

WEDNESDAY, 6 JULY 2005

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B—CHILD SAFETY

Estimates Committee B Members

Mrs JM Attwood (Chair)
Mr MW Choi
Miss PK Croft
Mrs LA Cunningham
Mr VG Johnson
Mrs RN Menkens
Ms BG Stone

In Attendance

Hon. M F Reynolds, Minister for Child Safety
Department of Child Safety
Dr R Sullivan, Director-General
Ms N Deeth, Deputy Director-General
Mr M Walsh, Executive Director, Policy and Program Division
Ms D Mulkerin, Executive Director, Child Safety Services Division
Mr G Carlyon, Policy Adviser, Office of the Minister for Child Safety

Committee commenced at 8.28 am

CHAIR: I declare the meeting of Estimates Committee B open. The committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in Appropriation Bill 2005 for the areas allocated to the committee. The organisational units will be examined in the following order: the Department of Child Safety, the Department of State Development and Innovation, the Queensland Police Service and the Department of Corrective Services. The committee will suspend proceedings for the following breaks: from 10.30 am to 10.45 am, 12.15 pm to 1.15 pm and 2.45 pm to 3 pm.

I welcome the Minister for Child Safety, public officials and members of the public who are in attendance today. I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time limit for questions is one minute and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A 15-second warning will be given at the expiration of these time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. The standing orders require that at least half the time is to be allotted to non-government questions and the other half to government questions.

In the event that those attending today are not aware, I should point out that the 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 in accordance with standing order 206, strangers—that is, the public—may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the pleasure of the committee. In relation to media coverage of the hearing, the committee has resolved that television, film coverage and photography be allowed during the chair's opening statements and the introductory statements of each minister. I also ask that mobile telephones and pagers be switched off.

I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio relating to the Minister for Child Safety open for examination. The question before the chair is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

The minister may now make a brief introductory statement, which may be limited to five minutes under the standing orders.

Mr REYNOLDS: Thank you, Chairperson, and members of the committee. In 2005-06 the Department of Child Safety will forge ahead with the vital work of reforming Queensland's child protection system thanks to an outstanding budget. Child Safety has an operating budget of \$394 million and capital funds of \$58 million to continue the implementation of the recommendations of

the CMC's report released in January last year. I am proud to say that this is the largest investment in child protection ever made by a Queensland government and it highlights our commitment to reform. The unprecedented 45 per cent increase in our operating budget represents an extra \$123 million and recognises the importance of providing quality, accountable child focused services for vulnerable children. The amount of \$28 million supports our dedicated professional staff and provides for 151 new permanent positions.

An additional \$25 million capital funding over two years, including \$19.2 million this financial year, will continue the major expansion of child safety officer accommodation statewide. This massive project will deliver 12 new safety service centres, two zonal offices, new service delivery hubs at Normanton and Weipa, among 38 projects delivering safe and secure workplaces in total.

One of our most exciting initiatives this financial year will be a new multi-agency therapeutic services model that will greatly benefit hundreds of children and young people in care across the state. I am pleased to be able to announce today the whole-of-government model for enhancing the mental health and behaviour of children and young people with complex needs. This will be a \$22.6 million program. The magnitude of this recurrent funding highlights our strong commitment to this very important program.

Another significant initiative by the department is the multi-systemic therapy research project that begins at Inala in Brisbane this month. This \$1.8 million project is a first of its kind in Australia. It is specifically designed for vulnerable children and young people with severe mental health problems. The department has allocated \$375,000 specifically to attract and recruit more carers through a targeted advertising campaign to be launched in the coming months. Funding for foster-carers goes up 37 per cent, from \$35 million last year to \$48 million this financial year. The department will continue to provide ongoing training and will give our carers the very best support.

We are addressing areas of industrial concern, and I am working closely with the unions to resolve outstanding issues. I want to assure members of the committee that my department is continually working to drive down case loads. While 15 cases per child safety officer, as suggested by the CMC, was an indicative guideline, it is a useful guide for resource planning. Our staff and the children they help care for cannot be reduced to mere numbers or that guide. I am determined to make sure that each child gets the attention they individually need, and case loads will be determined by taking into account the complexity of each individual case. Our aim is to achieve reasonable workloads for all staff. The CMC acknowledged in its report that it had difficulty attempting to calculate workloads and directed that the new department explore empirically rigorous means of calculating workloads. I provided details of how this is occurring in response to a question on notice asked by the committee.

I am very proud of the tremendous efforts of all staff in that they are addressing the workload situations. We meet the ongoing challenges and drive cultural change through training, new systems and strategies. Implementation of structured decision making, our new practice manuals, our new permanent positions and training are already making a big difference. We know this takes time though. To date we have acquitted 45 of the 110 recommendations, and the other 65 reforms are well on track. It is important to remember that the reform project is a dynamic document and we have brought forward some areas of reform and held back others as required for effective implementation. Target dates were set early in 2004 and, as is common with any major reform program, there needs to be scope to adapt to changing circumstances. For example, while the design of the new care directory is complete and the directory is anticipated by November this year, its use as part of the integrated client management system is contingent on finalising the overall system, and that is expected next year.

Productive, enduring partnerships are central to the department's service delivery model. I have been very proud of the work that we have been able to do with our non-government partners. That is an ongoing partnership and a very, very good one. We have allocated \$9.4 million to continue the development of new or enhanced Indigenous recognised agencies. These agencies provide great assistance to the department to deliver culturally appropriate services to Indigenous children and families. It is with a great deal of pleasure that I appear before you and answer any questions of the committee.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, I note your comments in your opening statement. I refer to page 1 of the MPS regarding the implementation of the CMC recommendations. Minister, last year I asked you a question on notice regarding the case load of child safety officers because it was a critical factor regarding the failure of the previous department. It was because of that the CMC made critical recommendations regarding case loads. Last year you told this committee that the case load was previously 32 and that it was being reduced to the level of 15. This year you have refused to reveal the case load, just like your predecessor did. Minister, isn't that because the case loads are actually increasing and you are refusing to be open and accountable about them?

Mr REYNOLDS: I thank the member for Burdekin for that question. I say emphatically that the answer is no. I have indicated on many, many public occasions that I, as a minister, will be open, accountable and responsive. The very fact of the matter is that there is no single case load measure available for child safety officers given the range of functions that child safety officers may perform.

These different functions include taking intake calls, investigating notifications, supporting children in care and providing intensive support to at-risk families. The number of children that child safety officers support will vary over time and will also vary according to a range of factors, such as the complexity of individual cases, the experience of staff and the skill sets of individual workers.

It would be very easy to set this down to a numerical figure. Do not get me wrong. The indicative case load in the report was 15 but the CMC and the blueprint said that it is very difficult and complex to set that workload factor. I think we have to realise that the department, which has been operating since September last year, is in its early days in that regard. But I can assure you that we know of the workloads that our workers are carrying whose case load consists of children in stable placements and we know the extra staff that we are putting on. We know that structured decision making is going to be a very important element in driving those case loads down. We have actually launched two case practice manuals and they are important as well. One of those I launched only a couple of months ago on the Gold Coast. That is pivotal in terms of bringing case loads down as well.

We need to understand that we have a three-year reform process in place here. In accounting to the CMC by January next year, I am hoping that with our system as it is we will be able to get some idea of case work and case loads in that respect and report back to the CMC by the end of this year. Given that the ICMS will not be in place until later in 2006, we are doing our very best in that regard.

I say very sincerely to you that it would be easy to say that it is a case load of 15 per person. Sometimes one worker can have a case load of eight and that is enough because they are very complex cases. Sometimes you could have a case load of, say, 25 and it would be equivalent to that case load of eight. We are still working on that because we do understand the CMC's request in that regard. As we are driving these reforms, we are actually reducing the workloads, but it takes a while for those reforms to grip.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, further to that previous question regarding your perhaps refusal or inability to reveal case loads, I note your answer to question on notice No. 14 in which you advise that you have implemented an internal planning tool called the workload analyser, the use of which is based on current workloads. Minister, in one answer you say that you cannot provide workloads but in answer to this question you say that you have a tool that makes projections based on them. Minister, you cannot really have it both ways. Which is it: do you have current workloads or not? And, if so, what are they?

Mr REYNOLDS: I thank the member for Burdekin for her question. A very superficial examination of this, as you wish to put to me this morning, is an easy way to try to say to the department's workers—I want to go back to my workers. The workers in this department and those who are sitting with me today want to be as open and responsive and as accountable as we can be. I am not answering this in a political way. You are asking whether I am trying to trick the committee or trying to be superficial in my answer. No, I am not.

The fact of the matter is that we have nearly 800 child safety officers out there. When we are working in these areas quite often we test or we pilot in one, two or three particular offices with regard to workloads. In the 46 child safety service centres that we have we are working with them in terms of the workloads. That does not mean that we are working with every child safety officer and examining every workload. When we get the integrated client management system up and running, yes, those individual workers will be able to input into the system their individual workloads, and we will be able to examine those and scrutinise those in a much better way.

I have established the workload management task force, which has the responsibility to review the workload analyser. That has commenced over the last month or so. The task force will also be establishing the currency of the information contained within it. So that is an exercise that it now needs to go and do. This review will take place upon the completion of the implementation of the department's new policies and procedures in line with the structured decision-making process and the recommendations of the blueprint. The structured decision-making process is critical in terms of driving those workloads down. It is actually a process within which each worker is able to more quickly and efficiently analyse the concerns that may be present in a particular case.

All of these things are interactive and they are interdependent. It is very difficult for us to go out there and examine the case loads manually—that is what the CMC actually acknowledged. So when we get our computer system up and running—and that is going to be within the time frame of the reform process of three years—we will be able to analyse that. I think it is unfair and impractical to be putting to us as a department now that we are not able to do this because we are not going to go out there and manually count every case load. I think surely you would be able to see that that is impractical. We are getting on with the reform, which is really the critical element.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, I refer to answer to question on notice No. 15 regarding case plans and to your answer which states—

The existing information systems do not currently have the capacity to generate detailed data plans in relation to the completion and review of case plans.

Minister, some 18 months after the CMC report you are telling this committee that you do not know if any case reviews were conducted within the legislatively required six months. Minister, if you do not know and your managers do not know, how many case officers do not know if they are breaking the law? Who is accountable for the operations of the department and how?

Mr REYNOLDS: First of all, I absolutely rebut the base of your question today. There are literally hundreds and hundreds of case plans that are being effected by the department on a daily basis. Indeed, I can say to you, Mrs Menkens, that if you ask me a question or write to me about a particular case, the case plan is given to me. I can read through and analyse the case plan that is given to my departmental staff as well.

What I would say to you in terms of case plans is that the case plans are part of the child safety officers' work. Through my director-general to my executive director of service delivery, who is with us today, we are training and professionally developing every child safety officer as they get on board in regard to their absolute commitment to have case plans and to have family group meetings with their clients. We are really about making sure that case planning is integral in regard to the case work that our child safety officers are doing.

The existing information systems—and I think you are aware of this, and I find it difficult to understand your question in that regard—do not currently have the capacity to generate detailed data reports in relation to the completion and review of case plans. But I can assure you as well that we have our zonal directors; we have our managers of each of those child safety service centres. The important thing is to say that the case plans have actually been placed in our case practice manuals. That is a very important part of training our people to be able to do the case plans.

The legislative reforms that I have in the House at the moment are very, very important in that regard as well. They are all integral in regard to ensuring that, as we go through the case planning and the family group meetings, staff from a particular date are asked to incorporate that into their case practice. The manuals and the work that they do and, most importantly, their training and professional development are taking them down that track all the time.

I think I can say very sincerely to you that we recognise that our ICMS is not on board yet, but an interim data recording system has been developed and that will commence operation this month. I think you have been told that. The system will be completed manually in each child safety service centre and used for operational management and collation of statewide reports. This system will record the number of case plans completed in each child safety service centre each month. That will be very important in terms of us being audited and giving our audit to the CMC next year.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, thank you for that. As a follow-on question, Minister, how many case plans have not been reviewed within the required six months?

Mr REYNOLDS: The first review in regard to our case plans is on 30 September this year. I would love you to write to me some time after that date. Then I will be able to give you that in a very concise, accurate way in regard to our case planning. But I do not want to see today some slur against the department or our individual staff, because I tell you what: they are working their butts off. They are absolutely working their butts off. I can say this to you: we are doing all we can humanly do to bring these reforms in.

The date for the review is established after considering the child's age and circumstances. A plan for a younger child must be reviewed more frequently than one for an older child. It is also based on the degree of risk, the nature of the arrangements under the plan and, if a child protection order is in place, the duration of the order.

As I have indicated to you, we are reviewing these plans, as has been set out in our legislation, and also in our manuals, to train our staff as well. Two of those manuals have been launched. There are another two or three to go. As we bring these in, we do our launch of our case practice manual. We then have to bring each of our staff up to strength in that regard. As I say, in terms of the reviews of the case plans, that is an essential element of it. That is to come. The first review of our case plans will be taking place on 30 September 2005.

Mrs MENKENS: Thank you, Minister. I refer to MPS 1 and to your statement that as at May 2005, 37 of the 110 recommendations of the CMC had been implemented. Minister, is it not true that at that date at least 82 recommendations were due for implementation? Minister, given that the Forster blueprint was endorsed by your cabinet, that your government went to the last election on a platform of implementing these recommendations and the Treasurer tells us that he has billions of dollars in surplus, when are these outstanding recommendations going to be implemented?

Mr REYNOLDS: Thank you very much for the question. The funny thing about this is that this is not about money. This is about time—time to do the work. I have a \$394 million budget. That is compared with the coalition government budget in the period 1996-1997-1998 of about \$65 million. It is not so long ago. It is not about money. This Department of Child Safety has been given an extraordinary amount of money, which we deserve, because the vulnerable children and young people of Queensland deserve nothing less than what they are getting through this budget.

Can I say to you that as of 2 June, 45 of the 110 recommendations had been completed and the rest are significantly advanced. Every time we see a rather loosely written press release by yourself in regard to the very savage criticism you make of my staff and the work that they are doing, can I say to you that they feel that. They really feel the criticism that you are making of their efforts. That is the criticism that is made right down at the child safety service centre level, because you cannot just be critical in a political way without understanding that these staff in the past—by governments of all political persuasions—I do not believe were given much support. We have changed that. The cultural change that we are making in that regard is about supporting our staff. We have introduced peer support into our staff. We are training and developing our staff like they have never been developed before.

Could I just remind you, in a very sincere way, that each time you are critical of our staff not performing, I think you have to really understand—and perhaps you would like to join me in going through some of these offices at one stage—how hard these people work.

I have no doubt that we have progressed these recommendations in a very timely way but, as I have said, it is a three-year progress report. Indicative times are given. Some of the questions you ask are really very liberal in regard to when things should start or finish. At some stages you have asked me questions about when something should finish when we are probably saying at that particular time the second phase or something is being finished and at the end of 2006 we will get the whole lot finished. You cannot have your cake and eat it as well.

I think it is important to say that we are working as fast as we humanly can to get this reform into top gear on all occasions. This is unprecedented. This level of reform in any child safety system in Australia is unprecedented. I believe that my staff are doing an absolutely wonderful job, and I do not believe that the criticism that is being meted out to them in the very difficult and complex work that they are doing is deserved in any way, shape or form.

Mrs MENKENS: Thank you, Minister. I could not agree more with how hard the staff are working. Minister, I refer to MPS 20 and dot point 9 regarding the development of a screening process for foster-carers and to the delay in the implementation of a carer directory. Minister, I am aware of a constituent who had her children taken into care, but in the weeks following their removal she was constantly rung by the department asking her to be a foster-parent. Minister, can you explain why, 18 months after the CMC report, this type of basic dysfunction does seem to still continue at times in the department?

Mr REYNOLDS: I would like to thank the member for Burdekin for the question. Have you actually made me aware of this particular case?

Mrs MENKENS: Not yet.

Mr REYNOLDS: One thing that I think you as the shadow minister have learned and one thing that I certainly have learned as the minister is that there are claims and counterclaims that are made in regard to the Department of Child Safety. I think all I can say to you is that if you would like to give me that particular case I would certainly be willing to take it up, but I do not think you can rest your case today based on one example you are giving me for the first time this morning.

In regard to the new screening and assessment model for foster-carers, can I say that we are very fair dinkum about ensuring that foster-carers are screened in the best possible way so that our very vulnerable children and young people are in the safest possible hands they could be. We are developing an evidence based screening assessment model that will support quality care to children and young people through strengthening the department's role in approving and reapproving carers. The assessment continues to address the factors that pertain to approval as described in our act. It provides comments as to whether the applicant is able to meet the standards of care in the statement of standards, whether the applicant is able to help in appropriate ways towards achieving plans for the child's protection, that the applicant does not pose a risk to the child's safety, that the applicant understands and is committed to the principles for administering the act, that the applicant understands the policies and procedures implemented by the department to ensure that the care meets the statement of standards, and that the applicant has completed any training reasonably required by the department to ensure that the applicant is able to properly provide care.

Most importantly, can I say that we have set up a complaints system second to none where a foster-carer or anyone who wants to complain about any aspect of the administration or the operation of the department can do that very easily. I think if you have people who have a concern like that they should be immediately contacting their manager or going through to our complaints unit. That is a very easy process. I think that I have actually given you, as a member of parliament, some easy steps in regard to showing people how to do that.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. That time slot for non-government members has expired. I call the member for Springwood.

Ms STONE: Good morning, Minister. I would just like to say that I heard the comment about the dollars in the budget and I think it will be a very good day when we can say that we have zero dollars for child safety because we know there is no child at risk. That would be a very good day.

Mr REYNOLDS: Yes.

Ms STONE: I would to start off by referring you to page 5 of the MPS. The CMC highlighted inefficiencies in the information systems of the previous department. How is the new department working to improve record keeping and information management?

