year I have been heartened by the consistent improvements in this key area of helping young people become independent as they move from adolescence into adulthood with the necessary means to lead balanced and fulfilling lives.

Mr McLINDON: Minister, I understand that children in foster care who receive medication are fairly compensated by the government. I talk, for example, of those receiving medication for ADHD such as Ritalin. There was controversy earlier on in the year when the peak body for child protection in Queensland, PeakCare, expressed concern about the high level of ADHD medication prescribed to kids under government guardianship. I am also aware that the Youth Affairs Network is part of a coalition that is preparing a complaint to the Australian Human Rights Commission. What mechanisms are in place to ensure that children are not prescribed these drugs, particularly at a young age such as the vulnerable under-six-year-olds because obviously their neurological systems are still developing? What mechanisms are in place to ensure that these children are not given these prescription drugs against the manufacturer's advice?

Mr REEVES: Any decision to prescribe medication to a child is made by a health professional, not a Child Safety officer. Child Safety officers, directors-general and I are not the health experts. We go to the appropriate health experts and professionals. Any prescription for a child or a young person is written by them, not by a Child Safety officer.

Mr McLINDON: I understand that was your answer publicly some time ago. The number of children receiving Ritalin—and consider the side effects—because they supposedly suffer from ADHA is estimated to be 170. If that doctor, in their best knowledge, is prescribing that medication against the manufacturer's advice, surely the department would have some measure in place that provides a boundary for those doctors who may prescribe it against the advice of the manufacturer.

Mr REEVES: I repeat that Child Safety Services always relies on the expertise of the medical and mental health professionals in diagnosing and treating a child in out-of-home care. They are the professionals. We let the professionals make the judgement. It is not up to politicians or non-medical people to make a judgement on a child whom they may or may not have seen.

Mr McLINDON: So if there were a case in which a one-year-old was actually taking this medication against the strong advice of the manufacturer, would that be the department's fault for not doing anything or not having a mechanism in place, or would that be the GP's fault for prescribing it?

Mr REEVES: Child Safety Services has practice guidelines so that diagnosis, treatment and review of medication are undertaken by specialist health professionals who oversee any impact of possible side effects of the medication. In reality, if someone is concerned about the prescription that a doctor has written for a child, we would be happy to work with that person—if it were a foster-carer, for example—to gain a second opinion. Ultimately, decisions in a medical sense about children and young people in care are made by the medical profession. If someone has a concern about a doctor prescribing a drug for a person, then the appropriate body to deal with that is the doctors' registration board. They are the ones who look at the medical practices of a doctor.

CHAIR: Moving away from that for a moment, I asked you a question earlier about data. You mentioned a trend not only in Queensland but also right across Australia and probably internationally. The SDS at page 3-12 shows an increase in the number of intakes received. The difference between the estimated actual and the target estimated for 2011-12 is quite substantial; it is roughly 10,000. Can you outline some of the reasons for that increase?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. We have obviously increased the budget and during the year we recorded 11,000 more intakes. Up to March 2011 we recorded 108,916 intakes. By comparison, in 2005-06 the number was 62,496; that is just under double the number of that earlier year. An increase in the number of intakes is proof of a couple of things such as people having more confidence in the system and more confidence in coming forward for assistance. It is also partly due to Child Safety being funded to increase the number of front-line services. I have already announced the 21. This comes on top of the other additional services.

One of the big issues is the confidence that people have. As I said, I think New South Wales received over 300,000 intakes. Some of the reports to Child Safety are reports that, in a realistic sense, should not have been reported. However, it takes a considerable amount of work for Child Safety officers to deal with that. We look into every referral that is made. That does put pressure on the system.

I think we need to work harder with our referrers with regard to what they are referring and also with the community. Some referrals—not a large number but some—are paybacks on family law issues, for example. There will be accusations against a particular partner in that regard. That is just one example of the impact of the intake system. If it were just a Queensland issue, then I would say that we could easily tackle it. But in one sense we have been a victim of our own success in that Queenslanders now have confidence in the child protection system and so they are reporting in that regard and as a result, that has created that large intake.

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

Mr O'BRIEN: Minister, I noticed the member for Kallangur was recently collecting pyjamas. I do not know whether this is relevant or not. Can you tell me what the government does to support the Pyjama Foundation and how this benefits young people in care?

Mr REEVES: The Pyjama Foundation, which is an absolutely terrific—

Mr O'BRIEN: Sorry, Minister, but I understand that the member for Capalaba has done that as well.

Mr REEVES: Yes, I think I have seen a picture of the member for Capalaba in his pyjamas in the local paper. It was a sight to behold. I do not think we should table that, Chair. The Pyjama Foundation is a valued non-government partner which provides innovative reading and literacy programs for vulnerable children in care. The Love of Learning Program receives funds of \$235,805 per annum from the Queensland government. I should declare my interest in the Pyjama Foundation. My wife is a pyjama angel. She loves it and so do the children and young people she reads to. These funds are provided jointly by the Department of Communities, Child Safety Services and the Department of Education and Training.

The Pyjama Foundation recruits, trains and supports volunteers known as the pyjama angels who commit at least one hour per week to visiting children in care to read, play literacy games and puzzles, and assist with homework. The children are referred to the foundation by child safety service centres and all volunteers are required to have blue cards. The Pyjama Foundation operates all throughout Queensland. The Bligh government has a strong commitment to ensuring individual education needs of children in care are met. This includes money provided to the Department of Education and Training to provide education support plans. This allows for specific tutoring, additional teacher aide time and other educational materials.