Mr REYNOLDS: Thank you very much for that question. The department's information renewal initiative is a group of related projects that was funded as a direct result of the blueprint to overhaul information management and improve record keeping within the Department of Child Safety. This initiative comprises four projects—the ICMS project itself that I have talked about; a record keeping initiative; an enterprise architecture project; and also an executive management and reporting system.

Importantly, the ICMS project will provide more accessible, accurate and complete information on children and young people allowing more effective case management by departmental officers and enhancing information exchange between departments and also with the Commission for Children and Young People.

The first phase of the ICMS is the carer directory, which will provide a centralised directory of all carers and care services. Detailed design of the carer directory is complete. Design of the remaining components of the ICMS to support child safety work is also well advanced. This includes the ability to manage investigations, risk assessment, court processes and case work. The ICMS will provide tools to improve the efficiency of officers, allowing them to spend more time with clients and less time completing paperwork.

I anticipate that the directory of carers will be in place by November this year, with full functionality of the ICMS to be rolled out across the state over 2006 in accordance with the three-year implementation time frame for all the CMC recommendations. Work has also begun on the development of a new data warehouse that will collect data from various Child Safety systems including child protection, human resources and finance records as well as data from external systems.

In regard to record-keeping practices, significant attention has also been given to this area to enhance the quality of information being entered into corporate systems. All child safety service centres and zonal offices were visited between January and September 2004 to clear filing of back loads and attach loose documentation to client files. You will be astounded by these figures because I was: in total, contracted filing staff attached almost 300,000 documents to files. During this process new standardised files were created and more than 45,000 inactive client files were archived to secure off-site storage facilities. In addition, administrative and contract staff registered nearly 90,000 client files onto the departmental records system RecFind.

Over the next few months further enhancements to the department's record-keeping processes and systems will be undertaken. This is a very important element of our work. We are very cognisant of that, and we will continue to do the very best we can in that regard. In terms of the system itself, we are well on track for the 2006 deadline as indicated in the blueprint.

Miss CROFT: Good morning, Minister, and good morning to your ministerial and departmental staff that are here with us today. There have been recent media reports of industrial action in a number of child safety service centres. How is your department dealing with these claims, which also include allegations of bullying, inadequate staffing numbers and overwork?

Mr REYNOLDS: Thank you very much to the member for Broadwater for that question. When I took on this portfolio in February 2004, I rapidly became aware of the scale of the systemic reform required to build the new Department of Child Safety starting with the front line of service delivery. In the last year through extensive recruitment drives, the department fulfilled its commitment to employ 318 additional service delivery staff and support staff funded within the blueprint. In addition to the blueprint commitments, additional staff have been employed to deal with increased numbers of child protection notifications, and a business support officer was employed at each of the 43 operational child safety service centres. We have three more to go. In order to stabilise the Child Safety work force, child safety officers are now being permanently appointed in accordance with the 2005-06 blueprint allocations.

The department is also undertaking a significant body of work to develop and implement new policies, practices, tools and training to better equip our front-line child safety workers to do their very important work. Our managers and team leaders in child safety service centres are working closely with staff to provide them with the professional case supervision and supportive direction they need in order to effectively prioritise, allocate and manage their workloads. We are confident that, by providing better practice tools, improved support and training for our valued staff, they will be more satisfied and more efficient in undertaking their work, thus contributing positively to our capacity to deal with our workloads and to retain experienced officers.

At a number of child safety service centres, some staff members who are members of the QPSU have engaged in industrial action. In response, the management teams within these centres have worked closely with the senior executive team to take whatever steps are reasonably possible to address the concerns of these staff. Both the director-general and I met with the QPSU and advised the union in writing that the department is ready, willing and available to meet with the union and delegates to find solutions to staff concerns. In line with established industrial relations policy, the department has asked the union to cease industrial action to allow these discussions to occur in good faith.

The department has acted swiftly in any case where an allegation has been made. We have appointed an independent external investigator to thoroughly examine any allegations that are made in regard to bullying. I can assure the committee that the department takes those allegations very seriously and has committed to ensuring that all employees are provided with a safe and supportive workplace. I am pleased to say that permanent managers have now been appointed to 41 of the 43 operational child safety service centres including all centres that have been involved in industrial action. The new permanent managers will undergo a thorough induction and competency based training program during 2005-06, and I am confident that they will provide effective leadership and management of child safety service centres and provide ongoing stability to service delivery—what can only be described as being a very dynamic period of reform.

Mr CHOI: To the minister and his departmental staff, I thank you very much for coming here to answer our questions on your department. Can I start by concurring with the member for Springwood that it is a very sad indictment on our society today that we have to have a Department of Child Safety and to spend several hundred million dollars to look after the most vulnerable members of our society. To achieve the mission statement of your department—not to work yourself out of a job—as soon as possible is an important aim.

My question to you this morning, Minister, is that I notice there has been a significant increase in notifications and some of them require attention within 24 hours. Are you able to advise us whether those cases are being attended to in that time frame?

Mr REYNOLDS: Thank you very much to the member for Capalaba for that question. Queensland, like the rest of Australia, is experiencing an unprecedented increase in notifications of child abuse and neglect. One key reason for the increase in Queensland in recent years is the increased awareness and understanding in our communities of child abuse and neglect, and a greater willingness to report this. This is partially a result of the CMC inquiry, increased media awareness and the department's awareness-raising campaigns. Other contributing factors include the growth in our population and the economic and social pressures impacting on our families.

Between 2001-02 and 2003-04 there has been a 26.9 per cent increase in cases notified. This increase is expected to continue, with an estimated actual number of cases notified of 43,000 in 2004-05. We think that will jump to 47,000 in 2005-06. To address these increases, a number of reforms have been implemented and a range of additional resources are being assigned. This includes a significant increase in the number of front-line staff. Our CSOs, child safety officers, have increased numbers significantly through extensive recruitment drives and the department fulfilled, as I said, its commitment to bring on those 318 staff. We have employed an additional number of team leaders, senior practitioners and new court coordinators who are taking away some of the workload that rested with the CSOs.

In addition to these extra resources, other service delivery strategies being implemented include the development of our work flow management tools and systems to enable optimum performance within child safety service centres—that will bring the workload down; a more responsive induction training package to reduce delays in the provision of training and development to our CSOs; major customisation of work in the development of our structured decision-making tool, which we think will make a major difference in improving consistency in decision making and reduce the risk of subsequent harm to children and young people; and, as I have indicated today, the development and delivery of practice manuals to assist CSOs to undertake their work.

The department is also committed to working to address notifications within the required time frames. The shortest response time frame is allocated to those cases where the information indicates there is a very serious current or imminent danger to children. These types of cases demand a response within 24 hours. Where the department receives an urgent notification and is unable to commence an investigation in that time—for example, in a remote location—other government agencies and community partners are engaged to assess the immediate risk to the children concerned. We rely on Police, Health and Education service providers who are frequently engaged with us in that assessment process.

Departmental staff have been directed to ensure any children subject to the 24-hour response time frame are sighted within 24 hours to ensure their safety and the investigation has been commenced. The department remains absolutely committed to responding to notifications of child abuse and neglect within those appropriate time lines.

Ms STONE: There is no doubt that many foster-carers do a fantastic job, and this morning you touched on some of the departmental needs that your department meets with the foster-carers. I am just wondering how your department deals with any foster-carers that are not up to scratch.

Mr REYNOLDS: Thank you for that very important question. Can I pay tribute, first of all, to the dedicated and highly committed foster-carers throughout Queensland who work on a daily basis to meet the needs of children. I want to put on the record that the safety of children in the department's care is our highest priority. To highlight this commitment, all child protection notifications and initial

assessments involving carers are assigned that 24-hour response time frame. This illustrates the importance that my department places on the safety and wellbeing of children in care.

Departmental records indicate that between January 2004 and May 2005, 730 distinct children were subject to report of a matter of concern. Of these, 631 were responded to by way of a child protection notification and 99 were responded to by way of a caseworker response. Of the 730 children subject to a matter of concern, 265 were removed from their placement. The removal of these children highlights how seriously my department takes its responsibility. The children who were not removed from their placements were assessed as being safe. It is important to understand that matters of concern regarding carers can range from issues that are easily rectified through to serious matters. It is on these matters that the department takes urgent and decisive action.

Where serious matters have been raised regarding abuse of children by foster-carers, the department moves to remove all children at risk in their care, to assess the safety of the family's own children, to immediately cease the carer's active status to ensure no further placements with them and, finally, to deregister them. The Department of Child Safety has implemented a stringent and rigorous approach to reducing, preventing and responding to abuse in care which is based on a number of strategies. They include implementation of new foster care training policy, procedures and guidelines, and improved guidelines and procedures for the assessment and screening of foster-carers including continuous monitoring of any changes in the status of foster-carers' criminal histories. An audit of all notifications that involve foster-carers received from 1 July to 30 June 2004 is currently being completed. Legislative reforms include the regulation of all voluntary placements for children in the development of a regulatory system for all carers including foster-carers, kinship/relative carers and provisionally approved carers. The stage 3 amendment bill, as you know, was introduced on 24 May. That will be debated after parliament resumes.

I must re-emphasise that my department does not leave children in unsafe placements. If the department is made aware of a child at risk in foster care, it ensures that the assessment of these concerns is given the highest priority and is attended to as a matter of urgency. We understand that the very intrinsic concerns that were first of all brought to the public's attention through investigative journalism in 2003 were about abuse in care. Those recommendations of the CMC, subsequently placed in our blueprint, are extraordinarily important and we take this as a very, very serious part of our work.

Mr CHOI: Minister, some of the children and young people under the care of your department have very complex needs and requirements. What initiative has been implemented by your department to address those needs?

Mr REYNOLDS: Thank you very much to Mr Choi for that important question. I am pleased to advise that the Beattie government has committed \$22.6 million for mental health disability support and education support services to children in care in this budget. The CMC found that children subject to statutory intervention by the government were more likely than other children to suffer from emotional and behavioural problems. Research has found that if these problems are not addressed there is an increased risk of placement breakdown. This often further exacerbates poor behaviours associated with disruptions in schooling and lack of continuity of relationships with peers, carers and other significant people in the child or young person's life.

The blueprint highlighted that services should be progressively established to address the needs of 43 per cent of children in care requiring these interventions, with the most immediate priority being the 17 per cent in extreme and complex categories. We are working with Queensland Health, Education Queensland and Disability Services, and we are working collectively and collaboratively to deliver specialist support services exclusively for children in care to achieve these outcomes.

It is clear that effective responses to child protection issues as they interface with therapy require coordination and collaboration across sectors including government and non-government agencies. The \$22.6 million includes \$8.8 million for mental health therapeutic services through Queensland Health, the department and the non-government sector and \$3.7 million for specialist and disability assessment and behavioural support services for children with a disability through Disability Services Queensland for children in care with extreme and complex support needs. The remaining funds will provide therapeutic services to all children in care, with \$3 million through the Department of Child Safety and \$7.1 million to provide for the needs identified in the education support plans.

I am also pleased to inform the committee that the Department of Child Safety has been successful in obtaining permission to provide the first multisystemic therapy program in Australia for children who have been abused. That will be piloted and will commence in Inala. It will provide therapeutic services to 50 children a year for three years.

The service model is therapeutically intensive and emphasises service delivery in the child's surrounding which includes the provision of effective interventions for significant adults in the child's life including parents and the other caregivers. Communication with the organisers of that MST in the USA has resulted in an invitation to implement MST in Queensland as part of the MST child maltreatment

project. The project will be undertaken with MST Services Inc. in the Family Services Research Centre in the USA.

This is a very exciting project for the department. I look forward to reporting on the results in the near future. We know that mental health issues, disabilities and other concerns really impact on behaviour and quite often impact on whether abuse actually occurs. This is a fantastic program.

Miss CROFT: Minister, would you be able to explain what early intervention and prevention strategies are being put in place to work with families before children and young people are taken into the child protection system?

Mr REYNOLDS: I thank the member for Broadwater for that question. It is an opportunity for me to highlight the importance of prevention and early intervention strategies, not just by averting entry of children and young people into the protection system but to improve their health, wellbeing and future life chances as well. Effective prevention strategies minimise the instances and effects of abuse and neglect. The Queensland government is committed to its investment in prevention and early intervention services.

In line with the findings of the CMC inquiry, the Department of Communities has specific responsibility for child abuse prevention and early intervention services. My department is working closely in partnership with that department to ensure that there are strong connections between community based prevention and early intervention activities in the statutory child protection system.

The Department of Communities, in consultation with my department, this financial year will allocate \$8.5 million to prevention and early intervention services for vulnerable families and children at risk. These funds will supplement tens of millions of dollars of current funding, including funding by the Department of Child Safety, to a number of non-government organisations that provide therapeutic and family support services for children who have experienced sexual abuse and intervention and family reunification services that provide more generic counselling and support services. The Commonwealth government also has a critical involvement in prevention and early intervention.

In addition, the department operates a sexual abuse counselling service which provides counselling, consultation and training, resources and research in relation to child sexual abuse. Whole-of-government collaboration to provide prevention and early intervention services for vulnerable children and families is vital. For example, Queensland Health, through its child health services, provides education and support services and positive parenting programs to enable families to make informed decisions regarding health practices for their children and their parenting style.

Queensland Health also provides youth health nurses to state secondary schools. That is a great initiative of the Beattie government. They provide health consultations, health promotion and education to adolescents. This is a very important program.

CHAIR: The time for government questions has expired. I call the member for Burdekin.

Mrs MENKENS: Following on from that question, I refer to page 2 of the MPS and to your reference to the development of effective early intervention and prevention services to reduce the incidence of child harm. Could I ask that you inform the committee of the specific programs that are in place for this purpose? I know that referred to some of them.

Mr REYNOLDS: What page is that?

Mrs MENKENS: Page 2.

Mr REYNOLDS: On what page?

Mrs MENKENS: Page 2 of the MPS. This follows on from your previous answer. What funding is directed to those early intervention services?

Mr REYNOLDS: That is a good question and I am pleased to answer it, thank you very much. In line with the findings of the CMC inquiry the Department of Communities, as I have already indicated, is responsible for early intervention and prevention strategies. It is important to say, particularly in the area of Indigenous child safety concerns, that we have now identified about 90 positions in a new category of child safety support officer. Some 49 of those are Indigenous positions. In Indigenous communities those 49 CSSOs specifically have a role to play in terms of early intervention services. They work with families and understand that quite often it is not just about taking a child away from a family. It is important to provide that early intervention service.

A number of other departments—I have mentioned Health, Education and Disability Services—make significant contributions. The Department of Housing, in partnership with my department, makes a significant contribution to prevention and early intervention through provision of crisis accommodation, public housing and initiatives such as community renewal. Education does work in terms of prevention and early intervention through the provision of a range of guidance and counselling services. Some specific services are available to parents of children with disabilities from infancy. These are available to all Queensland state schools.

As you would be aware, in some areas with a very low socioeconomic base these services sometimes include breakfast at school. In some Indigenous communities like Palm Island we are now

providing money to non-government organisations like the Red Cross to provide breakfast at school. When we are looking at problems of abuse quite often it is not just physical or sexual abuse but also neglect. It is early intervention that is necessary at that time.

An innovative example of a service currently being funded by the department is the new families program run by Mercy Family Services in south-east Queensland. The department has allocated funding to this project of \$566,000 per annum for three years. It is aimed at young women aged 15 to 25 years who are six months pregnant or parenting a young child up to six months in circumstances that could, without their participation in the program, result in their baby being assessed by the department as being at risk of significant harm.

The program combines social work and nursing intervention to provide young mothers with relevant skills and confidence to enable them to meet the protection needs of their babies. A case plan is developed with the involvement of the young mother, the department, new family's staff and, where appropriate, the young mother's extended family and community.

Mrs MENKENS: I refer to the MPS at page 29 and in particular note 3 regarding the implementation of the integrated client management information system. The first part of this system identified for implementation in the Forster blueprint, endorsed by cabinet, was the carer directory, which was due for implementation in February this year. You now claim that, due to the costs of delivery, alternative options are now being explored. What was the anticipated cost of delivering this first stage? Why was the cost of this not included in the project costing you announced last year?

Mr REYNOLDS: What you are looking at now is the total budget of \$25.3 million as indicated in the MPS. The ICMS will provide more accessible, accurate and complete information on children and young people. The first phase of the ICMS project is the provision of the carer directory. The directory will enable child safety service centre staff to match placements for children more quickly and efficiently.

I anticipate that the directory of carers will be in place by November this year, together with foundation elements to support structured decision making and remaining child protection and youth justice functions. I have already indicated that the detailed design of the directory of carers is complete. The directory of carers data collection and verification is being coordinated by a dedicated ICMS data-cleansing team that is actively working with child safety service centres. A statewide set of clean and verified carer data will be available for a directory of carers roll-out.

Following a closed request for offer last year, the Department of Child Safety and the Department of Communities selected Fujitsu and ONIX to implement the new ICMS. In accordance with the normal staging provisions of the government information technology conditions framework, the government has been assessing the next stage of the Fujitsu-ONIX contract which involves the full development of the carer directory.

The government must be assured of the ability of the selected tenderer to deliver subsequent ICMS project stages within appropriate time frames and budget and with the core functionality necessary to meet child protection service delivery needs. I understand that this assessment is almost finalised. I am also assured that a directory of carers will be available by November this year with full ICMS functionality commencing online over 2006.

Once fully implemented, the carer directory will include functionality for screening, training and assessment, approval and re-approval, matters of concern, appeals alerts and a history of current and past placements via an interface with Legacy Systems. Additionally, it will allow staff to generate reports, letters and other documents quickly and efficiently.

I am sure that I could say that the opposition would not want us to go full steam ahead and not meet the framework that the government actually requires and not be assured of the ability of the tenderer selected last year to deliver the subsequent ICMS project stages, which are quite clearly set out, in the appropriate time frame and budget. That has been a key component of this. We really do not make any apology for that. At the end of the day, the staff of my department would not be properly conducting themselves if they had not made the recommendation that they have made.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, I refer to the MPS at page 14 and to the fact that 30 per cent of the children your department confirmed had suffered abused were then re-abused within 12 months. This is an increase of four per cent above last year's report. How does this unacceptable rate compare to other jurisdictions?

Mr REYNOLDS: Thank you very much for that question. Abuse of any child in care is something that we do not want to see. Unfortunately, none of us in this room today controls the behaviour and the sometimes disgraceful behaviour of adults in this regard. I do not think any of us of today would ever condone that. That is something we would be unanimous about.

In terms of work that we are doing, you may be aware that at the end of last year we put out the first monitoring report. We are leading Australia in terms of setting the benchmarks that are required in this particular area of substantiation and resubstantiation. We are leading the pack. No other state has done it. There has been international interest as well.

I want to make absolutely certain that in this area of substantiation and further substantiation the work that we are doing on our ministerial committee—and this is one of the priorities that we have set—is to get data that we can actually compare. With the six states and territories we are comparing apples and oranges. We have actually split up the department of families into a prevention and early intervention department and a department considering the child protection framework.

I take on notice that comparison because that is not an easy comparison due to the difficulty of comparing apples and oranges. Queensland is doing all it possibly can. I think it is fair to say that this reform process is a three-year process. After a year you are saying that it was 27 per cent and now it is 30 per cent.

We need time to actually make sure that our structured decision-making tool is in place. We need to absolutely ensure that the foster care training that we are implementing—I launched it about two months—starts to grip. There are many things that we are doing that are key indicators for the future. I think we really need to look at our reform in that way, rather than just select a particular statistic. We need to absolutely ensure that as we are doing this we keep the children's interests clearly in mind.

CHAIR: Are you happy to put part of that question on notice?

Mrs MENKENS: Yes, I am happy to put part of it on notice. Is it not true that the re-abuse rate in Queensland is the highest in Australia according to the Productivity Commission report?

Mr REYNOLDS: Is that a supplementary question you are asking?

Mrs MENKENS: Yes.

Mr REYNOLDS: I have already indicated to you that by the close of the hearing today I will actually get those figures to you. But I want to indicate again that we are quite often comparing apples and oranges. That is one of the biggest difficulties, and Queensland has led the way in terms of our ministerial advisory committee of all of the ministers from the states and territories in saying exactly that. Even when you look at the Productivity Commission report and you look at the institute of family and welfare studies report as well, we are comparing apples and oranges and quite often those statistics are not valid. So if I can look at those and come back to you by the close of the hearing today. We may be able to match them up in a little bit better way than I can at this particular time.

Mrs MENKENS: Thank you, Minister. Minister, I refer to the answer to question on notice No. 16 in which you advised that there have been 14 internal audits undertaken with a further three in progress. I note that you failed to answer my question regarding the issues covered by these audits and the actions taken to implement recommendations.

Mr REYNOLDS: First of all, I just want to go back to your earlier questions and say that you have quoted the Productivity Commission report. I indicate to you today that those reports themselves say that those comparisons that you are making are not valid. I would not want to let this opportunity go without saying that both of those reports actually illustrate the invalidness of those comparisons, and I indicated that last year I think at estimates as well.

In terms of the audits, the foster care audit that took place with Gwen Murray was a very good base from which we could actually work into the future. You may be aware that in response to those recommendations that have arisen we have now subsequently gone on with phase 2, and three of our audit reports were released in 2004. The Department of Child Safety has created a foster care audit team, and that foster care audit team is continuing the audit of notifications against foster-carers with a view to driving improved practice and organisational development. During the 2004 financial year the foster care audit team completed the retrospective audit of 652 notifications and their corresponding assessments as they relate to the reporting period from July 2003 to September 2004. We are always doing them retrospectively in terms of those years that come in.

It is anticipated that the report detailing the findings of the current audit will be submitted to the director-general and myself by September this year. As in phases 1, 2 and 3 of the audit process, auditors have generally found that inefficiencies—this is an important point I want to make—in departmental record keeping often fail to reflect the fact that the departmental response to child protection matters complied with legislative, policy and practice requirements and was in the best interests of the subject child. If you go back to that earlier question that was asked by a government member, I think that we had a legacy there of ineffective and inefficient record keeping. In fact, the staff were overwhelmed by workloads in those particular days and in fact were not able to actually have complete records. Current reform of our departmental policy, practice, staff training and information management systems will bring about greater accountability and enhance outcomes for children at risk of harm.

One of the areas that we brought in is the child death case review. Prior to the enactment of legislative change on 1 August last year, we did not go through those reviews. A number of those have now been done by the review committee chaired by the Commissioner for Children and Young People. I am determined to ensure that we are as open, transparent and accountable as possible in all of the work that we do, and reviews actually enhance that.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, I refer to the MPS at page 10 and to the executive reporting system and note that this system has been developed to provide timely performance information for managers. Minister, you will recall a recent question on notice—that is, 657 on 11 May—regarding any 24-hour responses that were not responded to within the required time and that you advised that you were unable to provide that information from the department's information system. Minister, how can managers respond to demand if they do not even know whether urgent cases are being responded to?

Mr REYNOLDS: Thank you for your question. The basis of your question is incorrect. In terms of managers who are on a day-to-day basis working with staff, their requirement is to ensure that 24-hour responses are done within a 24-hour period. If they cannot be done at the child safety service centre, we get the police, we get Education and we get Queensland Health to work with us in that regard. What I have indicated to you is that when the ICMS framework is on board I will easily be able to answer those questions for you, because they will be going into a database. But I do not think you really require the department to go back to every child safety service officer at a time when we are training them—and we can hardly afford to take them out of the system—to do manual counts in each of these areas when it is the manager's responsibility to ensure that that is actually occurring. I think that responsibility placed on the manager is a very important component of their job.

As you would be aware, we went out on the basis of merit selection and we have had many changes in managers right across the state of Queensland. I want to say that at that manager level, at the senior practitioner level, at the zonal director level to our executive directors up to the DG and up to the minister we remain absolutely committed to responding to notifications of child abuse and neglect within the appropriate time frames, particularly those 24-hour responses. Child Safety staff continue to show professionalism and diligence in undertaking their critical roles in protecting the vulnerable children and young people of Queensland.

Local systems are in place to track cases. However, we are not able to aggregate the data and to report statewide. That is the dilemma that has been with the old department of families for years and years. We recognise that. That is why we are putting in place the directory of carers. That is why we are also ensuring that we have an executive reporting system tool that will provide improved whole-of-government performance information to the department's executive management team. That reporting framework introduces new concepts to provide a more holistic view about performance measurement and seeks to establish clear links between departmental activities. Again, give us the time to reform the system. We cannot do everything overnight, but we are doing the very best that it is humanly possible to do.

CHAIR: One more question, Rosemary.

Mrs MENKENS: Thank you, Minister, and I certainly do reiterate that I know how very hard the staff are working. I refer, though, to the increasing number of notifications being received by the department and ask further to my last question: can you tell this committee if all 24-hour response cases are being responded to within the time frame? Are you aware of any that were not and what the consequences were?

Mr REYNOLDS: Can I say first of all that I received a report from my director-general on Monday, because this is an area that I am always keen to examine. I can assure you once again, in terms of those 24-hour response times, that we are absolutely committed to keep them. I have also talked about the need to ensure that we use our partners in police, Health and Education in that regard. With regard to 24-hour responses, as I have indicated to my director-general—and I know that Robin has inculcated time after time to our child safety service centres—they must be attended to in 24 hours. That is our requirement. If over the last year or the last two to three years or whatever one has not occurred in that way, that is unacceptable—absolutely unacceptable. I do not know the reasons and why that may have occurred or not occurred, but can I say to you today—and Robin as my director-general would be able to assure the committee as well—that this is the area of my greatest concern.

My greatest concern when I was minister for emergency services was about response times for ambulances. I am in exactly the same way concerned that those 24-hour responses are met. Whether it is the manager getting out there in the car and doing them himself or herself, that is what will be done. Whether it is the zonal director having to pull up the britches as well and get out there and do it, that is what should be done. Sometimes in rural and remote Queensland where we may not be able to access people within 24 hours there may be a reason why it cannot be done in those areas, and I want to know those reasons. But in those areas you have police, you have Health staff and you have Education. So if our staff cannot do it, we need to ensure that we get them on board, and that is what we need to do.

CHAIR: The period of time for non-government members has expired. Minister, we all get fairly traumatised when we hear about young children tragically losing their lives. Can the minister tell us how many children or young people in the care of the department or known to the department over the last three years have died in the last 12 months?

Mr REYNOLDS: I thank you for the question. The death of any child is distressing to the family and carers, departmental staff and the broader community. The Department of Child Safety takes very seriously the deaths of any child known to it. In accordance with changes to the act that came into effect

on 1 August last year, the department is now required to review its intervention with all children known to the department in the three years prior to their death and submit the child death case review report together with all case file material and other supporting paperwork to the Child Death Case Review Committee. During the period from 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005, the department has records for the deaths of 36 children and young people where there was departmental involvement with them in the three years prior to their death.

Current information about the causes of death is as follows: 10 children died as a result of an accident; 19 children died from natural causes such as congenital illness; for three children the cause of death was nonaccidental; the cause of death for two young persons was suicide; and two children died from sudden unexplained infant death. There was a variety of contacts between the 36 subject children and the department, including six children who were in the care of the department at the time of their deaths. Five of these deaths were from natural causes and the cause of death of one was nonaccidental; the cause of death related to injury sustained prior to coming into care. Some 14 children were subject to other current departmental involvement. Six of these deaths were from natural causes, five were accidental, two were attributed to sudden unexplained infant death and one was suicide. Some 16 children had previous but no current involvement with the department in the three years prior to their death. Of these, eight died from natural causes, five were classified as accidental deaths, two were deemed nonaccidental and one was from suicide.

Findings and recommendations from a child death case review report support organisational learning and development through translation into action plans at zonal and systemic levels, training and development material and policy and practice reform processes. However, I want to be clear that the departmental review is about the appropriateness of departmental actions in relation to each child and whether there was effective interaction between my department and other key agencies. This is distinctly different to a police investigation or a coronial inquiry. Recommendations arising from the review of child deaths as well as external reporting and accountability mechanisms such as the Child Death Case Review Committee will ensure ongoing change and improvement in the state's child protection framework and ultimately benefit the state's most vulnerable children and young people, their families and carers and of course the wider community as well.

Ms STONE: The budget certainly did have record spending in it, and I would like you to highlight what that will do for the children in Queensland.

Mr REYNOLDS: Thank you very much for that excellent question. No doubt you will remember that last year child protection was the centrepiece of the state budget. We have gone this year from \$271 million to \$394 million, an outstanding increase of 45.3 per cent—in other words, a mighty increase of \$123 million. Our growth in funding this year is more than double the money promised in the blueprint for implementing the Crime and Misconduct Commission's recommendations and a fair degree more than the \$65 million that was committed by the previous coalition government.

This budget reaffirms the government's commitment to building a world-class child protection system for Queensland. It recognises the critical role played by our community partners in the development and delivery of comprehensive, high-quality child safety services throughout the state. Almost half of our operating budget—a total of \$193 million—will be allocated to grants and subsidies and will be spent by community partners, foster-carers and other government agencies to deliver services to children on behalf of the Department of Child Safety.

The department will allocate increased funding of \$19.6 million this year to non-government organisations to deliver community based child protection services and \$1.4 million to strengthen local partnerships with the non-government sector. I have indicated the work we are doing in that \$22.6 million cross-government initiative that will deliver specialist support including mental health and therapy services. This is a tremendously exciting and innovative initiative for the department. As I indicated before, quite often the underlying factors are factors such as mental health, homelessness, the lack of care and neglect that is given by families.

An additional \$28.8 million will also be invested employing child safety officers and support staff to deal with up to 47,000 child protection notifications that the department expects to receive. I say today that our staff are our greatest asset, but they are involved in a traumatic reform program over a three-year period. It is a matter of bringing the reforms in and training and professionally developing those staff, and that takes time. That is why I say we cannot just sometimes reduce that, if you like, to numbers.

To support this growing work force an additional \$25 million in capital funding over two years is going into important accommodation statewide. \$19.2 million will be invested this financial year. That will bring the total investment in staff, accommodation and support to \$33.5 million. Other highlights of the budget include \$25.3 million in the ongoing investment in the information renewal initiative; funding for our foster-carers has increased by 37 per cent; and \$9.4 million has been allocated to develop new and enhanced Indigenous recognised agencies. We are committing this amount to the budget because this is what vulnerable children and young people deserve.

Mr CHOI: I always feel very concerned when a child is removed from his or her family. We have obviously seen in the not-too-distant past the problems that have been caused when children are forcefully removed from their natural parents. Having said that, I also understand that some families are more hazardous to the child than we would like to think. If a child has to be removed from their parents or their family, what measures or policies are in place, firstly, to help the child to cope with that and, secondly, to help the family to manage as well?

Mr REYNOLDS: I think the base of your question is excellent, thank you very much. It is a last resort to take children away from their family, because we believe in unifying the family. We also believe in reunification of the family if it can be done. But as you have indicated, if a family is not willing or not able to look after their children the only resort the state has is to take them away. When child protection information comes to the attention of our department, an assessment is undertaken by our CSOs to determine whether the child is at current or future risk of significant harm. To prevent children coming into care we are providing an ongoing commitment to prevention and early intervention services, as I have indicated.

The Department of Child Safety also works with a number of families to ensure the safety of children while they remain in the home. This occurs where risk has been assessed and the person responsible acknowledges their role in the harm to the child and is able and willing to cooperate with the department so that children may remain safely at home. Tragically, it is a concern that sometimes if we assess that a child can remain in the home we then suddenly find that abuse occurs. The child safety officers have a very difficult job in their assessment. You can only not envy sometimes the role that they play.

Intensive family support teams have been established in every one of the child safety service centres within the Department of Child Safety. The purpose of these teams is to provide an intensive family support response to families where, after a notification, children are assessed as requiring departmental intervention to ensure that their protective needs are met. These teams work closely with community services through case planning to best assist children, young people and families to build on their strengths to increase their future coping capacity. These families must agree to further involvement from the department to be eligible for this response. The aim of intensive family support is to prevent vulnerable children and families from entering the child protection system by identifying them and providing support that is unique to the specific needs of each family. It is directed at building on a family's capacity to deal with possible future concerns with minimal assistance from the department. Involvement with the consent of the family is appropriate in cases where the child is in a placement with parental consent or the family's willingness to adhere to the case plan means the child can safely remain at home. In these circumstances it is desirable that the parent who is identified as the person responsible for harm to the child acknowledges their role in the harm to the child and is able and willing to cooperate with the department.

As I say, it is a last resort for us to take children away. Unfortunately, we do it more than we would like to. We would really love to keep families intact. That is our whole purpose and, of course, our underlying philosophy.

Miss CROFT: There are obviously a number of children and young people who come into the child protection system who are not suited to the conventional foster care or family situation. How is your department providing care and support for this group of young Queenslanders?

Mr REYNOLDS: Thank you very much. There are a number of children and young people in the care of the department who require specialised care and support. The CMC report highlighted that the vast majority of out-of-home care placements in Australia are provided by foster and relative carers. In comparison with other states, Queensland was found to have one of the highest proportions of placements with foster and relative carers and one of the lowest proportions of placements in non-family based care, including residential care. The CMC report recommended that the department reduce its overreliance on foster care by building up the capacity of alternative placement options in areas such as residential care and enhanced foster care. This recognises that children with complex and extreme needs may not be able to be placed in standard foster care arrangements and require a more diverse and flexible range of alternative placement options.

As you would be aware, \$13.4 million was spent last year, delivered to 29 organisations, to deliver family and non-family based alternative care services throughout Queensland. That has brought on about 140 new and enhanced alternative care places. But we are very aware that we need more of those. The CMC inquiry and blueprint identified a need for 360 places. So I am delighted to be able to say today that we have allocated in the 2005-06 year an amount of \$10.3 million but we have also taken money that was allocated for the 2006-07 year to ensure that we can actually make many of these places come on board earlier than is required. In fact, this year we are hoping to roll out a further 222 alternative care places. That will bring us to about 360 places that will be out there.

At the end of the day, the department wants to ensure that we can place a child with a caring and dedicated foster care family. If we cannot, because of serious behaviours or serious disabilities or other concerns, we then need to look at alternative care placements. Those placements we are rolling out are a very important component. We do not want to place, for example, children in commercial

accommodation. But as you would be aware, the huge increase in notifications and the very fact that these figures were based on figures that went back to 2003 are why we have found it necessary to roll these alternative care places out even faster than we have done. We are about best placement and best practice in that regard.

CHAIR: Minister, you stated earlier that it is really in the best interests of the child for them to be with their natural parents in a safe environment. When it is in the best interests of the child in care to return to their family after foster care, what services are available to help reunify them with their parents?

Mr REYNOLDS: Thank you very much. Reunification is again our key here. Family reunification services have long been recognised as having significant benefits to children and young people in alternative care as well as their families and carers. The evidence is clear that positive family contact during placement is an absolute key to family reunification in a timely way.

In the 2004-05 state budget we had an allocation for services to assist the safe reunification of children and young people with their families. In November 2004 I approved \$2.9 million per annum over three years to 17 organisations to deliver a range of family reunification services across Queensland. Additional funding of \$200,000 has been held in reserve for further development to ensure specific high-need areas, including the north and far north of the state, can also benefit from this initiative. A second blueprint funding instalment of \$1.6 million per annum will be available in 2005-06 with total funding for the family reunification initiative rising to \$6.24 million in the 2006-07 financial year.

I am happy to say that the majority of children in care return to their families, with protective placement only a temporary experience, while many of those who remain in placement reconnect with their families even after leaving care. The priority for these services has been for them to work with children and their families within the 12 months of entry into care and to implement processes that engage family members and significant members of the child's cultural community in decision making. Where returning home is not possible, the aim of the services is to establish a long-term placement option that also meets the child's needs for connection with family and community, stability and a sense of belonging.