Last year I announced Department of Communities one-off funding of \$21,000 to the Pyjama Foundation to develop and produce a personalised colouring-in book for children from three to 10 years entering foster care to help introduce them to their new home and the people with whom they will be living. It is a terrific book if you ever get to see it. Earlier this year I was pleased to join the Pyjama Foundation to provide an additional \$35,000 as a one-off grant to print general copies of this resource because it was so popular. It is a small gesture that the Queensland government can provide. It enables carers to bond with the children when they are first placed with them. Thanks to organisations such as the Pyjama Foundation, children and young people who have been abused and neglected are receiving the support they need and have a much brighter future.

The Pyjama Foundation performs a valuable contribution to the wellbeing of our most vulnerable children state-wide by helping to empower them to become happy, confident young people with a love of learning. The Bligh government is committed to working with our non-government partners to ensure that every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

CHAIR: I think the member for Cook has a follow-up question and then the member for Aspley has a question.

Mr O'BRIEN: It is actually a follow-up from a line of questioning I was pursuing earlier. I meant to ask this question but did not. Minister, can you please outline to the committee any Indigenous specific foster and kinship carer recruitment strategies that you have recently launched?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. It is appropriate that you mention it. I should have mentioned when I was talking about the pyjama angels that one of the people who has been heavily involved in the pyjama angels is Queensland Reds James Horville, the captain of the all-conquering Queensland Reds. So there is another example of sport and child safety mixing.

Another example was the recently launched Indigenous Family and Child Support Service Indigenous foster and kinship care campaign, which was launched at Suncorp Stadium. The Bligh government and Indigenous Family and Child Support Service have a shared focus. We are both committed to ensuring that all children and young people have access to a safe and supportive home. This campaign 'Keeping our mob together' is all about recruiting more Indigenous foster and kinship carers. As we know, foster and kinship carers are the backbone of the child protection system and we always need more carers. It is a sad fact that tonight more than 8,000 children and young people will not be spending the night at home. If they did they would be abused or neglected. That is where carers come in. They have opened their hearts and homes to care for the most vulnerable children and young people.

The Bligh government is proud to support a grassroots campaign like this one which, as I said, is called 'Keeping our mob together'. It provides necessary information about how to become a carer and what steps are needed to be taken to care for foster-children. It also includes a website, Facebook page, TV commercials, DVD and information pack for potential carers. I would like to thank Sam Thaiday and Jharal Yow Yeh for supporting this campaign and being part of the ads and being involved in the campaign. So once again this is another example of sport and child safety mixing together. I know that with their help they can boost the number of Indigenous carers. It is great to see high-profile sporting stars supporting such a worthy cause.

The Bligh government is a proud supporter of IFACSS. It is interesting that IFACSS is mainly Brisbane based. But we are going to have a look at the success of this program and see how effective it is and then look at rolling it out state-wide. They did some television ads during Friday night football

recently and they are linking it with other community events. I am going to keep a close eye on it and see whether it makes a difference in recruiting more Indigenous foster and kinship carers. We need more Indigenous foster and kinship carers. If it is successful, we will look at rolling it out throughout the state.

CHAIR: I call the member for Aspley.

Ms DAVIS: While we are on the issue of kinship carers, what are you doing to address the issues of payment to kinship carers?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. Foster and kinship carers are paid the same I believe. Foster and kinship carers are the unsung heroes. The Bligh government is committed to ensuring foster and kinship carers. The government invests significantly in our non-government partners to ensure Queensland's vulnerable children and young people are protected. We give them support including financial support.

Foster and kinship carers receive a fortnightly carer allowance of between \$421 and \$493 depending on the age of the child; a one-off establishment payment of \$454 when a child first enters care; a start-up allowance of \$91 when a child changes placement; and a regional and remote loading of 10 per cent for carers in remote locations. Also, there is a high-support needs allowance of \$148 to assist with costs that exceed the fortnightly carer allowance. We also offer training packages for the kinship carers. Many of our carers are supported by our NGO partners. The payments are the same for foster and kinship carers in that regard. I will be striving in the next year to try to increase the number of foster carers and kinship carers. Unfortunately, as we have seen by the figures today, the number of children and young people in care is increasing, and I look forward to getting support from both sides of the House in that regard.

Ms DAVIS: Again, my question is to the minister. You spoke earlier about a number of reports and that included the Munro report that is coming out of the UK. It does have recommendations and parallels to the Queensland system. What consideration has been given to the recommendations of this report and have you commissioned any similar work in Queensland?

Mr REEVES: Eileen Munro is a world leader in child protection advocacy. In October 2010 she released her first report into the child protection system into the United Kingdom. The report described the driving forces of the British child protection system. The second report was released in February this year and considered the child's journey through the child protection system. The final report outlined 15 recommendations to assist reforms. Each of those recommendations were closely considered by the Bligh government to ensure that, where appropriate, Queensland could learn from the findings to further improve and enhance our child protection system.

I am pleased to advise the committee that each of the 15 recommendations Queensland is already delivering comparably, while still taking into account some of the differences in the child protection systems—bearing in mind that the UK is a locally based system. There was no uniformity. In fact, they had a computer database that they closed down because they believe it got out of control. In 2004 child protection in Queensland underwent significant reform. I am comfortable that we are leading the way in that regard.

It is interesting when you want to compare reports and compare jurisdictions. I mentioned before that we do not have a policy from the opposition, and I am concerned that we have to look across the border to see what the LNP are doing. The New South Wales minister for child safety has said, as quoted in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'Children should not be taken from their families simply because they live in terrible circumstances.' I think it is very important that if children are living in terrible circumstances we need to protect them. That is why I am confident that tonight over 8,000 children and young people are protected and they are away from harm and neglect. If the opposition eventually gets a policy, please do not replicate the New South Wales policy because our children are too important to live in terrible circumstances.

Ms DAVIS: You were speaking earlier about the length of time children are spending in care and that that is increasing. What are you doing in order to end up with successful reunification with families? If they are coming into care earlier, the longer they are away from their family they are not connecting with their family. So the concern is that they will stay in care for much longer than they need to. Can you please tell me what is happening in that regard?

Mr REEVES: It is obviously very important, where possible, to reunify children and young people with their families. Unfortunately, not in all cases is that able to happen. Obviously through the process families have contact with their children and young people. Family intervention services, which I mentioned before, help assist when the reunification occurs. What we do not want is to reunify and then the same triggers occur and there is a breakdown. In some cases, unfortunately, that happens. But we work extensively with the families, firstly, to try to see whether they are capable of being reunified and, secondly, if that is the decision that the professionals make then we will work with them in ensuring that enough support is wrapped around them in that regard. We will continue to work with them to try to get as many families to reunify as possible, but we will not do it at the expense of putting children at risk or letting children live in terrible circumstances as obviously the New South Wales LNP policy does.

Ms DAVIS: Minister, at what point do departmental officers determine that it is not worthy of trying to reunify because, due to whatever circumstance, the parents are not capable of taking them back. How long does the department work at trying to assist in reunification or is there a time period where it is just not going to work so we need to ensure that these children are in a safe environment for the long term rather than just working on something that is not going to have a positive outcome for the children?

Mr REEVES: Obviously in the first instance we have to protect the children and put them in the right placement that will protect them. I do not think it helps anybody by putting a time frame on it. For example, a young mother might have a child when she is 18 or 19. At that time she could be heavily involved in drugs. We have all heard of those stories. We have all seen or had experience of people in that situation. In five years time that person may be off drugs, for example, and during that time has had a connection with the child but has not looked after the child.

If we had a time frame of, say, two years then that person could not reunify. It is a case-by-case situation. It cannot be a black-and-white situation whereby we say that after three years, two years or 18 months the case is closed and that child will remain forever in care. It has to be done case by case, individual by individual. I have confidence in the abilities of child safety professionals to make the right judgements in that regard.

CHAIR: We are now just short of seven o'clock—we have about 30 seconds left—so I think it is appropriate to begin our questioning in relation to sport. That would end the questioning in relation to child safety. We will now commence the questioning in relation to sport. I call the member for Gympie.

Mr GIBSON: My first question is to the director-general. Local sporting clubs may be forced to pass on higher power bills to their membership or cut back on their services or facilities under the federal Labor government's proposed carbon tax. Can you advise if the department has undertaken any modelling on the impacts of a carbon tax on Queensland sporting clubs and, if so, what that modelling shows?

Ms Apelt: The department has not done extensive modelling on the impacts that you refer to. At this stage, clearly, it would be premature for us to be able to do that.

Mr REEVES: Can I add—

Mr GIBSON: I have another question for the director-general, if I can.

Mr REEVES: I was going to add to that.

Mr GIBSON: The question was not to you, Minister.

Mr O'BRIEN: Oh, if you are going to be rude!

CHAIR: Member for Cook, I have warned you previously today. Would you kindly cease your interjections. Member for Gympie, you are here by leave of the committee. If you persist in that sort of attitude, that leave will be withdrawn. You will ask your question of that person. You will not argue with anyone at the table. Thank you. I would also draw your attention, as I did this morning in relation to questions on the carbon tax, to the fact that we are dealing with the Appropriation Bill for 2011-12 and any carbon tax will not commence until 1 July 2012, which is outside the area of this Appropriation Bill. The director-general has answered your first question. I call the member for Gympie. You have another question.

Mr GIBSON: Director-General, you indicated that you have not done extensive modelling. Does that indicate that you have done some preliminary modelling?

Ms Apelt: It indicates that we have obviously studied the announcements that have been made to date in preparation for any modelling that we may need to do in the future.

Mr GIBSON: Of your study of the announcements, are you aware if there is any compensation available to local Queensland sporting clubs on the impact of the proposed carbon tax?

Ms Apelt: We have actually observed very closely what the cost-of-living compensation arrangements have been for lower income people in particular. We have not done an analysis in relation to sporting clubs.

Mr GIBSON: Is the department looking forward to any compensation that it may offer to sporting clubs if the impacts of the carbon tax are such that they cause clubs to reduce their services or facilities?

Ms Apelt: As I mentioned earlier, it is premature to be making any of those program decisions at this point in time.

Mr GIBSON: With regard to the funding provided for the local sport and recreation coordinators, I note there have been some ministerial statements which detail their responsibilities across the state. Can you advise the committee what key performance indicators will be used to ensure these coordinators are achieving their stated goal of helping grassroots organisations develop and prosper and how those KPIs will be reported to the department?

Ms Apelt: I expect that the member is referring to the local jobs plan?

Mr GIBSON: The local sport and recreation coordinators.