Family reunification services have been encouraged to consider family group conferencing as an effective strategy for engaging families. However, services need to provide a range of processes to prepare and support children and families through the transition involved in entry, placement moves and, where relevant, exit from alternative care. Family group conferencing, of course, does recognise that families provide the most enduring relationship for children, and the importance of the maintenance and promotion of family connections is well documented. It is amazing what can be done when you get the families children have come from, the carers and service providers around the one table and how you can work through some of those issues and how there can be an awakening by families in regard to abuse that has occurred. It is great to then see long-term family reunification.

Ms STONE: It is obvious that foster-carers are vital to the system. How are we ensuring that we actually do get enough foster-carers?

Mr REYNOLDS: I thank you very much for that very important question because foster-carers are vital and they are valued. In line with the CMC recommendations we are adopting a vigorous and proactive approach to both attracting and retaining a pool of skilled and compassionate carers. My department has recognised that the recruitment of foster-carers requires ongoing activity and dedicated resources. We have developed a comprehensive foster care recruitment strategy, and in 2005-06 we hope to increase our overall number of carers by a minimum of 500.

The recruitment strategy, comprising state, local and target activities, is scheduled to enter its active phase in September this year. The recruitment strategy importantly will include specific initiatives to attract carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background and carers from cultural and linguistically diverse communities. Other initiatives planned include a strategy to raise awareness of foster care and attract interest from within local church communities. Indeed, I have just funded a church community organisation in Queensland \$50,000 to work through the churches to attract more foster-carers in that way. It also includes mass mailings of information to parents and citizens groups, schools, child-care centres and other identified target groups and distribution of a comprehensive suite of materials to support all recruitment activities and including materials specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It is hoped that all of these activities will be complemented by a media campaign inclusive of advertising, editorial coverage and community service announcements. Existing foster-carers are recognised as a valuable resource in this endeavour and will be formally invited to participate in the recruitment campaign.

My department has also been working to ensure that we better support our existing carers. We have recently contracted research to establish the true cost of caring, the results of which will be available towards the end of 2005. We have already moved to implement the increase in the fortnightly fostering allowance of 2.5 per cent to reflect movement in the CPI index—we have committed that in an ongoing way—and increases in the rates of common secondary allowances from 1 July 2004 including the one-off establishment payment, the start-up allowance, the high support needs allowance and the

introduction of a 10 per cent regional/remote loading for carers living in the far north and west of the state.

Importantly, training for foster-carers has been enhanced with the development and progressive implementation of the Quality Care: Foster Care Training package from March this year. Carers will have access to ongoing training, and their specific learning needs beyond the standard modules that all carers will complete will be regularly reviewed. I thank the foster-carers for the very valued job that they do.

Mr CHOI: Minister, you mentioned that at times the department does not get it right and sometimes decides to leave a child with his or her natural parents and abuse happens. I say through you to your staff that although we would like to get it right 100 per cent of the time we never will, but we should take comfort from the fact that if you get it right 99.9 per cent of the time then you are doing a wonderful job. Most members of parliament on this side realise that you are doing a wonderful job. It is not an easy job. I certainly do not want to do your job and make those kinds of decisions on a daily basis. We appreciate it.

Minister, you would agree with me that cultural awareness is very important? I recognise that in your budget you are making available \$9.4 million to create Indigenous recognised agencies. Can you tell us a little more about that?

Mr REYNOLDS: The recognised agency function is twofold. Firstly, the agencies provide community based cultural information and advice to the Department of Child Safety at all key decision-making points within the statutory process of the child protection system. Secondly, they support Indigenous children, young people and families during that process. Recognised agency functions can be delivered by Indigenous individuals, unincorporated groups and/or incorporated organisations. Amendments that are currently before the parliament within the Child Safety Legislation Amendment Bill will empower the director-general of the department to keep a list of recognised entities, as they will become known, based on criteria to ensure that the recognised entity is culturally appropriate, is independent from the department and has child protection expertise.

During this financial year and in 2006-07 the department will progressively establish recognised agency coverage across the state. While formal recognised agency coverage is being built, the department will work with Indigenous communities on a zone-by-zone basis to ensure their appropriate engagement of Indigenous support. These agencies are vital to the Department of Child Safety's work and our aim to significantly reduce the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the protection system. Therefore, in 2005-06 my department has allocated over \$9.4 million to enhance the capacity of the existing recognised agencies and to establish a new service delivery model. This funding recognises the very important role the agencies play in providing the crucial advice that I have mentioned. Their functions had to be developed as part of a collaborative capacity-building exercise because Queensland needs a culturally appropriate and effective Indigenous child protection system across government, non-government organisations and communities.

The new Indigenous agencies service delivery model will provide clear direction about the role of the Indigenous recognised agencies. It will enhance coverage and build capacity of Indigenous recognised agencies and establish an Indigenous recognised agency peak body. I know that the member for Gregory has a strong concern in this area from the point of view of the area in which he lives and also the work that he is doing on the parliamentary select committee. It is an area that we feel very, very strongly about.

CHAIR: Order! The time for government questions has expired. The next 15 minutes will go to non-government members.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: I just wanted a further clarification of your answer to question on notice No. 12. Are you saying that the whereabouts of each child in the department's care is accurately known by the department on a daily basis and is recorded either at a local level or on a more centralised database?

Mr REYNOLDS: I thank the member for Gladstone for that important question. I think the answer to the question on notice actually states in a very comprehensive way the operational work that we are doing at a local level in that regard. Sometimes there are scurrilous rumours that go around at a state level as well as at a local level. I am aware of them with regard to this particular area. I say quite emphatically today that those rumours are scurrilous. For example, someone asked me whether there were 1,000 children that we did not know the whereabouts of. They are scurrilous in their intent to put that type of rumour about.

The department is committed to ensuring quality care for children and young people subject to statutory intervention. What I have said in answer to the question on notice is that all children who have been placed in care arrangements by the Department of Child Safety are accurately recorded on our departmental systems at a local level. Children and young people who leave a placement without the authority of the department are located through inquiries within the child's family or community. If a child is unable to be located, which does happen from time to time, through these informal networks, the Queensland Police Service is contacted to assist in locating the child.

Sometimes we are talking about 14-, 15-, 16- or 17-year-old young people and sometimes younger who may abscond from their home in exactly the same way as they would abscond or run away from their family. It is also important to understand that information about the whereabouts of children is shared with the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian to support its monthly community visitor program. In instances where a particular child may have moved between the time that details were provided to the commission and the time of the visit, recourse to local records can be made to ensure the visit is undertaken successfully.

The department is currently in the process of developing, as you know, the new ICMS system, which will facilitate improved, more accessible, accurate and complete information on children and young people, but the information exchange between the departments and the commission would also be enhanced through the ICMS. For anyone to allege that there is a widespread number of missing children is absolutely and emphatically wrong. At the local level if a child absconds from a placement we naturally put that into the hands of the police and they do an excellent job, and part of that is due to the work which they themselves have enhanced in looking for children who go missing.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: I wish to follow up a question from the member for Burdekin. I referred to your office an incident similar to that outlined by the member—a family had children removed by the department and within 48 hours the same couple were given a very difficult child to care for. Would you agree that this must place significant questions in the minds of families who have children removed but are seen subsequently and often within a short period of time by the department as appropriate carers for other children?

Mr REYNOLDS: I thank the member for that question. Can I clarify that we are talking about children being removed from a carer and subsequently other children—

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: Children were removed from a parent because of alleged harm but those same parents were then given a child by the department to care for.

Mr REYNOLDS: As a carer?

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: Yes.

Mr REYNOLDS: I would certainly like to know the detail.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: It was sent to you.

Mr REYNOLDS: Has it been sent to me in recent times?

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: Yes.

Mr REYNOLDS: I do not have that with me today, but I have placed before the estimates committee today a very vigorous process in ensuring that if children are taken away from a foster-carer or from a family the process that we undertake in that regard has to be always in the best interests of a child. Naturally, if we believed that a member of that family had not been willing or able to look after the interests of children we would hardly be looking at placing children back with that family. Indeed, if that had occurred in practice by any member of our staff, that would be subject to the normal disciplinary procedures of the department. I do not know the case but we would look at any particular case in that regard.

I have just been advised that in the case you have brought before us—again, these are the sorts of claims and counterclaims that we need to be careful about making, and I know you are aware of that—the child was an adolescent and was placed by the extended family, not by the department, back with that family. It was not a placement by the department; it was a placement by the extended family. That is being disputed by the family.

As far as the department is concerned, the whole essence of these reforms would be badly undermined if that was the practice. If a practice occurred like that, we would be asking a child safety officer to account for themselves in that particular decision-making process. I am told that the allegation that was made is incorrect. Often we find this. People tend to either fib in what they are saying or from time to time do not give us the correct information.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: Thank you, Minister.

Mr REYNOLDS: I know you have never had that in your electorate office.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: On page 19 of the MPS there is a reference to \$15 million in recurrent funding for additional places in non-family based care. You mentioned commercial placements earlier in this session. I would be interested to know what commercial placements the department has used in the past. Could you clarify what non-family based care is, where these new facilities are generally located and how the children's needs are met in these placements?

Mr REYNOLDS: First of all, the alternative care placements that we make can be in a variety of different settings. Sometimes if the alternative care placement is made with regard to serious behaviour or disability they are placed with the necessary support that needs to be given in that placement. That may be therapeutic treatment, therapy of some particular type, support by a youth worker or other types of support. Sometimes that can be done in a group home setting. Sometimes it can be done in a family

setting. Sometimes it can be done with a specific carer who has the qualifications or experience to be able to support a child like that. Basically alternative care is done outside the family.

Given the significant growth in the number of children and young children placed on child protection orders in the past year, this has put additional pressure on out-of-home care resources. That is why we have brought forward the money for alternative care which was to be expended in 2006-07 into 2005-06. There has been a pulling back of the number of children in commercial accommodation but at the same time there has been a push to put more there because we do not have the alternative placements. This is just the reality of the notifications that are coming in and our need to care for children.

Between 1 July and 31 March this year, 431 children and young people were placed in paid commercial accommodation for a combined total of 2,015 days. These placements occurred due to no other suitable placement options being immediately available. Of the 431 children, 304 were male and 127 were female. The Department of Child Safety only uses commercial accommodation where foster care, residential care or other preferable placement options are not immediately available. In other words, those arrangements are used as an interim measure to ensure the immediate safety of children while an individual care arrangement can be developed to meet the specific needs of each child. Sometimes at quarter to five on a Friday afternoon we are faced with having to make a placement decision which is extraordinarily complex. The option, as I said, is only a last resort and it usually occurs only when we cannot get alternative care.

When children and young people are placed in commercial accommodation, arrangements are made to ensure proper supervision and support for the child or young person. Assessments are made of the child's or young person's needs, and arrangements are completed to ensure that they are safe and provided with the necessary supervision. This is of last resort. I would have liked to have been ahead of the pack at this particular time, but unfortunately the notifications coming in are numerous.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: It is probably a supplementary question. I take commercial placements to be motels and similar places. The facilities that are being constructed, would they be group facilities where five or six children can be placed with a single carer?

Mr REYNOLDS: Yes, they are. For example, there are a number of organisations in Queensland today that are building their capacity to be able to place children either in one-to-one care or group care to be able to give the necessary support and therapy to those children while they are in their care.

One of the things that I have found out—which I am sure previous ministers have found out as well—is that some of these options are incredibly expensive, but we want quality. What we have done, even in terms of the commercial accommodation, is that where it is necessary—and I think you probably have found this in terms of the answer I have given on commercial accommodation lately and in the past—we are increasing the quality of the motel accommodation that we are actually placing a child in. Certainly in terms of very difficult placements, if children cannot be placed in the traditional foster care, we are actually placing them into a group facility. I am trying to think of some of the ones that we have. Mercy Family Services in Toowoomba is one of them. I think I mentioned the boost in funding we gave those group facilities earlier in the session today. Certainly there are a large number of organisations that are out there that are working within the philosophy of ensuring not only that the placement is right but also that the support that is given in that placement is mirroring the case plan that the departmental worker has actually put down as well.

The other thing I should say is that the \$22.6 million that we are rolling out in regard to therapy with Disability Services Queensland and the Health Department will be of a major benefit in this way as well. We are looking at the best placement, but alongside that must be the best support we can give them and what type of arrangements do we have? I should say to you that we are looking more at the small, family group setting than we have in the past. We do not want to go back to the allegations in regard to institutionalisation and normalisation, but we believe that we need to look at those as alternatives, and we are going to do that, and we are doing that at the moment.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: That is welcome news, Minister. I want to ask a question on the footnoting of your MPS. Throughout your MPS there is a repeated statement that changes, decreases in supplies and services et cetera reflects a realignment of the budget to more accurately reflect the allocation of resources following the machinery of government changes. Can you detail how those machinery of government changes have altered the structure of the department?

Mr REYNOLDS: Sure. First of all, it is important to say that when the blueprint report came down on 23 March last year it recommended that the old department of families be restructured through machinery of government changes to a new Department of Communities and a Department of Child Safety. It would also be fair to say that at that time the department of families became known as the Department of Communities. In other words, we did not split up—and were not able to split up—at that very early time both of the departments. We had a very important transition of all the staff who were with the department of families. We had transition workshops that took place around the state. That was in regard to the cultural change that was required in the Department of Child Safety, and the staff themselves making up their mind which department they wanted to go to. In that regard, by 20 September last year we made the change. At that particular stage of our budget, these type of expenses

for a partial year were indicative. The footnotes that you are seeing there now are spelling out what we have been able to learn from that time but also, if you like, what the full year effect of that has been as well. I think that is plainly, through the machinery of government changes, the work that we had to do to get those accurate numbers in the MPS this year. That is because of the major changes that were occurring in machinery of government.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The time for non-government questions for this portfolio has expired. The next 10 minutes will be for government questions. I call the member for Broadwater.

Miss CROFT: Thank you very much. Minister, I certainly do appreciate and understand the very difficult work that the Child Safety officers do. What are you doing to ensure staff of your department have a safe and secure working environment?

Mr REYNOLDS: I would like to thank the member for Broadwater because I know the relationship that you have with staff of departments in your electorate. Our staff are our greatest asset. We are committed to supporting them in every way possible so they can focus on the task of delivering support to children and young people in need. Again I say that I think one of our dilemmas in the past decades is that we did not look after our staff well enough. We have learnt that.

To support this growing work force, an additional \$25 million is being expended on new accommodation. That brings up to about \$33.5 million the money that we will spend in that area. Among the 38 accommodation projects will be new service delivery hubs in Normanton and Weipa, 12 new dedicated child safety service centres and two zonal offices. This accommodation project will further support our front-line staff by providing them with safe and secure workplaces. Some of their workplaces at the moment are not of the standard they should be. That is why they need this very large amount of money that is being spent.

As part of this initiative, design guidelines have been developed for new child safety service centres and zonal offices. These guidelines provide the architectural template that will drive the design of these new offices. The guidelines aim to provide an improved environment for child protection service delivery not only in terms of security for staff but also facilities for clients as well. Some of the features include informal, formal and secure interview rooms, a child's play area, a foster-carer's room, secure car parking, duress alarms, an ability to lock down reception and improve conference facilities. The guidelines were developed by a reference group consisting of our child safety service centre managers, our team leaders, our CSOs, local and zonal administrative staff as well as staff from other key areas.

In developing the guidelines, the reference group modelled and challenged a range of security scenarios and drew on the experience of workplace health and safety advisers. It is important that I acknowledge and emphasise, however, that staff security and safety requires a comprehensive approach. It is not just about bricks and mortar. To this end, the department has a range of other strategies in place to improve security in the work environment for its staff. That includes, of course, the fact that we have brought in an excellent peer support program, the first of its kind in the Department of Child Safety. This is mirroring what has been done in the Department of Emergency Services. We now have 60 peer support officers. That number will grow to 100 in the next financial year.

Training in protective behaviours is now a compulsory component of CSO and CSSO entry level training. Our staff are dedicated to vulnerable children and young people, and the department is committed to providing the best possible accommodation and support. I know staff are looking forward to seeing the new offices come to fruition in the near future. We need to support them. We will support them. They certainly deserve the support from all of us.

CHAIR: Minister, there has been a lot of talk about foster-carers during this hearing and what a wonderful job they do. They are very valuable to the Department of Child Safety. Of course, looking after children costs a lot of money. Could the Minister advise how the department is helping to meet the financial needs of these dedicated men and women?

Mr REYNOLDS: Thank you, Chairperson, for that important question. I am pleased to be able to highlight the additional financial support the Beattie government is providing to carers for the outstanding job that they do in caring and providing invaluable support to some of the most vulnerable children in Queensland society. Adequate financial support to carers is an area of vital importance to the delivery of quality child protection services. I say that the government and the department is committed to the effective and direct financial support of carers. This commitment was reflected this financial year with a number of key enhancements. These include the fortnightly fostering allowance which has been indexed, increasing from \$200 to \$375 the one-off establishment payment for all children and young people when they are placed with a carer for the first time; increasing the start-up allowance from \$50 to \$60; boosting the high support needs allowance from \$120 to \$144 per fortnight; and introducing a 10 per cent regional remote loading for carers living in the far north and west of the state.

For the 2005-06 financial year, we committed to the true cost of caring research project. We are expending \$100,000. We hope that will be ready by the end of this year. This project will include a review of the current payment levels both in Queensland and throughout Australia. It will explore further enhancements to the base and high support needs levels of the fostering allowance. This project will also assess what secondary payments, known as child related costs, can be rolled up into the fostering allowance and so minimise the impact of the carer being out of pocket while awaiting reimbursement for

these expenses. In addition, the consultant will review the 10 per cent regional remote loading to determine the need for future increases in both the rate and what parts of the state the loading covers. Further, to recognise the carers who undertake additional training and duties, three new allowances will be introduced—a mentoring allowance, an advanced carer training allowance and a carer representative allowance.

Finally, as I said, the fostering allowance will be further increased in future years. I conclude by saying that Queensland foster-carers are the backbone of the child protection system in this state. The government aims to do everything possible to make sure that foster-carers receive very adequate levels of support.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The member for Springwood.