Ms Apelt: Thank you for the question. On 24 February 2010, as you mentioned, there was an announcement of a new suite of sport and recreation funding programs which have been designed to create jobs, help build infrastructure and deliver initiatives to encourage Queenslanders to participate more in sport and recreation activities. One of these funding programs was the Local Sport and Recreation Jobs Plan. It is designed as a three-year program providing \$38 million to employ local sport and recreation coordinators. The Local Sport and Recreation Jobs Plan provides funding towards the employment costs of a local sport and recreation coordinator, who will provide advice and support to organisations on matters such as fundraising, volunteer support, promotional activities and sponsorship at the grassroots level. To date, there are 111 local sport and recreation coordinator positions supporting 736 local sport and recreation organisations across the state for a total of approximately \$17.3 million over the next three years.

Obviously, with any of our grants to organisations we have funding agreements, and those funding agreements spell out very clearly what the performance indicators will be. One of the primary performance indicators to measure the performance of these coordinators will be the number of hours of support that they provide to their local organisations to achieve these objectives.

Mr GIBSON: So how will those performance indicators be reported to the department?

Ms Apelt: We have a very comprehensive reporting program with our funded organisations. In this case we collect that data on a six-monthly basis. We use that data to monitor the effectiveness of the funding agreements. We also have local staff. We are a highly regionalised department with officers located across the whole of the state who liaise very closely with organisations that are funded by the department. So while we receive the six-monthly report on data, in between times we have ongoing liaison to ensure that there is good surveillance of the work of these coordinators.

Mr GIBSON: Just so the committee is clear, then, you are indicating that the performance indicators will be provided by the sporting clubs, not the coordinators themselves? Is that how the information will be provided back to the department?

Ms Apelt: The information is provided by the clubs that have a funding agreement that auspice the employment of coordinators, and that is provided to the department in the usual way that we collect data from our funded organisations.

Mr GIBSON: Is there any restriction on the clubs not using the coordinators to fill out the reporting requirements and provide that information back? Could we in effect have a situation where these coordinators, in doing the work that they do for the clubs, are asked by the club, 'Hey, the department wants you to fill out your key performance indicators. Can you fill out that report and we will send it in?'

Ms Apelt: I am not quite sure of your question. Are you suggesting that if there was fraudulent behaviour—

Mr GIBSON: What I am concerned about is: what oversight do we have of the key performance indicators? Is it going to be a matter of the coordinator indicating, 'I have done 150 hours,' and putting that through, or are the clubs required to do that separately?

Ms Apelt: As I mentioned earlier, funding agreements are obviously a very serious situation. We have a very rigorous process with the selection of organisations to make sure that those organisations have the capacity to manage such a significant program. With that, we operate in good faith that they have the expertise, the honesty and also the capability of monitoring the work of the coordinators. But in addition to that, I must emphasise how significant the role of the regional staff is in actually monitoring funded bodies on a very close basis. You will note from the overall appropriation for the Department of Communities that about three-quarters of the overall appropriation is provided by way of funding agreements to third-party organisations, not-for-profit organisations. So we are, in terms of the state government, a centre of expertise in being able to monitor and manage funding agreements with organisations.

Mr GIBSON: You indicated in an earlier answer that one of the key performance indicators—or 'primary' I think was your word—would be the number of hours that they spent. What other key performance indicators is the department measuring their performance against?

Ms Apelt: Ultimately, the real performance of the coordinators is actually the way that the clubs are able to be sustainable and able to carry out the work that communities expect them to do in the interests of community cohesion and making sport available to communities. That is something that is easily monitored. Once again, I reiterate the role of our regional staff to keep a very close surveillance on the efficacy of funded organisations.

Mr REEVES: If I could assist the member and add: bear in mind that you will have one auspice body that is employing the person but you will have anywhere from five to eight clubs—volunteer clubs—involved with that person. In my experience with sport, if that person is not doing the job that he has been assigned to, you will hear the volunteers from those clubs telling the auspice body and telling the department that they are not performing the way we had thought. One of the big keys is to help increase volunteers.

Mr GIBSON: Minister, just on that, then, based on what the director-general has indicated, that the reporting will be six-monthly, do you give a commitment that that information will be available to the Queensland public?

Mr REEVES: Obviously we do not make available every single service agreement with organisations.

Mr GIBSON: Not the service agreement, the reporting.

Mr REEVES: Do not put words in the mouth of the director-general. I think she said that each position would report via their service agreement on a six-monthly basis. At the moment that will be 111, soon to be 150.

I will quite happily at any time get up and talk about the work that the local sport and recreation coordinators are doing. They are already doing successful jobs and already achieving. When I talk to the clubs from the cape all the way down to Coolangatta, they are excited about this and those that have employed them are really impressed about this service. I should add to make it clear that this is a three-year program. In the selling of this we said that at about the 18-month to two-year period is when the clubs involved should look at whether it has been successful and how they are going to fund it for the future. I have been clear about that and the department has been clear about that. It is not an ongoing program after three years. I believe given my experience in the sporting industry that ultimately this is going to be successful, and bear in mind that a lot of councils have taken these up as well.

Mr GIBSON: Minister, you indicated that you are happy to get up and talk about it and I do not doubt that at all. What I am seeking is that the taxpayers of Queensland can have some confidence in the key performance indicators. Will you ensure that those six-monthly reports as they reveal those key performance indicators will show the people of Queensland that this program is in fact working?

Mr REEVES: I am very happy to put this in our annual report as normal and very happy to talk to anybody about any individual programs that are in place. I am happy to put it in our annual report and statements.

Mr GIBSON: So the commitment you are providing to the committee and to the parliament is that, despite the fact that the reporting is six monthly, you will advise us on an annual basis?

Mr REEVES: That is reasonable. When you think about all of the different service agreements across Queensland, what you are saying is that you want a copy of every key performance indicator that appears—

Mr GIBSON: No, Minister. What I am saying is that the people of Queensland want to know if this money is being spent properly.

Mr REEVES: I am quite happy to report it in the annual report like we do for many measures, but let us just say that what you are saying is for every service agreement—

Mr GIBSON: No, Minister.

CHAIR: Member for Gympie, would you let the minister answer the question before you interrupt him.

Mr GIBSON: With respect, Chair, the minister is putting words in my mouth.

CHAIR: No. With respect, you have interrupted the minister on a number of occasions—

Mr GIBSON: Only when he has—

CHAIR:—and I have reminded you and I would ask the member to respect the ruling that is made. When the minister finishes the answer, you can ask a supplementary question. There are other people who have questions to ask also, so I would ask you to allow the minister to finish.

Mr REEVES: If we took what you are saying to the nth degree, you would want to be provided with every service agreement across the whole government. They would have to triple the Table Office. However, all of these agreements are subject to audit purposes. I am happy to say that I am going into your patch in the next week or so to be at the launch of one of the programs with regard to Gympie Junior Rugby League and Gympie State High. I am sure that they will do a great job, as will Mary Valley Connect Inc.

Mr GIBSON: Hopefully this is one of those meetings in my patch where people actually turn up.

CHAIR: I call the member for Capalaba.

Mr CHOI: Minister, I refer to investment in the local job plans funding program. Can you provide an update on this program and the benefits to sporting clubs from this program?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. I have to say that I am absolutely amazed in that the member opposite is the first person I have ever heard express negativity about the Local Sport and Recreation Jobs Plan. I am just flabbergasted, to tell you the truth. I thank the member for the question and acknowledge that he understands, unlike others, the benefit to sport and recreation clubs of having someone to assist them to build capacity with their clubs and the flow-on

effects it will have in the area. Last year I created the Local Sport and Recreation Jobs Plan. This program was designed as a three-year program providing organisations to employ local sports and recreation coordinators. Each coordinator would look after about five to eight local sports and recreation organisations and would provide advice and support to those organisations on matters such as fundraising, volunteer support, promotional activities and sponsorship at the grassroots level.

To date I have approved funding for 111 local sport and recreation coordinators supporting some 736 local sport and recreation organisations across the state. That is 736 local sports and recreation organisations across the state that are getting a benefit, and the overwhelming majority of them are volunteers. Funding approved so far is approximately \$17.3 million over the next three years. This is an average of about \$52,000 per year for the three years for each local sports and recreation coordinator. I can tell the member for Redlands that there are four local sports and recreation jobs coordinators looking after 25 clubs and associations. They include organisations such as Redlands Hockey, Redlands Touch, Redlands Gymnastics, Redlands Athletics, Redlands Lawn Tennis, Redlands Netball and Sports Karate Australia. The coordinators will work out of the Redland City Council, Redlands Sporting Club and the Victoria Point Sharks. The Cleveland District State High School will look after a range of clubs, both on the mainland and on the islands.

These coordinators will help sports such as rugby league, netball, rugby union, softball, triathlon, bowls, swimming, cricket, AFL and football. Coordinators will assist these clubs with strategies to manage their volunteers, increase membership and help in their governance and applications for grants. I congratulate these organisations for being part of the program and I, like the member for Capalaba, look forward to watching sport and recreation in the Redlands grow into the future. As the member knows only too well, the Redlands is a very strong sporting area and because of the employment of these four coordinators this is an opportunity for sport and recreation in that area to become even stronger. The department is supporting local sports and recreation coordinators through workshops at a regional level. A new round of the local sports jobs plan opened on 8 June and applications are currently being received by the department. I urge all sports and recreation clubs to get involved.

CHAIR: I call the member for Beaudesert.

Mr McLINDON: Minister, at the outset I want to thank you and the department for the good work you have done on the trail bike facility out Wyaralong way. That is something that the community is looking forward to. Minister, I was at a fundraiser for Nat Cole who is representing Australia at the Olympics next year for volleyball. Speaking to the Olympians, they were very concerned that there was no state funding available for them in terms of their training. In fact, some Olympians are actually training in South Australia because they get state funding, and these are people who live in Queensland. Can you outline in this budget, particularly with the Olympics coming up next year, what funding sources are available and to what extent are our Olympians living in Queensland funded to make sure that they are successful?

Mr REEVES: No problems at all. I am astounded by that. The Queensland Academy of Sport is second to none in Australia and Queensland is the only state—the only state—that gives \$5,600 per Queensland athlete who gets selected in Commonwealth or Olympic teams. I think the closest is about \$5,000 or something in the Northern Territory, but they only have one or two athletes. We are head and shoulders above the rest. I missed the sport you spoke about.

Mr McLINDON: It was volleyball.

Mr REEVES: You will probably find that the national body of volleyball choose a place to have their elite squad and that is probably where you said. I think it is more than likely that that would occur. We fund sport and recreation more than any other state in the country. Our budget for the Queensland Academy of Sport is \$11.9 million. The Queensland Academy of Sport looks after 70 volleyballers. In fact, by the look of it, volleyball has the highest number of athletes, even ahead of swimming. Volleyball has 70 athletes and the next is swimming at 41.