Ms STONE: Thank you. Are you ready?

Mr REYNOLDS: Can I just ask for a moment to answer the question that was previously asked by the member for Burdekin in regard to substantiations and resubstantiations? I say, first of all, quoting from the government services report, that the indicator is defined—this is a resubstantiation rate—

As the proportion of children who were the subject of a substantiation the previous financial year who are subsequently the subject of a further substantiation within the following three or 12 months. Data that are comparable across jurisdictions were not available for this indicator but data are comparable within each jurisdiction over time. In Western Australia, South Australia, the ACT and the Northern Territory the proportion of children who were the subject of a resubstantiation within three months of an initial resubstantiation increased in 2002-03 compared with the proportion in the previous year. The proportion remain unchanged in Tasmania and fell in all other jurisdictions, excluding New South Wales, which had not provided data for 2002-03.

Of course that includes Queensland.

The increase in 12 months resubstantiation rate for Queensland is due, in most part, to more diligent case work and increased awareness of the public to report suspected harm to children.

Again, I think we need to give our staff, who have been trained in a much more adequate way, a fair go in that regard.

Initiatives to reduce the number of resubstantiations include the blueprint provisions provided for 40 specialist child safety officer positions to work exclusively with parents whose children have already been the subject of low level notification and continue to reside at home. Forty of the child safety officer positions in 2005-06 will be allocated to this function. Provision of prevention and early intervention services will also play a key role, and introduction of structured decision making tools to assist in consistency at critical decision making points in the child protection process.

I committed to giving that to you, and I am happy to be able to provide that information.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

Ms STONE: I know that the department relies heavily on non-government organisations. I also know that the department gives a lot of support to them. Could you please tell us how much funding is being given to these groups in the 2005-06 financial year, and what role do these organisations play?

Mr REYNOLDS: Thanks for that excellent question. There is \$193.3 million under the category of grants and subsidies. That accounts for nearly 50 per cent of the department's budget. We are budgeting some \$78 million in this financial year specifically for community based agencies. These funds will be provided to non-government organisations to deliver a range of services for departmental clients. These include alternative care placement and support services, including residential care and responsive placement services, specialist or enhanced foster-carer where family based care and wrap around services are provided to children and young people with high or complex needs. It also includes shared family care where our non-government partners—through fostering agencies—recruit, train, assess and support foster-carers; intervention services who work with children and young people in care and their families to provide a range of services for intensive family support; and specialist counselling and sexual abuse counselling. It also includes Indigenous recognised agencies that support the department in its statutory obligations and that support departmental Indigenous clients through the statutory process. It includes family reunification services, which is a new service type funded under the blueprint, to facilitate reunification where it is in the best interests of the child or young person. It also includes important funding that goes to our peak bodies, particularly bodies such as peak care, Foster Care Queensland and the CREATE Foundation. They are a very important component of our funding.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, and director-general, for attending this hearing today. The time allotted for the consideration of the estimates for the Minister for Child Safety has expired. I thank the Minister and his portfolio officers for their attendance today.

For the information of those attending today, the hearing transcript for this portfolio will be available on the parliament's web site in approximately two years hours. The committee will now suspend the hearing for morning tea. We will resume again at 10.45 am to look at the Department of State Development and Innovation. Thank you.

Mr REYNOLDS: Thank you, Chairperson. I thank you and the members of the committee for the excellent questions you have asked. I look forward to seeing you next year.

CHAIR: Thank you very much.

Proceedings suspended from 10.31 am to 10.46 am

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B—STATE DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION

In Attendance

Hon. T McGrady, Minister for State Development and Innovation

Department of State Development and Innovation

Mr P Fennelly, Director-General

Mr D Cook, Deputy Director-General, Infrastructure and Project Delivery

Mr P Chard, Director, Finance

Ms N Randall, Cabinet Legislation Liaison Officer

CHAIR: Good morning, everyone. The Estimates Committee B hearing has now resumed. I welcome the Minister for State Development and Innovation, public officials and members of the public who are in attendance today. I would like to introduce the members of the committee. I am Julie Attwood, member for Mount Ommaney, and my fellow committee members are Mr Vaughan Johnson—he is not with us at the moment but should be here shortly—the deputy chair and member for Gregory; Mr Michael Choi, member for Capalaba; Miss Peta-Kaye Croft, member for Broadwater; Mrs Liz Cunningham, member for Gladstone; Mrs Rosemary Menkens, member for Burdekin; Ms Barbara Stone, member for Springwood; and our visiting member, Howard Hobbs, member for Warrego.

I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time limit for questions is one minute and that answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A 15-second warning will be given of the expiration of these time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. The standing orders require that at least half the time be allotted to non-government members and the other half to government members. I ask departmental witnesses to identify themselves before they answer a question so that Hansard can record that information in their transcript.

In the event that those attending today are not aware, I should point out that the 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, in accordance with standing order 206, strangers—that is, the public—may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the pleasure of the committee. I also ask that all mobile phones and pagers be switched off. I declare the proposed expenditure to the portfolio of the Minister for State Development and Innovation open for examination. The question before the chair is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

The minister may now make a brief introductory statement which must be limited to five minutes under the standing orders.

Mr McGRADY: Thank you, Madam Chair, and members of the committee. I thank you all for the opportunity to again deliver good news for the Queensland economy. Right off the bat, I want to make a couple of announcements at the heart of what my portfolio is all about, and that is jobs, jobs and jobs. I am delighted to announce that Footlocker—one of the world's leading retailers of athletic footwear and apparel—will establish its Asia-Pacific headquarters at Murarrie in Brisbane. This will mean the relocation of the company's warehouse and freight operations from Melbourne and lead to an additional 28 jobs for Queensland.

I am also delighted to announce the \$15 million expansion of Almax Aluminium to create 79 new jobs. It is another coup for Queensland because the company chose to expand at Lytton rather than move to Newcastle. This comes hot on the heels of IBM opening up an outsourcing centre here on Monday that could create 1,000 jobs over the next 10 years.

I suppose the question is whether grants were involved in attracting these businesses. The answer is yes. Do I apologise for that? Absolutely not. The critics can whinge, moan and complain. We are about results and we are about delivering. It is no wonder the Beattie government's economic record makes the other states and territories cringe. Queensland's economic growth is estimated to be 4.25 per cent for 2004-05—more than double the estimated national growth rate of two per cent. The Smart State economy is forecast to grow a further 4.25 per cent in this current financial year. Queensland created 140,000 new jobs in 2004-05 which accounted for 40 per cent of all new jobs created nationally. We have delivered the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years. The trend unemployment rate for May was 4.9 per cent.

Coal exports will continue to headline our economic good news story, and we are experiencing unprecedented major project development. Access Economics states that Queensland has \$60 billion worth of projects either under construction, committed, under consideration or possible. Next year we are expecting a decision on the PNG gas pipeline. We have been promoting this project for many years,

but it looks like becoming a reality with the proponents signing major contracts to supply gas in the past week.

We are continuing work on one of the world's major bauxite deposits, Aurukun, which has the capacity to create billions of dollars in wealth and up to 1,000 jobs. The industry reference group was set up and is performing well as we move towards the commencement of a competitive bidding process.

My portfolio is leading the government's implementation of strategies and programs to ensure that Queensland remains the Smart State. We are aggressively promoting emerging industries such as biotechnology, information and communication technology, aviation and of course creative industries. Six thousand jobs have now been created in aviation and, looking to the future, I want to mention unmanned aerial vehicles. Queensland is going to be a leader in the development of this exciting new industry. For interested people, we have a UAV on show this morning in the Parliamentary Annexe.

We are also leaders in trying to get an ethanol industry going in Australia. We have the ethanol roadshow and the international conference and we have announced a \$7.3 million ethanol industry action plan. We have led the charge in calling on the federal government to introduce a mandate. We are finally seeing the winds of change blow through Canberra. Shadow industry minister Stephen Smith has personally offered me and the state government his support. Bill Shorten, the prominent national secretary of the Australian Workers Union, has also given us his backing. The federal government has set up a biofuels task force and the new Nationals leader, Mark Vaile, is now talking about compulsory levels of ethanol in fuel. It is time for sugar growers to be more vocal in their support for this fledgling industry, and there is also scope for the grain industry to become involved.

While we have been promoting ethanol as a boost for sugar and grain regions, I do not think we have done enough to push the health benefits. I have recently been in touch with the Australian Lung Foundation and the Asthma Foundation of Queensland, and both organisations are interested in learning more about how ethanol in fuel reduces tailpipe emissions and leads to cleaner air.

The government has developed and is delivering programs to help our existing industries remain competitive. New jobs, billions in infrastructure investment and a sustained high level of business confidence are proof that our government's Smart State policies are paying huge dividends for Queensland. In turn, this is reinforcing Queensland's reputation as the place to do business.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. To commence questioning, I call the member for Warrego.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, I refer to the promise you made to the taxpayers of Queensland on 30 July 2004 to recover the money and assistance given by the Department of State Development's grant to Citibank after its relocation to the Philippines, the details of which grant were locked away by the Premier for eight years in August 2004 by changing the FOI Act. Can you guarantee taxpayers your department has recovered every last cent of taxpayers' money you handed out to Citibank?

Mr McGRADY: I thank the member for the question. I understand that the Premier answered a similar question yesterday. I want to give an assurance today that after the decision by Citibank to move from Brisbane to the Philippines, as I recall, we immediately moved in, we secured the bank guarantee and, as far as I am aware, all the moneys have been recovered by the state government.

Mr HOBBS: Very good.

Mr McGRADY: I think that is the same answer that the Premier delivered yesterday. I did media on this at the time and I stated then that we would move in ASAP to secure that bank guarantee. As far as I am aware, that did happen and it did not cost the taxpayers of Queensland one single cent, to use your words.

Mr HOBBS: I refer to page 3 of the MPS. I understand that your department receives hundreds of applications for assistance every year. How many applications would your department receive a year under the different business assistance schemes and programs on offer from the Department of State Development—thousands of applications?

Mr McGRADY: For financial assistance?

Mr HOBBS: Yes.

Mr McGRADY: It would not be in the thousands. It would certainly be in the hundreds. As you would be aware, there are a number of different schemes which people can make application for. You often hear of the assistance which we give to the big end of town, and I mentioned two this morning, but there are also many grants that we give ranging from \$1,000 right up to the larger ones. You would be amazed at some of the seed funding we give to help small businesses start up. Also we give assistance to organisations to help other small businesses.

In the budget this year, as you would see from the figures, we budgeted to allocate \$78.7 million for the department's grants and did not quite match that figure. The information I have is that there have been 313 grants and sponsorships with a total value of \$38 million provided in the financial year ending 31 May. I stress that all applications for assistance are assessed against the selection criteria for the applicable grants scheme. As I mentioned before, I think we have about 12 different types of grants, and in most cases this involves the eligibility of the applicant as well as the proposed project.

These criteria are published in the various scheme guidelines, which are available through any of the department's offices or indeed on the web site. Grants have been provided to businesses, industry associations, individuals, local government, chambers of commerce, research organisations and of course educational institutions.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, is it a fluke that somebody you just happened to have personally publicly endorsed—Mr Mel Bridges, a 2004 bioneer award recipient—just so happened to have been a director of four separate firms which just so happened to have received at least five separate grants from the Department of State Development over the last five years?

Mr McGRADY: I do not know of the individual you have mentioned. I do not think I know him, but could I just take this opportunity of saying—

Mr HOBBS: He is one of the two bioneers that you endorsed recently.

Mr McGRADY: Let me just say this: I often hear that certain individuals—it is usually termed 'friends of Labor'—get assistance from the government. In terms of the vast majority of people who get these grants, I can refer back to Monday's decision by IBM to bring a thousand jobs to Queensland. Nobody but nobody but nobody would suggest that they would be friends of Labor. The two organisations which I announced assistance for today, again, nobody would claim are friends of Labor.

The process is that a person seeking a grant would go through all of the procedures within the Public Service. Those final decisions come to me to be signed off. I can certainly recall knocking back applications or seeking further information. It is nonsense people being friends of Labor or people in high places getting assistance.

The figures I gave this morning prove beyond a shadow of doubt that Queensland is leading the rest of the states and territories. Our unemployment is at the lowest level for almost 30 years. It proves that the policies that we are adopting are correct; they are providing jobs for Queenslanders and making us the leading state. I reject out of hand any suggestion or any suggestions that people secure support from our government because of positions of influence they might have.

I reiterate in front of the Public Service and on the *Hansard* that before any application comes to me as minister it has gone right through the processes within the Public Service. That is the way it is and that is the way it should be.

Mr HOBBS: I was not suggesting for a minute that he was a friend of Labor. I think he is just smart. He obviously knows his way around the department. Do you think taxpayers will be surprised to know that on top of your department awarding Mr Bridges's company two grants in the same financial year, the Queensland Investment Corporation just so happened to also buy about \$3.2 million worth of shares in the company—shares which are now lucky to be worth \$800,000.

Mr McGRADY: I suppose you have winners and people who are not so fortunate. I want to emphasise again that there are approximately 12 types of grants. If it is the belief of those within the department that these people qualify for assistance then they would present a case to me. They would brief me. On most occasions for large amounts of money I seek a personal verbal briefing just to satisfy myself that the investment the government intends to—

Mr HOBBS: You get a personal briefing?

Mr McGRADY: Not all the time. If I have questions I would ask for a personal briefing. That is provided and then we go through the motions. I question the public servants who make the recommendations to me. Any person on this table would verify that. I can assure you that no grant goes through without, first of all, my personal staff—and you would understand this—going through the application with a fine tooth comb. They make a recommendation to me. If I believe there is a need for a verbal briefing the officers come in and we discuss it. Sometimes I reject the recommendations from the bureaucracy or ask them to seek further information for me.

You would appreciate that I do not know all of the individuals who make applications, nor do I want to, nor do I believe it is important. What I look for is whether or not an application for assistance would in fact be in the interests of our state and provide jobs for the people of Queensland.

Mr HOBBS: Taxpayers could view the situation like this. A dodgy company cons the state government for two grants, the company director bails out—your bioneer bails out—and QIC buys his shares at top price, the company crashes and its value drops 73 per cent from \$1.29 to 17c and QIC then sells down, potentially losing \$2.3 million of the \$3.18 million. Minister, would the taxpayer not say that your bioneer has fleeced you and your government? That is an absolute disgrace.

Mr McGRADY: I know that the curtains are drawn and that the show has started and that there are some theatrics going on.

Mr HOBBS: There are no theatrics. This is real stuff.

Mr McGRADY: I do not know the full details of this. I guarantee that I will investigate the claims or statements you are making and satisfy myself that the assistance we have given to this company was legitimate. I guarantee that it was legitimate because of the processes I have explained we go through—that is, the department, my ministerial office and me.

If anybody thinks that I simply sign off on recommendations from the bureaucracy then everyone in this room will say, 'Sorry, not true.' I go through grants and, as I have said before, if I believe I need further information I seek that information and I bring the officers involved before me to explain the reasons they have made the recommendations. Even then I sometimes reject those applications.

I had a batch of applications for the smaller grants just this week and I rejected five which had been recommended to me for approval. I said, 'No, as far as I am concerned, it is not in the interests of Queensland that we give this money.' I give you an assurance now that I will check on that.

Mr HOBBS: Will you report back to the committee on that?

Mr McGRADY: I will check this and I will get back to you. I would need clarification of the company for whom you are alleging things have not been 100 per cent. I do not want it now. When we finish I would like all that information. We will check it out and I will get back to you.

Mr HOBBS: I refer to your answer to question 11 where I asked you to list the companies that received incentives to come to Queensland. I was surprised to see that Panbio, the very company I have just referred to, was a recipient. Do you not think that the taxpayers have put enough money into this company already? Last year they got an incentive grant to come to Queensland. This is the same company that is now worth virtually zilch. The director has done the bolt and QIC has picked up the tab and has had to sell down the company.

Mr McGRADY: Again, I have assured you that I will check the claims that you are making. But let us go to the crux of this. We have a policy in place in this state which is the envy of every other state and territory.

Mr HOBBS: Let us hope it is, but what we have got so far is not looking too good.

Mr McGRADY: What do you mean it is not looking too good? Let me get this perfectly clear today. As a direct result of the policies which this government has pursued we now have the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years. We have people queuing up to come and set up businesses in this state. From time to time you may get a company that fails—I do not know; I will check it out—but that should never, ever allow people to try to claim that the policy that we have in place—

Mr HOBBS: It is not looking too good so far.

Mr McGRADY: Come on.

CHAIR: The member should cease interjecting.

Mr McGRADY: I will take that statement to task. He says it is not looking too good. We have the fastest—and you can smile and play your theatrics—

Mr HOBBS: You have the fastest guy. He is smarter than you guys.

CHAIR: The member for Warrego should cease interjecting and let the minister answer the question.

Mr McGRADY: You can play the theatrics in this building if you want to—

Mr HOBBS: I am telling you what it is.

Mr McGRADY: The reality is that as a direct result of the policies which this government pursues, and in particular the Department of State Development and Innovation pursues, we are creating 40 per cent of all new jobs created in Australia today. We have the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years. The economic growth of the state is more than double the national average. For you to sit there and say that the policies are not working—

Mr HOBBS: I am not talking about policies.

CHAIR: I warn the member. The member should cease interjecting.

Mr HOBBS: He asked the question.

Mr McGRADY: With due respect, I think the member is not telling the whole truth. With regard to the question you asked before, I have given you an assurance that I will check it out. Year after year we have certain members who come here with their conspiracy theories. The reality is that when we give you the answers they fade into total insignificance.

Mr HOBBS: I hope this one does, Minister.

Mr McGRADY: I will be more than happy to seek this information today and get back to you.

Mr HOBBS: Further to my last question, would it be correct to say that as the QIC operates wholly independently of government, as a GOC should, there is no recommendation or flow of information from your department that would in any way encourage the QIC to invest in firms receiving lucrative state government grants or information going back the other way?

Mr McGRADY: This is a matter which should have been asked of the Treasurer yesterday. I do not have any influence over QIC. It is a statutory authority. They deal with their investments and other activities themselves. It does not come under my portfolio. I would suggest that if you want more information you either read the transcript of some of the questions which were asked of the Treasurer yesterday—

Mr HOBBS: Is there any contact from your department?

Mr McGRADY: I have no input into how QIC invests and what they lend out.

Mr HOBBS: There are some good links in that last question I asked you in relation to that last company. When you have a look at those you will see that there are some very interesting links.

Mr McGRADY: In fairness to me and the department allow us to check the claims that you have made.

Mr HOBBS: I note that the share price of Peplin Ltd earlier this week stood at about 30c a share. Was a decision by QIC to buy 650,000 shares in Peplin Ltd, of which Wayne Goss is a director, at between 64c and 84c a share following the awarding of an \$81,840 Innovation Start-Up Scheme grant from your department entirely QIC's decision alone?

Mr McGRADY: Again, I think this is a question that you should have directed to the Treasurer when he was before the committee yesterday.

Mr HOBBS: It is your grant. I am asking whether the awarding of your grant was entirely your decision and that you were not influenced by anybody else.

Mr McGRADY: I explained before how the system works. It is not entirely my decision. I do not know when such a grant was approved. I do not know whether it was before my time. Certainly it was not only my decision. If a grant had been approved it would have gone through the normal processes which I outlined before. It would have been considered by the responsible officer within the department. In many cases it would go before a committee of the department. It would then come as a recommendation to me. I have explained what I do when I receive such recommendations. That is the answer I will give. I think you have missed the boat because some of these questions should have been referred to the Treasurer yesterday.

Mr HOBBS: Further to the business development service outline on page 5 of the MPS I refer to the \$125,000 grant given to Farmacule BioIndustry Pty Ltd in August 2003. So given your last answer we can therefore assume that your department acted completely free of any advice from any existing or former Queensland Treasury officials?

Mr McGRADY: I do not know what officials do. I do not know what discussions took place. When you were the minister you did not know what discussions took place. I have explained to you how the system works. I do not know, but maybe from time to time advice was sought.

CHAIR: The time for non-government questions has expired. The next round of questions is from government members.

Ms STONE: Minister, you mentioned the proposed PNG gas pipeline in your opening remarks. Can you please inform the committee of the progress of the project and how the government has been involved?

Mr McGRADY: Thank you for that very topical question, because every time you open up the business pages of the national press you see stories about the development of the PNG pipeline. These are indeed exciting times for the Papua New Guinea gas pipeline project.

I have been up to the area in PNG about three times, on one occasion accompanied by the current Premier when he was Leader of the Opposition. I have been involved in this project for about 10 years, so I am feeling very pleased at the developments which are currently taking place. But the \$5 billion project involves the development of gas processing facilities in PNG and a natural gas pipeline from the PNG highlands to markets in Australia, and of course Queensland will be the biggest winner. In October last year the project partners announced that they would commit to the front-end engineering and design, or what they refer to in the industry as the FEED stage for this project.

The commitment to FEED required an investment of about \$150 million. The project partners took this step without sufficient gas orders. However, recently we have seen a major turning point. In the past week alone the project has announced two significant new customers. Alcan's refinery at Gove in the Northern Territory has signed up for 43.5 petajoules of gas a year and just yesterday AGL, one of Australia's leading energy suppliers, announced a contract of 1,500 petajoules over 20 years. With these signings, it will potentially supply gas to six of Australia's eight states and territories. Until the FEED studies are completed, we cannot be totally sure about the project's commercial viability. But the momentum is certainly there.

Contracted volumes are now reaching the levels required for the project to go ahead. However, this has not always been the case. This time last year it looked as though the project might not proceed. It was on this very day last year that I had the meeting with the proponents and the Commonwealth government to see what could be done. The Queensland government recognised the strategic importance of this project for the state's economic future. We therefore promised assistance to the QAL gasification project on the condition that it used PNG gas. I am today delighted and proud to say that this commitment from the Commonwealth and from our government assisted the project partners to make the FEED decision. In fact, yesterday at a conference over the road at the convention centre Ian Macfarlane and I took a moment to congratulate ourselves on behalf of the two governments for the position the PNG project is in. Let me say this: I spoke before about jobs, jobs, jobs. Let me tell you that

if this project goes ahead—and I am sure it will—it will be jobs, jobs, jobs, jobs for thousands of Queenslanders. Again, when you have projects this size, it does not happen overnight. This is 10 years in the making. We are still not there, but I am confident that we will be.

Mr CHOI: I was reading an article in the *National Geographic* two weeks ago regarding the consumption of hydrocarbon oil and whether it has reached its peak. Therefore, I read with some interest in the MPS at page 4 where you have allocated \$7.3 million over two years for the implementation of the Ethanol Industry Action Plan. Can you please explain to us what that is about and how will that help the community?

Mr McGRADY: Again, I thank the member for that very sensible and topical question. A study by the Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics found that the number of probable traffic pollution deaths in Australia's capital cities was 1,200 in the year 2000. In Australia there were 2,400 hospital cases and 21,000 days of asthma attacks resulting from traffic related pollution. The study also found that the economic burden of health effects from traffic related pollution in Australian capital cities amounted to \$3.3 billion in the year 2000. The use of a 10 per cent ethanol blend leads to, firstly, a reduction in carbon monoxide by between 25 per cent and 30 per cent; secondly, a net reduction of carbon dioxide by between six per cent and 10 per cent; thirdly, a reduction of volatile organic compounds by about between seven per cent and 10 per cent; and, lastly, for diesel and ethanol mixes there are significant reductions in sulfur dioxide and particulate matter emissions.

Placing ethanol in fuel blends creates a more complete combustion of fuel, and that means less emissions. Having ethanol in the fuel as a 10 per cent blend will simply mean cleaner air. With the continued urbanisation occurring not only here in Queensland but right across the nation, there is certainly an urgent need for cleaner air. We can get cleaner air by using ethanol in our fuel. I think that the 2,400 hospital admissions across the nation for asthma linked to traffic related pollution is certainly too high, and I am sure that every mum and dad would agree with that statement. So the use of ethanol in our fuel will reduce the number of these cases. There are also significant environmental benefits from using ethanol blended fuel as it reduces greenhouse gas. This reduces the impact of our activities on global warming.

I recently went to the United States. I had discussions with a whole number of organisations in Minnesota, including the Governor. They have a 10 per cent mandate now. That is currently about to change to 20 per cent. But above all else, the Australian Lung Foundation has come out in Minnesota actively supporting the introduction of ethanol in petrol. I have had discussions just in the last week with the asthma foundation and the lung association. The lung association in particular is very keen to get behind this campaign. In the past I have been selling and the government has been selling the use of ethanol as the saviour of the sugar industry. What we are doing now is saying that not only will it save the sugar industry but it is also going to create a better and a healthier climate for people to live in. If anybody wants information, I would be more than happy to give you one of these booklets.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. It sounds good.

Miss CROFT: Page 4 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement indicates that the Burnett River Dam will finally be completed by the end of 2005. Can you please update us on the progress of the construction and the expected benefits to the surrounding community for that project?

Mr McGRADY: I certainly can, and I thank the member for the question because it gives me the opportunity of being able to talk about benefits which these major projects have to regional Queensland. The Burnett Water Infrastructure Project represents a major government commitment to improving the reliability of water supply for the Wide Bay and the Burnett region. I am pleased to report that construction of the Burnett River Dam is on target for completion in time for the 2005-06 wet season. Progress to date includes completion of river diversion works and foundation treatment works in the riverbed and the dams; placement of roller compacted concrete for the main spillway wall within the river banks to reach its final height of approximately 36 metres in May; and concrete protection works for the main spillway wall have commenced. The Eidsvold Weir is now operational and beginning to store water and other infrastructure associated with the dam, such as the new access roads and a bridge at Mingo Crossing, are now complete.

The project is bringing clear economic benefits to the Burnett region. At peak construction, the work force numbers exceeded 450 with a significant proportion coming from the local Wide Bay area. Indirect benefits from the project have also been significant, with approximately 200 businesses in the Wide Bay-Burnett region supplying products and services for the project. An independent assessment of the development indicates the project could potentially increase net wealth in the region by up to \$800 million per annum and create more than 7,000 new jobs, yet we still have people opposed to this development. The project is just another example of the Queensland government's commitment to delivering projects which create jobs and drive economic growth in all corners of the state. The government's approach to the project focuses not just on achieving outstanding economic outcomes for the region but environmental outcomes as well. This is a shining example of the Smart State at its best.

The other thing I want to say is that during the construction of this dam we had a problem—a problem where a company went bust. I again want to have placed in *Hansard* the appreciation and the

gratitude that we all have to those workers and management who have been involved in the construction of this dam during some difficult times. But, again, I believe they have come out as true Queenslanders. In fact, during the difficult periods productivity at the dam increased, and I think that that is something which we should all be proud of.

CHAIR: We should be, Minister. I refer to page 2 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement which indicates that the department has contributed to the creation of jobs through financial and non-financial assistance. How do the facts contrast with the views of Commerce Queensland on business assistance?

Mr McGRADY: I do not have too much to say about Commerce Queensland. I do not really waste my time reading some of the nonsense that it goes through with. But let me just say in answer to your question—and I thank you for it—the department's specific programs and grant schemes generated or retained over 25,000 jobs at a total cost of \$56 million, leading to an average cost of \$2,234 per job. These figures do not include jobs generated through the more general activities of the department. The majority of the activity focusing on job creation, as I have said before this morning, took place in regional Queensland. Some 48 per cent of business and market development services and innovation clients are located in regional Queensland. Do you remember the old cry some years ago that everything is centred on the south-east corner? Well, those days have gone! An estimated 87 per cent of jobs generated by major projects are in regional Queensland and 76 per cent of jobs from Queensland investment incentives schemes are in regional Queensland as well.

The targeted industry grants scheme has led to an estimated 4,500 jobs being created or indeed retained. It has led to \$247 million in capital investment, \$117 million in import replacement and \$389 million in exports. The Queensland Investment Incentive Scheme grants have led to an estimated 1,300 jobs being created or retained. Importantly, as previously mentioned, 76 per cent of these jobs are in regional Queensland and \$106 million in capital investment. The Regional Business Development Scheme has led to an estimated 185 jobs being created or retained, \$18 million in capital investment and \$6.5 million in exports. From infrastructure and project facilitation, there are committed projects that have led to an estimated 15,500 jobs that have been generated or retained. These are just some of the success stories of the assistance to businesses offered by our government.

As you mentioned, Commerce Queensland conducted a survey with biased and loaded questions suggesting that the schemes were of questionable value. I said, 'Don't bother bringing the results of the survey to me because I don't believe a word that Commerce Queensland utters.' As far as I am concerned, Commerce Queensland is playing the old game of doing a survey. It never says how many people were interviewed and how many people responded, but it runs around with the results. I am sure that many people in this room today have done similar activities.

Ms STONE: Minister, in your opening remarks you mentioned that there were some really exciting developments happening in Queensland in relation to unmanned aerial vehicles. I think if I remember correctly there is a display on today.

Mr McGRADY: I thank the member for the question. As you rightfully say, there is a display and the people from CSIRO and the Queensland University of Technology are displaying that in the media room where we normally have conferences. But unmanned aerial vehicles are the next big thing in aviation, and Queensland is going to be a world centre for their development. The United States has used them in both the Afghanistan and the Iraqi conflicts and for border patrols against illegal immigrants and indeed drug traffickers. There are many potential civilian uses. For instance, in Queensland unmanned aerial vehicles could monitor kilometres of fences, pipelines or indeed powerlines. Why spend weeks in a four-wheel drive searching for a fault when an unmanned aerial vehicle can lead you straight to the problem?

I am happy to say that Queensland is going to play a leading role in the development of unmanned aerial vehicles. The Queensland University of Technology and CSIRO were awarded \$3.5 million under the Smart State Research Facility Fund to establish the Australian Research Centre for Aerospace Automation. This facility will be based at the Da Vinci precinct at Eagle Farm and will carry out research into the use of unmanned aerial vehicles in commercial applications. The testing for these unmanned aerial vehicles will occur in Kingaroy. I am sure that the former state Premier would have been delighted if he had heard that news before he passed on.

The Commonwealth government and the Civil Aviation Safety Authority have identified a test and training area to the northwest of that town. It is an area 30 nautical miles wide by 300 nautical miles long and to an altitude of 50,000 feet for the operators. The Kingaroy Shire Council will also build a common user facility at Kingaroy airport to be shared by up to 70 Australian and international companies. The Australian Defence Force has two UAV projects in their forward plans and again Queensland is in the thick of it. The first project involves unmanned aerial vehicles to be operated by an Army unit at Enoggera. The second project involves the Defence Force trialling two unmanned aerial vehicles off the northwest of Australia. Two bases in south-east Queensland, RAAF base Amberley and the Oakey Army base, are likely candidates to be involved. The department is also in discussions with two interstate firms about the reallocation of their operations to Queensland. Madam Chair, doesn't it make you proud to be a Queenslanders?

CHAIR: It certainly does.

Ms STONE: Especially today, with the State of Origin.

Mr McGRADY: On a State of Origin day.

Mr CHOI: The federal government recently announced the upgrading of the nation's naval defence capabilities. Can you advise the committee what steps have been taken to ensure Queensland companies can take a significant slice of that contract?

Mr McGRADY: I certainly can. As you rightfully said, the Australian government is upgrading its naval defence capability and is seeking a builder for two amphibious ships. The value of this contract is estimated at \$2 billion and the decision is expected some time next year. We have been working with the likely contractors, who are interstate shipbuilders, notably ADI/Forgacs and Austal/Raytheon, promoting Queensland's capability and, of course, our expertise. Modern defence vessels, such as amphibious ships, are built in modules and then put together at a final assembly point. The Queensland government has identified and worked with a number of local engineering firms who have the expertise and capability to undertake modular construction work. I met with a number of these companies on 1 June this year following the announcement of the air warfare destroyer contract. These companies have agreed to work together and in combination have the capacity to undertake up to 50 per cent of this module work creating up to 700 jobs in Queensland. The consolidation work can be carried out at Forgacs at Cairncross dock, which is one of only two dockyards capable of taking a 28,000 tonne ship. We are also investigating the possible establishment of a calmer user facility on the Brisbane River. This will enable local engineering companies to fabricate 300 to 400 tonne modules, then barge them six kilometres up the river to the Cairncross dockyard for consolidation into the final ship. Other regional centres which could benefit would be Cairns and, in fact, some others as well. This is an exciting proposition. I mentioned before it could mean 700 additional jobs for Queenslanders. At the end of the day, that is what the Department of State Development and Innovation is all about: jobs, jobs, jobs.

CHAIR: That concludes the time block for government members. I would like to now move on to non-government questions. However, I would like to warn members of the committee that unless you allow the minister to answer the question within the time period you are actually impeding the work of this committee. I call the member for Gladstone.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: Minister, on page 4 of the MPS you relate some information in relation to coal infrastructure programs. As minister in charge of major development, what assurances can you give common facility users at the Port of Gladstone that coal exports and coal infrastructure, important as those needs may be, will not be given precedence over other port users, some who have been recognised by your department as projects of state and/or national significance?

Mr McGRADY: Can I just say that the Port of Gladstone and Gladstone city in recent years has certainly been an example to many other places around the world. There is not a place in the world which is not aware of the importance of the City of Gladstone and, in particular, its port. As you know, the development of this port certainly started through coal. Coal has and will continue to play a very important role in the life of Gladstone, but also in the life of Queensland. You refer now to some other projects and, in particular, I assume, the \$1.5 billion Comalco project?

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: Yes.

Mr McGRADY: The \$1.5 billion project at Gladstone from Comalco again will be using facilities and, as you know, there are some discussions taking place, or many discussions taking place, about stage 2 of that project. I have been involved in these discussions, so too have other people from both my department and the Premier's department. The port rules govern the operation of ships based on safety and navigation. But you are talking about a common user facility. We are in discussions about such a proposal and I am sure that in the not-too-distant future we will be able to make some announcements.

You would also be aware that for stage 1 of the Comalco project the Queensland government gave \$150 million. That is common knowledge. I understand that the federal government also gave some assistance. Part of the deal with the Queensland government was that we would give the \$150 million but do not come back for seconds. That was part of the agreement and you know that. The company has come back and is wanting further financial assistance and that is part of the negotiations.

We also have Macarthur Coal which to me is a great example of a Queensland company and what they are doing and there are some discussions taking place about common user facilities there. You also have the opportunity of other projects coming to Gladstone. So from time to time, as you know, we are certainly always happy to give you a brief on what is happening. I think the future of Gladstone is secure for many, many years to come and it is based on the infrastructure.

I just conclude by saying that there has been some criticism in some quarters that the government was not ready for this massive boom in the coal industry. I would also say that the coal industry was not prepared for it either. Had it been aware of this boom it could have taken certain actions. That is no criticism of the industry but I would certainly defend the actions of the government

and the vast amounts of money that the Central Queensland Port Authority is investing now in the future of that magnificent port.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: On page 5 of the MPS you report your department's interest in developing land in industrial precincts. The Aldoga land bank has been held for a number of years now and would be much more attractive to industry if it offered a greater level of infrastructure like water and power on site. What work is being done by your department, either alone or through the GEIDB, to facilitate provision of essential services?

Mr McGRADY: You are referring to the Aldoga land are you?

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: Yes.

Mr McGRADY: A lot of reports have circulated about the role of Aldoga. Aldoga is a private company. As I understand it, it has land in Gladstone—

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: This is the Aldoga industrial estate not the private company.