Mr McLINDON: So is there any category that is not getting funding at all in terms of the Olympics?

Mr REEVES: There is about \$150,000 to support volleyball athletes. If you go to the Queensland Academy of Sport, the facilities are second to none under the leadership of Bennett King and the advisory board with Tracey Stockwell as chair. They do a terrific job. Our target is usually about 25 per cent of the Australian team and we do extremely well year in, year out. I am happy to look at the individual and talk to the Queensland Academy of Sport about the individual, but in volleyball, as I said, there are 70 athletes. I mentioned the \$5,600 for Commonwealth, Paralympic and Olympic athletes and this year for the first time ever we gave Special Olympians the same amount of money—\$5,600—for them to go to the Special Olympics that have just recently been completed.

Mr McLINDON: Thanks.

CHAIR: Minister, we have dealt with all aspects of it, but bearing in mind that the total allocation invested in sport and recreation is \$155 million, can you outline the overall social benefits that that investment brings for Queenslanders and possibly also mention any health benefits?

Mr REEVES: There is no doubt that one of sports biggest drivers is convincing people to get active and get healthy. That is why a lot of our programs are at the grassroots level to encourage people to take up sport and recreation across-the-board, both organised sport and active recreation. Sport is also an economic driver, and that is why we invested in stadiums. Every year, just on the week-to-week games, stadiums have about a \$308 million economic impact to Queensland. That does not include one-off games like the Bledisloe Cup or grand finals, as we have had a few of them in Queensland recently if you have not realised. The Bligh government is committed to making Queenslanders Australia's healthiest people and we know that the key to good health and wellbeing is getting out there and getting active, and that is why we invest more funding in sport and recreation than any other state.

As a government we want to make sure that the investment delivers real benefits to Queenslanders, and sport and recreation funding programs assist in that way. It is also important to note that all Queensland communities benefit in some way from accessing sport and recreation funding. For example, in your own electorate via funding for the Active Inclusion Program Sailability Capricornia has conducted education and training for new volunteers, increased participation and purchased equipment to support sailing for people with a disability in Yeppoon. Through the same program Central Queensland Golf conducted a golf program for Aboriginal youth to support golf at multiple locations in Central Queensland and Yeppoon Swimming Club conducted coaching education and training to support swimming. All of these things have social benefits which flow through the entire community. We also had a focus of ensuring that when disaster hit we were there to make sure that sport and recreation clubs could get back on their feet as quickly as possible.

CHAIR: I call the member for Cook.

Mr O'BRIEN: Minister, just with regard to funding to support greater participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in sport, can you tell me if there are any specific initiatives for Cape York and the Torres Strait to assist increased participation?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. In answering I would firstly say that we have a strong commitment to improving the wellbeing of our Indigenous people, and sport is a major component of that. As the member for Cook knows only too well, sport and recreation activities are an important part of the fabric of Indigenous communities, providing a meaningful diversion for children and youth at risk and teaching important life skills that can be used in a variety of circumstances. I know that the honourable member makes his own personal commitment being a rugby league referee now that he has left the rugby union, often refereeing in his local competition at Indigenous carnivals.

In answering the member's question, I say that in 2010 I announced a commitment through the Indigenous sports grants of \$1.3 million over three years for AFL, hockey and rugby league to improve program delivery, education and access for remote communities in Cape York and the Torres Strait. I should say that with the hockey program—and I think it is Julie McNeil who runs the hockey program—it was great that the *Courier-Mail* picked it up on Saturday and had an article about it. It is unique in that it mixes sport and art. It gets the hockey sticks and encourages young women to get involved by decorating the hockey sticks in Indigenous art. Obviously, it gets them involved in getting active and getting involved in the sport of hockey. The rugby league program and the AFL program is going well. On top of that is our support under the PCYC program and the program with Tagai State College.

Member for Beaudesert, I might have been overzealous. It was \$5,400 per athlete, not \$5,600 per athlete. I thought I would correct the record, but it is still head and shoulders above any other state.

Mr O'BRIEN: I note the recent AFL game in Cairns. I was not able to attend that, unfortunately; I was at my son's soccer. I know you are going to spend some money improving the facilities there. Can the minister provide a further outline of the benefit of bringing a premiership game to Cairns? How you are going to improve facilities at Cazaly's?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. North Queenslanders love their sport. There is no doubt about that. They get behind their side, whether it is the Cairns basketball team, the Taipans, or whether it is the Townsville based North Queensland Cowboys. But I must say that last Saturday was a great day for North Queensland, in particular Cairns, with the first AFL premiership match ever held in Cairns. In fact, it was the first one played out of Brisbane in Queensland. It was obvious that the Gold Coast Suns took a liking to North Queensland. They particularly like their Gold Coast stadium, Metricon, but they really took a liking to North Queensland's Cazaly's Stadium because of their hard-fought 85 to 70 win over Richmond. In talking to a couple of players today, they could not believe the atmosphere and they loved it.

This will be the first of three matches the Gold Coast Suns and the Richmond Tigers will play next year and the year after. That has come about as a result of the backing by Events Queensland through the Queensland government, because these premiership matches draw AFL fans. I was there on the Friday evening and spoke to many of the Richmond fans who had travelled from Melbourne. And why would you not want to travel from Melbourne to Cairns in winter and see it firsthand? It was a great boost for the economy. There were a lot of 'No vacancy' signs up. It has a major impact for the people of Cairns. About 1,500 people travelled from Melbourne when you consider that a lot of them would have

come up early or stayed later, it was the end of the Victorian school holidays. Andrew Demetriou spent two weeks in your electorate at Port Douglas and then came to the game. We got some good money out of Andrew. He was a great supporter of the Cairns project.