Mr McGRADY: Sorry, I thought you meant the company. Industrial development and creating land for industrial development is a prime responsibility of our government and, in particular, the department. Everywhere you go today people are demanding more industrial land to enable them to conduct their businesses. There is not a week that goes by where I do not sign contracts for people to move in some of these developments. The Queensland government certainly recognises the future development of global large-scale industries within the Gladstone State Development Area and that will be dependent on the availability and competitiveness of infrastructure to support both industrial and social development.

To be effective, infrastructure provision needs to be based on the optimum outcome in terms of costs and benefits rather than provided on a project-by-project basis. The infrastructure requirements to service current and proposed development within the Gladstone region include power transmission—as you mentioned—and related infrastructure; road and rail development, including realignment of existing rail infrastructure; common user port infrastructure, which again we have touched on; and common user material transport infrastructure such as pipelines and the like.

Over the last two years a range of infrastructure works funded by the Queensland government has been completed. These include expansion of the existing Yarwun sewage treatment plant; the upgrade of the Calliope River Road, which has become a major access route for heavy vehicles from the Bruce Highway to the Gladstone State Development Area and the adjacent Fisherman's Landing Wharf; the Gladstone Port Access Road, and other minor roadworks in the Aldoga precinct, to service the Comalco Refinery red mud dam; the Aldoga smelter site; and the proposed sewage treatment plant. Work is also well advanced on development of the new sewage treatment plant at the Aldoga precinct which will be required if the Aldoga smelter proceeds to construction. Some initial planning has been undertaken for other strategic road, rail and port infrastructure. The department has initiated the first stage of a strategic land use and infrastructure plan for the Gladstone area. Contractors have been engaged at a cost of \$90,000 to undertake a review of existing information and to provide recommendations on the area's future.

Mr HOBBS: If an individual held a key position in one of the Department of State Development's advisory committees and they just so happened to be a director of a firm seeking a grant, I ask what checks do you have in place to ensure such a person declares their interest and absolves themselves from the decision-making process in relation to that application?

Mr McGRADY: I thank the member for the question. When people are appointed to boards we get a CV and the details on the CV should be included.

Mr HOBBS: Further to page 3 of the MPS, if, as you say in your response to question on notice 615 of June 2004 that the department receives progress reports to demonstrate that the objectives of the projects are being met by the grant recipients, can you please explain why the Australian Securities Investment Commission has been advised that 13 grant recipients have been liquidated and an administrator appointed since receiving a grant from your department? I seek leave to table 13 companies placed in liquidation and/or administration.

Leave granted.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, why are you giving cash to dud companies?

Mr McGRADY: Again, I mentioned the theatrics of this place this morning.

Mr HOBBS: There are no theatrics, minister. This is a serious business. I mean, it is a serious question and I think you are trivialising it. I am really quite serious about this.

Mr McGRADY: You sit there, member for Warrego—

Mr HOBBS: I tabled some documents of companies that have gone broke.

CHAIR: Could you allow the minister to answer the question.

Mr McGRADY: You have tabled some papers. I do not have the luxury of being aware of the contents. The original question was how do I know that people who are appointed to boards do not have vested interests?

Mr HOBBS: Good question.

Mr McGRADY: The answer I gave you was that before a person is appointed to a board the normal procedure is that we get a copy of their CV where they would detail—

Mr HOBBS: That was the previous question, yes.

Mr McGRADY: That is right. You table a stack of papers. I have not had the opportunity to go through the papers or to get information as to what you are referring to. I accept your right to table these documents at such a hearing. In fairness to me as the responsible minister, I would need sufficient time to consider the claims that you are making. I will get copies of those documents and see what I can do.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, were you or your department made aware that at least 13 companies that you have funded are now either in liquidation or under administration? Is there any process to tell you that this is happening?

Mr McGRADY: I will ask the Director-General, Paul Fennelly, to answer that question.

Mr Fennelly: Mr Hobbs, I am not quite sure of the time frame you are talking about with respect to these companies, firstly, being under administration and in liquidation. We would need clarification on that. We have an independent unit which monitors the grants that we enter into with companies, and it randomly audits companies—and it has a series of regular intervals in which it audits companies—to ensure that the KPIs, key performance indicators, are being met. With respect to these suggestions of liquidations and administrations, of course some companies will experience financial pain and uncertainty. We are happy to investigate this, and the minister will report back on these companies. Because we do not have the documents in front of us, it is a bit hard to comment.

Mr HOBBS: Can you come back to the committee with that report?

Mr McGRADY: I will investigate the claims you are making and I will get back to either you or the chair.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, I want to move on to western hardwoods. Your government announced last year that you would purchase 25 per cent of the present millable resource in the western hardwoods region. Considering the fact that of the 14 mills, 12 have rejected your offer and two are interested in further debate, how do you propose to meet the unrealistic 25 per cent target? Also, can you explain to the committee why cypress pine is now included in the locked up area of the western hardwoods when last year at the estimates committee hearing you categorically said that cypress pine was not going to be included in this western hardwoods assessment?

Mr McGRADY: I thank the member for that sensible question. Western hardwoods is certainly an issue. It is an issue which takes the time of the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries, me as the Minister for State Development and Innovation and, to some extent, the Premier. In fact, a similar question about western hardwoods was asked of the Premier yesterday. I will briefly reiterate his response.

Mr HOBBS: I am not sure whether he was right though. I would prefer your answer.

Mr McGRADY: When you say you would prefer my answer—you know the old saying: you asked the question; I give the answer.

Mr HOBBS: I would like to get your answer.

CHAIR: The minister may answer the question in any way he deems fit.

Mr McGRADY: Thank you for your protection, Madam Chair.

Mr HOBBS: I do not think he needs protection.

Mr McGRADY: As the Premier said yesterday, the government is committed to protecting the conservation value of the western hardwood forests and trying to facilitate the transition to plantation resources. Since I have been in this position I have had numerous discussions with Rob McInnes from the timber association—a man of great honesty and he certainly does a tremendous job for his constituents. I have also had discussions with Dr Keto and other people. We have been trying to get a compromise. I thought that the more talks we had the closer we would get to some agreement. I have to say that we did move a lot closer but there comes a time when you cannot really go any further. So the Premier announced our policy with regard to the western hardwoods. A lot of discussion has taken place but there are still more discussions to take place.

I have been working on a separate activity—and that is that we had a quite successful project two years ago when the former minister, Jim Elder, was involved in the south-east Queensland agreement. When you have a situation such as this you do have job losses. So I, together with the Premier and other people, have been looking at how we can provide sustainable employment for some of those people who may, as a result of the government decision, find themselves without a job. We have been looking at fibre composites. As you know, we have spent about \$7½ million assisting the University of

Southern Queensland with some of the work it has been doing. The work is quite excellent. You also have Wagners.

Mr HOBBS: You have not mentioned the buyout of the mills.

Mr McGRADY: Again, you asked the question—had you left me to it you would have had your answer.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, through the Queensland Industry Development Scheme in 2002-03 your department provided a grant of \$24,000 to Leisure Pools Manufacturing Pty Ltd for product improvement. Minister, are you aware that Leisure Pools refuses to honour its manufacturer's warranty on its pools? It allows franchisees to illegally operate, installing pools on behalf of the parent company. It has been the subject of complaints through the Building Services Authority and the Office of Fair Trading. Does your department do any checks with state government departments and agencies to see whether companies you give grants to comply with state government legislation prior to receiving taxpayers' money? Are any checks done? I would like to table a letter you would be interested in reading, Minister, in which Leisure Pools is virtually threatening the people who had a pool put in which was damaged and if they go any further Leisure Pools will try to sue them.

Leave granted.

Mr McGRADY: Did you say 2002?

Mr HOBBS: 2002-03.

Mr McGRADY: That is a little bit before my time, I think.

Mr HOBBS: Obviously it was not you, Minister, but the department—

Mr McGRADY: The estimates is a time when you really should be discussing the budget. The estimates is all about the moneys which have been allocated for the future running of a portfolio.

Mr HOBBS: It is the same thing; they are still grants.

Mr McGRADY: I am not aware of the particular case and nor should I be really.

Mr HOBBS: No, you would not be—fair enough.

Mr McGRADY: My understanding is that the Building Services Authority would, in fact, be the organisation that would check details such as these. I mentioned before about milestones. You asked: do we as a department check before we have given or, indeed, after we have given grants? The government incentives are linked to economic outcomes such as jobs and contracts for other companies. Share prices go up and share prices sometimes come down but our incentives continue to provide outcomes for the state. As an example, when companies sign agreements to accept financial or other assistance from the government they have to agree to certain milestones. If they do not meet those milestones we can and, in fact, do—as we did with Citibank—withdraw our financial support. I do not know what happened with the \$24,000 grant we gave to that pool company. It was before my time. In answer to your question, yes, we do check what these people are doing—if we do not, certainly other government instrumentalities do. But \$24,000 is a substantial amount of money. I would certainly hope that that company has met the requirements of the grant. Again, I will check that out.

Mr HOBBS: Minister, I note that in submitting questions on notice Nos 16, 17 and 18, the chair of the committee advised me that your department said it was too onerous to outline the terms, conditions and targets set for each entity to meet and fulfil as agreed when they receive government assistance. Minister, if your department does not keep this information, how do you ascertain taxpayers are getting value for money and collaborate the output performance outlined on pages 8 to 12 of the MPS? Also, at the last estimates I actually did get this information. There is a spreadsheet and all you have to do is click on the different windows and up they come. I am interested to know why it is so hard to find.

Mr McGRADY: The member would be aware that we try to give as much information as we can. Departmental officers still have their duties to do—what they are being paid for. As you would know when you were minister, estimates do consume a tremendous amount of time for all of the department, whether it be the regional offices or the city based offices. To try to deliver all of the information which is requested really does become a massive task. We do our best. You, the member for Gregory and other members know that if you want information all you have to do is come and ask me and I will get the information to you. It is not a secret society. Where possible, we will get the information for you.

To get every single piece of information about transactions from the department over the last 12 months really is a major task. We try and maybe if you submit a question on notice through the parliamentary system we can get the information for you. But to try to get every ounce of information which is requested really is a massive task for our staff. You can see some of the documents in front of us now. All that documentation is for just in case one of the committee members asks a question, and this is all work which has been done in the last couple of months. If you want to submit a question on notice through the normal parliamentary system, we will get the information for you.

Mr HOBBS: Thank you, Minister. I was intrigued because there is already an assessment done as to how it is going and that comes into the MPS. Anyway, I will ask the question on notice. I refer also to the Queensland Investment Incentives Scheme through which \$82.2 million was spent over the last three years. I note that in 2002-03 there were nine grants in total and two were New South Wales based; in 2003-04, 18 grants in total and six were New South Wales based; and in 2004-05, nine grants in total and seven were New South Wales based. Minister, are you helping out Bob Carr's election campaign in New South Wales or do New South Wales business people think there is easy money up here?

Mr McGRADY: Bob Carr does not need my assistance, let me assure you, with the calibre of some of the people he has opposing him. I do not involve myself in the politics of other states or territories. They can do well enough themselves. All I say is that wouldn't it be lovely if you had the likes of Bob Carr coming to Queensland wanting to know why we are so successful?

Mr HOBBS: You are giving companies plenty of money, Minister.

Mr McGRADY: We are successful. I know you said before that I have already said it, but I will say it again: we have the lowest level of unemployment in 30 years. Our economy has grown faster, doubling that of the national average. It is a tremendous record. One of the reasons for that is some of the schemes we have in place to encourage people to come and invest in Queensland and to bring jobs to Queensland. You mentioned before that two companies that received grants had their people outside of Queensland. The whole idea is that, if they themselves will not relocate to Queensland, they would have to be part of encouraging other businesses in that state to relocate here or perform here to provide jobs. The whole theme, the whole principle, of these grants is to provide jobs and prosperity to our state. I can assure you that no grants would have been given unless we took the view that it was in the interests of Queensland to offer those grants to those prospective companies.

CHAIR: Order! The time for non-government questions for this portfolio has expired. The rest of the time will be for government members.

Miss CROFT: Minister, can you please comment on ways the Queensland government is promoting science and biotechnology to the wider community?

Mr McGRADY: I certainly can. Again, the Premier and I recently went to Philadelphia for the BIO conference, which attracts over 20,000 people each year. Science and innovation are key components of the Queensland government's Smart State Strategy. You hear the Premier and other ministers talk all of the time about the Smart State. The Department of State Development and Innovation has progressed a number of initiatives to promote science and innovation to the wider community. Many of these programs have been specifically designed to build upon the natural interest and curiosity that many young people have for science and the natural world and will hopefully encourage them to consider transforming that natural inquisitiveness into an exciting and rewarding career in the sciences.

The Queensland government's Bio Bus is an excellent example. This is a bus that is travelling throughout the length and breadth of Queensland where we are having students, teachers and members of the community coming on board to try to get a better understanding of biotechnology and how it affects people's everyday lives. It also encourages young Queenslanders to take up a career in biotechnology. In fact, one of my advisers is a graduate in biotechnology and does a tremendous job, both in my office and within government.

The Bio Bus was officially launched on 11 May. Over the course of the next two years the Bio Bus will visit more than 80 locations in rural and regional Queensland. It is expected that approximately 300 students per week will jump on board the Bio Bus, and six to 12 teachers per week will receive professional development training in the field of biotechnology. The Bio Bus is a great initiative to promote science and innovation to regional and rural Queenslanders. Right now the Bio Bus is making its presence known through the Darling Downs and will later be at the Ekka and the Queensland Museum.

Another example of the government's commitment to the development of science is the successful Science on Saturday. I have attended a number of these days. The last one I went to was in Camooweal in my own electorate. This is where young kids come along and involve themselves in helping to discover the perpetrators of crime through some of the DNA, fingerprinting and the like. You see the kids, their parents and grandmothers coming in and getting involved with science. If any member here has not participated in Science on Saturday, when it comes to one of your schools make sure you do. They are just two of a whole series of initiatives we have to try to get kids and people involved in the sciences.

CHAIR: Minister, earlier in the hearing you talked very favourably about ethanol and the environmental benefits of ethanol and the widespread support for it. I refer to page 4 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement which indicates that \$7.3 million will be spent on an ethanol action plan. Could you explain the economic benefits of using ethanol in vehicles?

Mr McGRADY: I certainly can. In the last week this has been receiving tremendous national and statewide attention in the media. I have already answered one question on ethanol, but the economic benefits of developing the ethanol industry are very, very significant. It reduces the trade deficit. It

creates new jobs. It creates new investment. It encourages new skills development in the labour market, and it assists with regional development.

The national trade deficit in petroleum has tripled in the last 10 years. According to the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics, the deficit in the financial year 1996-97 was \$A2.1 billion. In 2004-05 it had climbed to \$A6.2 billion. Using ethanol in fuels will reduce the imports of petroleum and will reduce the trade deficit. That is one aspect of it.

Consultants LECG have done an economic analysis on two scenarios. The first is that demand for E10 is 30 per cent of the Queensland market, and the second is based on the introduction of a mandate requiring all fuel to contain ethanol. In the first scenario, they predict that 2,038 jobs would be created by 2010. This is an independent consultant, not the government. This includes construction jobs and the jobs associated with the ongoing operation of the ethanol plants. \$441 million would be added to the Queensland economy. Based on a mandate—this is something that we are pressing the federal government to introduce—the number of jobs would rise to 6,886 and just under \$1½ billion would be added to the economy. These figures are based only on supplying the Queensland market. They do not take into account that Queensland ethanol plants could be called on to supply the needs of the other states.

Being the most decentralised state in the nation, it is important that we encourage the formation of jobs in regional Queensland, and the development of an ethanol industry could make an important and vital contribution to that. As an example—and again I go to Minnesota—each ethanol plant costs about \$US35 million to construct. That provides jobs right across the rural parts of the state. Imagine that happening here in Queensland. That can happen if the federal government takes our advice and the advice of some in the National Party at the federal level, too, and mandates ethanol. We would have all these jobs. We would have cleaner air, regional development and a healthier lifestyle.

CHAIR: Let us hope they take your advice, Minister.

Mr McGRADY: I am sure they are starting to.

CHAIR: I call the member for Capalaba.

Mr CHOI: Minister, I am sure you agree that small businesses are the backbone of our economy in Queensland. More than 90 per cent of businesses are small businesses, and they employ over 70 per cent of our work force. Could you advise the committee what initiatives this government has undertaken to assist small business in Queensland?

Mr McGRADY: I thank the member for the question. The first initiative—the most important initiative—was making you chairman of the small business council. I am serious when I say that. Small business accounts, as you say, for over 96 per cent of Queensland businesses. Our government actively supports small business and has a range of initiatives in place to assist small business to grow and prosper. Many of these grants that we have been talking about today go to small businesses.

In November 2004 the new Queensland Small Business Advisory Council was appointed. What happened then was that we had small business operators and representatives of business and industry associations. The council provides a grassroots link to small business so the government can continue to deliver results. The government also recognises that management skills are one of the keys to small business success. For this reason, the government provides a range of face-to-face workshops and seminars addressing core management skills. Last year more than 690 workshops and seminars were delivered across the state attracting more than 14,300 participants. The government also operates Smart Skills online so businesspeople can upgrade their skills from the comfort of their home or their office. To date, 19 online learning subjects have been launched. Smart Skills online was accessed over 90,000 times during the year, with approximately 6,000 learning modules completed.

The Smart State business web site is Australia's most comprehensive and progressive web site for small business. The popularity of this can be seen by the fact that over a quarter of a million clients have accessed it since it was launched. In 2005-06 the web site will be further enhanced through the development of additional business management tools.

In order to provide assistance to growing small businesses, the Small Business Accelerator Program has been implemented throughout the state. The government has allocated \$7 million over four years to the program. These grants will assist businesses to take advantage of, and maximise, their growth opportunities. Assistance available under the Small Business Accelerator Program has been expanded with the introduction of the pilot Advanced Business Planning Program. This program will enable eligible clients to participate in a combined workshop and coaching program that focuses on growth, planning and management. The pilot is currently being delivered in Brisbane, Cairns, Townsville, Bundaberg and, of course, on the Sunshine Coast. The government also provides assistance tailored to the needs of Queensland businesswomen.