This week we started the lights upgrade, which will ensure that these matches can be played at night but also international cricket will be able to be broadcast from Cazaly's. The total price is about \$2.75 million for the lights. The Bligh government has committed \$2 million to it and the Cairns Regional Council has committed \$750,000. There was an event last week—a week-long program—the North Queensland Secondary Schools Cup, a No Boundaries partnership program visited by the Suns at Bamaga, Richmond had an open training session, free AFL superclinics and the North East Australian Football League as a curtain-raiser. It was just a terrific event for Cairns. On top of Challenge Cairns, it is just a real boost. It just shows you what sport and events can do for a city like Cairns.

Mr GIBSON: I have a question to the director-general on the stadium theme. In light of the longstanding development approval condition on Suncorp Stadium being limited to 24 events attracting over 25,000 people each year, can you advise the committee on what date was the department made aware of the impending problem with regard to Suncorp and the Broncos?

Mr REEVES: Point of order. That is not the responsibility of the director-general; it is a responsibility of me as minister, or Kevin Yearbury, the CEO of Stadiums Queensland. I am quite happy—

Mr GIBSON: I am happy to rephrase the question.

Mr REEVES: I am quite happy to answer the question.

Mr GIBSON: No, I will rephrase the question to Mr Kevin Yearbury. Can you advise, based on the advice the minister has provided, on what date you informed the department of the upcoming problem?

Mr Yearbury: I do not have the specific date in my head for that.

Mr GIBSON: Can you give the committee an indication? Was it recent? In the last week? Two weeks? Was it a month ago? Two months ago?

Mr Yearbury: No, it was within the last month.

Mr GIBSON: It was within the last month?

Mr Yearbury: Correct.

Mr GIBSON: It is a great problem to have, may I say, because it is a reflection of great events that we have seen with Queensland sporting teams. What monitoring does Stadiums Queensland have in place to ensure that this development approval condition is met or at least when it is identified as a problem it is brought to the government's attention as quickly as possible?

Mr Yearbury: The development condition that applies to Suncorp Stadium is monitored every year by both the operator of Suncorp Stadium and ourselves. For the last eight years there has not been a problem in terms of that cap. The interesting thing that occurred this year—and you have alluded to it—is that the stadium has been host to two very successful teams, the Queensland Reds and the Brisbane Roar. If you analyse the figures, last year there were 39 events at the stadium and this year you would have expected there to be 39 regular events at the stadium. Of course, what has happened is that we now have the prospect of having 42 events. Those three events effectively can be accounted for by the Roar having a grand final, the Queensland Reds having a semifinal and then a grand final. So they are the additional three events.

What that has meant is that we are now in a situation where that cap could potentially be reached within the final series of the NRL, which we are hoping we will see the Broncos play, if not the North Queensland Cowboys as well. So the response to your question is, yes, it is monitored and when that became apparent to us the advice was provided to the minister and an application made to the Minister for State Development, who is the assessment manager for the development approval seeking that cap to be removed or addressed in accordance with his powers under the Sustainable Planning Act.

Mr GIBSON: With what you have just indicated to the committee—and as I said earlier it is a great problem to have—in light of the fact that there is a fair bit of discussion about Brisbane being the base of a second NRL team and that team being based at Suncorp Stadium, how do these current restrictions impact on the ability of any second NRL team to be able to play, assuming that they would bring crowds of greater than 25,000?

Mr Yearbury: When that cap was first introduced there was, of course, a situation where the Reds were not playing at Suncorp Stadium and the Roar were not playing at Suncorp Stadium. So the question that you put to me is, of course, a continuation of a situation where the stadium has become increasingly popular and is attracting potential hirers, should they get a licence in the NRL. So the answer to your question is that, while that cap was put in place at a certain time when the stadium had a set of hirers who were essentially the Broncos, perhaps one or two Wallabies games and a State of Origin, we are now in a situation where there are a number of hirers plus the potential for future hirers if there was a further licence given. So the consequence of that is that there could be in the future a continuation of a situation where that cap comes under threat.

Mr REEVES: Can I add that it just shows you an example that if you have budget allocations to build stadiums, build it and they will come. Metricon Stadium—

Mr GIBSON: Thank you, Minister. Can I just follow up—

Mr REEVES: No, I am further adding to the answer. This is budget estimates and I am talking about—

Mr GIBSON: And I have a further question for Mr Yearbury, if I can.

Mr REEVES: And I am entitled to add to the response.

Mr GIBSON: In light of the time—

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The member has a further question.

Mr GIBSON: Thank you. From what you have indicated, because obviously with the NRL season being the way it is they are at the greatest risk being at the end of the year of missing out of games if the cap was to remain in place, is Stadiums Queensland looking at some form of management model where perhaps lots are drawn—there are a variety of ways of doing it—or indicating to various codes that they are limited in their number of games that they may have over 25,000 spectators coming to it?

Mr Yearbury: Stadiums Queensland has not put any mechanism of that type in place with potential hirers. What it has done is applied to the minister who issued the development approval seeking that that condition be amended or varied to take account of the situation we are in.

Mr GIBSON: In seeking a variation, have you put forward a new number? Instead of 24 events have you indicated—

Mr Yearbury: No, the application we have lodged with the minister seeks a removal of the cap.

Mr GIBSON: A removal of the cap in total?

Mr Yearbury: Yes.

Mr GIBSON: Just continuing on with regard to stadiums and the NRL, there has been a fair bit of discussion with regard to another licence for Queensland. One of those places that is vying is Rockhampton. Can you advise the committee what work you have undertaken at the direction of the government in preparing for a possible new stadium at Rockhampton?

Mr Yearbury: Stadiums Queensland has undertaken no work at this stage in relation to preparing for a stadium in Rockhampton. It has had no request from the government to do work of that nature at this point and, therefore, it would not do work of that nature unless it was specifically requested to do so.

CHAIR: Following on from your answer, Mr Yearbury, I will declare that I am actually a member of this CQNRL bid. So I will declare my interest before asking the question. Perhaps the minister could outline the circumstances in relation to that? As I understand it, it has not yet got to the stage where Stadiums Queensland would be involved.

Mr REEVES: No. Obviously, the NRL has not even called for submissions yet. The Bligh government has given a commitment that if the CQ bid was successful, just like we have done for the Suns, just like we have done for the Titans and just like we have stadiums throughout, we will give a commitment that we will build a stadium. When we talk about the budget, it is interesting in the budget reply from the opposition they quite clearly said they do not support stadiums. We have heard examples today, even though the member for Gympie refuses to ask me a question, of what happens with stadiums. Stadiums are not just—

Mr GIBSON: I am happy to ask you a question but in light of the time—

Mr REEVES: I am answering the question. We have given the commitment, because we know what benefit stadiums give for jobs. For a normal Broncos home game, 1,200 people are employed just in the stadium let alone all the impact. Build it and they will come, unlike the opposition who refuse to.

Mr GIBSON: It is a great slogan.

CHAIR: It was from Kevin's Costner's movie.

Mr GIBSON: And I am happy to direct this to the minister. Minister, with recent media reports indicating that Queensland stadium costs are significantly higher for our own local teams than what their rival teams face in stadium costs in New South Wales and Victoria, I ask: do you believe that the current model with Stadiums Queensland is competitive in the Australian national stadiums market?

Mr REEVES: It is very important to get the record straight here. Obviously, the only research the opposition do is newspapers. The reality is that they are not judging apples with apples. They are judging on hearsay or speculation.

Mr GIBSON: It is a simple question, Minister. Do you believe it is competitive?

Mr REEVES: You asked the question; I answer the question and that is what I am doing. We ensure under Stadiums Queensland's structure that we have a commercial model. It is important budget wise that we build the stadiums. The Bligh government has built many stadiums, as I have stated

before. It is important that the operation of the stadium is paid by the hirers. Many of them are commercial businesses. Just like we would not subsidise a ticket to the cinema, we should not subsidise tickets to the football for the benefit of commercial companies that are having the franchises.

We are talking about franchises that pay. On any given day a rugby league game at Suncorp Stadium would have players on the field who get paid collectively in the vicinity of about \$6 million to \$7 million. So using your analogy, you would say that we should—

Mr GIBSON: It is not an analogy, Minister, it is a question. Do you believe it is competitive in the national stadium market?

CHAIR: Member for Gympie, let the minister finish, please. We are running out of time.

Mr REEVES: Using your analogy, you would say that we should subsidise the operation.

Mr GIBSON: No, minister.

Mr REEVES: Let me finish.

Mr GIBSON: Point of order, Mr Chair. The minister is verballing and he is placing words in my mouth that I have not said.

CHAIR: One, there is no point of order and, two, the minister is endeavouring to answer the question. Would you please allow him to answer the question.

Mr REEVES: To finish the point, there was an article two days ago in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and the example of the club they used was the Bulldogs. Can I tell you that at least for two years, maybe even three years, the Bulldogs have brought one of their home games to Suncorp Stadium. So if it was that bad—I don't think that is correct. They have been overwhelming supporters of Suncorp Stadium's model. Because what our model does is also allows them a lot more income streams such as corporate boxes, signage, pouring rights and a range of things. So the example that was used in the *Sydney Morning Herald* was false.

Mr GIBSON: The question was about competitiveness. You still haven't answered it.

Mr REEVES: We are very competitive. We are very competitive on the field, as you can see by our successes, and we are very competitive off the field, as you can see in the success of our stadiums.

CHAIR: The time allocated for consideration of the estimates for the organisational units of the portfolio of the Minister for Child Safety and Sport has expired. I thank you, Minister, and your departmental officers for your attendance. I do apologise; I said to your director-general this morning that I hoped that her injured arm was getting better, but I did not realise that she was going to be sitting at the table for the same length of time as the committee where others seemed to get a break. I would like to thank all of your ministerial staff, particularly your director-general, and also our own staff, Hansard, the committee's secretariat and all of our chamber staff who, in their normal fashion, have done a very, very good job.

Mr REEVES: On that note, can I thank the committee for their questions and their performance on the committee. Can I thank all the parliamentary staff, particularly the great people from Hansard who make words look good. I particularly want to thank the departmental staff, both the Child Safety staff beforehand and the Sport staff. I particularly thank the DG. She deserves a medal, with a broken wing and all. This is her second day of estimates and it has been a long day. I thank all my personal staff for all their great work in preparing for estimates and I thank the chair for your great performance.

CHAIR: That completes the committee's hearing for the examination of the budget estimates within the Department of Communities. Once again I extend my thanks. I thank my fellow committee members and I declare this public hearing closed.

Committee adjourned at 7.48 pm