CHAIR: The member for Springwood.

Ms STONE: Minister, I refer to page 13 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement which indicates that the aviation sector will be targeted by supporting skills and capability development and assisting in sourcing businesses with airlines and large aerospace firms. Can you please advise what specific inroads are being made in the aviation sector?

Mr McGRADY: I thank the member for the question. One former Prime Minister once said, 'This is about bringing home the bacon.' The aviation industry certainly fits into that category. It is one of the great success stories of our government.

We are committed to creating a strong aviation industry in Queensland. The government has underlined this commitment to the growth of Queensland's aviation industry through the establishment of a dedicated team to help guide government support for the industry. The team will ensure the effective implementation of our government's aviation strategy and promote the development of Queensland as a major aviation hub for the Asia-Pacific region.

The government is also implementing a dollar-for-dollar grant scheme that will support Queensland's aviation small and medium enterprises with \$1.8 million over three years. This will assist local firms to upgrade business systems, adapt new technology, develop new product and improve export marketing. A further \$200,000 has been allocated to upgrade management skills to ensure that aviation small businesses can take advantage of emerging opportunities offered by defence and large aviation firms.

Additionally, the government has identified considerable demand and opportunities for growth in the aerospace industry in the Ipswich region, especially in the defence aviation sphere. As such, the government has shown commitment to the Amberley Aerospace Park initiative by purchasing private land adjacent to the air base. The establishment of an aerospace industrial park will provide sites for both new and relocating aerospace businesses, many of which will be undertaking contracts for the Commonwealth. Several major national and multinational businesses—such as Boeing Australia, Raytheon, Qantas and Tasman Aviation—have indicated that they are supportive of the project and would consider locating on the proposed aerospace park once it has been completed. This would obviously bring great benefits to the region and, of course, to the state of Queensland.

The government can already boast that it has secured a number of high-profile aviation investments in the 2004-05 year including a Qantas international cabin crew base in Brisbane, which involved the creation of 280 new jobs; a Hawker Pacific maintenance facility in Cairns, which involved the creation of 64 new jobs and \$7.6 million in capital expenditure; and a Jetstar technical and cabin crew base in Cairns, which involved the creation of 135 new jobs. This is all great news for Queensland. It demonstrates the hard work and commitment the Queensland government has to developing high-value industries for our state.

CHAIR: The member for Broadwater.

Miss CROFT: Minister, page 24 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement makes reference to the development of a number of cruise shipping projects. Can you please outline what progress is being made in relation to the Queensland cruise shipping industry?

Mr McGRADY: I thank the member for the question and for her ongoing interest in at least one of these proposals. The government is committed to taking an active role in growing the Queensland cruise shipping industry. It is part of our promise to provide more jobs for Queenslanders and to help Queensland's regions capitalise on their unique assets and resources. When I was recently in the United States we went to New York. We had a look at their cruise ship terminal. I do not think the Gold Coast one will ever be quite as big as the New York one, but we certainly learned a lot about what is required for a cruise ship terminal.

The government is currently examining the best way to deliver projects under its cruise shipping strategy. Firstly, I would like to draw your attention to the Brisbane cruise ship terminal project, which is a prime example of the government working in partnership with the private sector to deliver important infrastructure for the people of our state. This partnership will deliver a \$30 million cruise terminal funded completely by the private sector with Multiplex owning and operating the terminal for a maximum of 15 years. It is estimated that the project will generate an additional \$100 million in gross state product, 750 jobs in the construction phase, an additional \$53 million in gross state product and 450 full-time equivalent jobs per year in the operational phase. It is on track for an early 2006 launch.

Townsville is another key location to advance the government's cruise shipping strategy. It receives the fourth highest number of international cruise ship visits of any Queensland destination in addition to visits by military vessels on active service, rest and relaxation. You can imagine how much money those sailors spend in the port of Townsville. A 2001 study by AEC Economics showed that Naval personnel spend, on average, \$376 per day whilst on rest and relaxation in Townsville. Some United States Navy vessels carry in excess of 1,500 crew and stay for between three and nine days. As we can see, visits by military vessels provide a significant boost to the Townsville regional economy.

In July last year the government received an unsolicited proposal from Tabcorp and the Consolidated Properties Group to construct the cruise/military facility as part of an integrated development in and around the Breakwater Casino area. This proposal includes a substantial contribution to the cost of the cruise/military terminal. Whilst the government is now in discussions with Tabcorp and Consolidated Properties Group to determine whether this proposal can deliver a value for money solution to Townsville's requirements for a dedicated cruise/military facility, it will give due

consideration to any further serious proposals. The government is also continuing to explore the feasibility of a cruise-shipping terminal at the Gold Coast. If you would like to give me an extra minute, I can give you some extra information on that, Madam Chair.

CHAIR: Minister, you have probably covered most of this question but you told us how ethanol can lead to cleaner air—

Mr McGRADY: Madam Chair, I just asked you for another minute. I was just about to talk about the Gold Coast terminal, which the member, I am sure, is interested in. Could I have an extra minute?

CHAIR: Yes, of course. Go ahead.

Mr McGRADY: You have given me notice on the next question you are going to ask, so I will have time to think. I just mentioned that the government is also exploring the feasibility of a cruise-shipping terminal on the Gold Coast. A key part of this process is undertaking the relevant studies. To this end, the government has completed a preliminary assessment study in accordance with the public-private partnership policy and value for money framework. It has also commissioned Star Cruises Malaysia to undertake detailed computer simulations for cruise vessels entering and leaving the seaway and berthing at a proposed terminal.

Should the government decide to progress this project further, the next stage will be the detailed environmental impact assessments which will include full community consultation. So all those people on the Gold Coast who have views on this will have the opportunity, if we decide to go to the next step, to put forward their objections or indeed their support for the cruise ship facility. Let me conclude by saying that all the advice we have is that this is the new way in which holidays are going. This is a growth area in tourism—cruise holidays.

CHAIR: Minister, you have a couple of minutes to answer my question about ethanol. Could you detail how the ethanol action plan will help develop the industry and what steps the non-government sector can take?

Mr McGRADY: Thank you for the question. As I mentioned before, we have committed \$7.3 million to be provided over the next two years to promote ethanol industry growth and investment in our state. Major programs to be implemented under the action plan are just under a half a million dollars for rebates for cleaning storage tanks so that they can now hold E10 plus the conversion of bowser equipment and signage. We have allocated \$2.28 million for a marketing campaign to boost public confidence in ethanol and we have recently employed the services of a journalist. I refer to him as my myth-buster and his job is to go out and dispel those silly myths which some people perpetrate around the community about the damage which ethanol does to cars, which is a nonsense. So he is on board now. We have allocated \$1.1 million to aid the introduction of operational guidelines for diesel-ethanol blends, engine conversion and related issues, and \$2.2 million for blending and distribution facilities for E10 and diesel-ethanol blends. I could go on for another half an hour.

CHAIR: The member for Warrego tabled a number of documents which I have copies of which I would like to present to you before the end of the session. The time allotted for the consideration of the estimates for the Minister for State Development and Innovation has expired. I would like to thank the minister and his portfolio officers for their attendance here today. For the information of those attending today, the hearing transcript for the portfolio will be available on the parliament's web site in approximately two hours. The committee will now suspend the hearing for lunch and we will resume at 1.15 pm.

Mr McGRADY: Madam Chair, before you conclude the proceedings, can I place on record my thanks and appreciation to you for the very professional way in which you conducted yourself, to all of the members of the committee for the way in which they asked the questions—I thought it was done in a very professional manner—and to all your staff, who obviously have been working long and hard behind the scenes preparing for today. I would also like to thank the Director-General of the Department of State Development and Innovation and all of his staff who, as I said before, have been burning the midnight oil for a long time. They can go and have a coffee now. My personal staff, as you would know, have been under a tremendous amount of pressure.

I think estimates such as these reinforce the decision by the Goss government as to why we should have estimates. You may not see it here, but the work that a minister, his staff and the department staff go through in preparing for these estimates certainly ensures that the minister of the day knows what his or her portfolio is about. If there are any skeletons in the cupboard, they certainly come out in the preparations for today. So I thank you and your committee, all of the department staff and my personal staff for the way in which they have assisted in making this what I consider to be a very successful estimates hearing.

CHAIR: Thank you very much.

Mr JOHNSON: Can we talk now or what?

Mr McGRADY: I will come back to the chair on that, Mr Johnson.

CHAIR: Yes, take the question on notice. The next portfolio to be examined will be Police and Corrective Services.

Proceedings suspended from 12.21 pm to 1.16 pm

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B—POLICE AND CORRECTIVE SERVICES

In Attendance

Hon. JC Spence, Minister for Police and Corrective Services

Queensland Police Service

Mr B Atkinson, Commissioner

Mr D Conder, Deputy Chief Executive (Operations)

Mr D Melville, Deputy Chief Executive (Resource Management)

Mr B Moy, Director, Officer of the Commissioner

Mr P Brown, Director of Finance

Department of Corrective Services

Mr F Rockett, Director-General

Ms A Hunter, Deputy Director-General, Correctional Operations

Mr C Udemans, Director, Financial and Administration (Acting)

Dr M Rallings, Director, Intervention Programs

Mr J Forster, Director, Facilities Management

Mr P Hollis, Project Manager, Estimates

CHAIR: Good afternoon. The Estimates Committee B hearing has now resumed. I welcome the Minister for Police and Corrective Services, the police commissioner, Mr Bob Atkinson, public officials and members of the public who are in attendance today. I would like to introduce the members of the committee. I am Julie Attwood, member for Mount Ommaney. My fellow committee members are Mr Vaughan Johnson, the deputy chair and member for Gregory; Mr Michael Choi, member for Capalaba; Miss Peta-Kaye Croft, member for Broadwater; Mrs Liz Cunningham, member for Gladstone; Mrs Rosemary Menkens, member for Burdekin; and Ms Barbara Stone, member for Springwood. In the audience we have Mr Simon Finn, the member for Yeerongpilly.

I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time limit for questions is one minute and that answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A 15-second warning will be given at the expiration of these time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. The standing orders require that at least half the time is to be allocated to non-government members. I ask departmental witnesses to identify themselves before they answer a question so that Hansard can record that information in the transcript.

In the event that those attending today are not aware, I should point out that the proceedings are similar to parliament to the extent that the public cannot participate in the proceedings. In that regard, I remind members of the public that, in accordance with standing order 206, strangers—that is, the public—may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the pleasure of the committee. I ask that all mobile phones and pagers be switched off.

I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Police and Corrective Services open for examination. The committee will begin by examining estimates for the Department of Police. The question before the chair is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

The minister may now make a brief introductory statement, which must be limited to five minutes under the standing orders.

Ms SPENCE: I am pleased with this year's budget as it ensures that the Queensland Police Service is equipped to continue its fight against crime. It is a budget that also further boosts the capacity and security of Queensland's prisons. For police, this government is providing a 57 per cent capital works increase on last year's budget. We are also funding an extra 228 new police positions. By September this year, we will reach our commitment of 9,150 police officers and by September 2006 we will have 9,378 police officers.

The 228 positions also include a staffing supplement of 50 police who will be used to fill critical positions made vacant by police who are on extended leave or in part-time working arrangements. This is a first and is a major step forward for the Police Service. These 50 positions will enable police to access part-time working agreements and get leave without pay for parental leave, high-level studies and secondments to other agencies and even overseas. The 2005-06 budget provides a record \$1.178 billion operating and \$160.50 million equity budget for police.

This budget builds on our 2004 election commitments to provide police with the tools, the numbers and the resources they need to enhance community safety and to continue to reduce crime. Crime continues to fall in key areas. The latest crime rates will be released in November in the Queensland Police Service's 2004-05 annual statistical review. However, a midyear statewide review by the Queensland Police Service of the six-month period from July to December 2004 found that there had been reductions in crime rates for sexual offences of 16 per cent and reductions in robbery offences of 10 per cent. Total offences against property were reduced by 12 per cent while unlawful use of motor vehicle offences dropped by five per cent.

This budget also has a strong emphasis on young people. The government is committed to reforming the child protection system, and in this budget we are funding a further 50 Juvenile Aid Bureau detectives to respond to child protection issues. These 50 officers are in addition to the extra 50 Juvenile Aid Bureau officers we funded last year. That means that over these two budgets we are providing 100 extra detectives, which is an increase of more than 30 per cent since this government began far-reaching improvements to child protection after the CMC report on foster care in 2004.

In January, Queensland was one of the first jurisdictions to sign up to the national child offender registration scheme, which enables police to monitor registered child sex offenders. Last week two offenders were charged for failing to comply with the register. This proves that the system is working. This register enables police to track offenders, so if they slip up they will be caught.

This budget is giving police more support to deal with the growing issues of mental health and homelessness. Up to 1,200 officers will receive specialist training under an initiative to establish mental health crisis intervention teams across the state. Police will be trained as first response officers to improve the response to crisis situations involving people with mental health disabilities. Police will also get more support to deal with homeless people. The police liaison officer community patrol program was set up in Cairns in response to Indigenous homelessness. It will be maintained in Cairns and also introduced to Mount Isa and Townsville.

The Beattie government is proud of its record of no escapes from secure custody. There have been no escapes from secure facilities in more than seven years and eight months. The budget will further bolster the capacity and security of the state's correctional facilities. A total of \$52.2 million will be spent this year on capital works, plant and equipment in Queensland's correctional centres. This marks the first year of a massive \$231 million investment over three years to fund the planning and construction of an extra 511 beds in our state prisons.

This expenditure is vital. Queensland has experienced a 142 per cent increase in prisoner numbers since July 1993, and a further 90 per cent increase is expected over the next 10 years. This financial year will see an increased focus on the rehabilitation of prisoners as well. Some \$3.4 million will be used to expand the number of rehabilitation programs for sex offenders including child sex offenders, and a further \$1.5 million will increase the number of programs available to offenders in secure correctional centres and in community supervision.

This is a law and order budget that will assist Queensland police and the Department of Corrective Services enhance community safety and prevent crime. I would like to now introduce the people at the table with me today. To my right is Commissioner Bob Atkinson. Next to him is Deputy Commissioner Dick Conder. In the middle we have the Acting Deputy Chief Executive of Resource Management, Mr David Melville. To my left is the Director of the Office of the Commissioner, Mr Bruce Moy, and at the end of the table is the Director of Finance, Paul Brown. We are ready for questions.

CHAIR: Minister, firstly can I compliment you on your very colourful name tags.

Ms SPENCE: I had not noticed them myself.

CHAIR: To commence the questions for non-government members, I call on the member for Gregory.

Mr JOHNSON: Good afternoon, Minister, Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner and the rest of the executive staff. I refer the minister to page 1-19 of the MPS. Dot point 4 refers to the government introducing legislation to allow specialist drug detection dogs to operate in licensed premises to detect illicit drugs as part of your government's 17-point plan to tackle violence in the inner city of Brisbane. On 1 March this year, when the Premier put out a media release on your government's 17-point plan, included within this plan was a commitment to an additional tactical crime squad of 14 officers operating from the Brisbane Central district. Minister, why is this additional tactical crime squad included in this year's budget given the violence that continues to threaten the safety of inner city Brisbane? When will this additional squad be in place?

Ms SPENCE: There is money in this year's budget to employ, as I mentioned before, an extra 224 officers. The tactical crime squad officer positions will be gazetted this Friday. We have been looking around for a premises for them. Some 14 extra officers will be added to the Brisbane city district. The police have managed to find them a location at New Farm. It is an old police station that they will refurbish. The positions will be advertised this Friday and I am sure that they will be filled very quickly. I am sure that there will be great interest in those positions.

Mr JOHNSON: Will you detail to the committee any of the measures announced in the 17-point plan that relate to policing that are not yet in place?

Ms SPENCE: I am happy to talk about our response to the 17-point plan. The first point was to introduce a lockout condition on all licensed premises that trade after 3 am in Brisbane. I understand that took effect on the weekend on 30 April and applied to 67 clubs, hotels and restaurants. We are committed to establishing a Brisbane Central District Liquor Unit. That has been implemented. Currently, this unit is staffed by two sergeants.

We are committed to the reorganisation of Queensland Police Services's Brisbane city division rostering. That has been done. They have been reorganised to provide a more effective policing presence. They have established an intelligence cell and allocated an intelligence officer to the division. They are in the process of completing an environmental scan and designating beat areas. They have civilianised a roster clerk position.

They have re-rostered and refocused the bicycle squad. We will be employing members for the tactical crime squad, which we are committed to. We are also committed to establishing a direct senior liaison point of contact between the Police Service and the Brisbane City Council. The position of Inspector, Support Services in the Brisbane central district has been designated as a direct liaison point. That person is undertaking that work.

We are currently undertaking a reviewing of the Bail Act and the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act. I expect to have changes to those acts in parliament this year. As I said, we are funding an environmental scan of the built environment which is another commitment of the plan. That is happening. We are committed to establishing a task force to monitor the implementation of the action plan. The district officer is actively involved in the Queensland government's city action plan independent task force. A lot of that work is going on.

The good news is that we are seeing a reduction in the number of offences in the Brisbane central district. The number of offences against a person has decreased by 10 per cent. There has been a 15 per cent decrease in offences against property and a one per cent increase in the rate of other offences. We are seeing assaults down and robberies down. Offences against the person are down by 10 per cent, unlawful entry is down by 11 per cent, other theft offences are down by 21 per cent, unlawful use of motor vehicles offences are down by seven per cent, fraud offences are down and handling stolen goods offences are down.

Mr JOHNSON: I refer you to page 1-21 of the MPS at dot point 3. It refers to the Queensland Police Service continuing to work in partnership with Queensland Health Scientific Services to implement the government's commitment to clear the backlog at the John Tonge Centre. What is the total number of cases currently awaiting analysis? Can you confirm how much funding the Queensland Police Service will receive in this year's budget towards processing the DNA crime samples at the John Tonge Centre? What will the funding be spent on?

Ms SPENCE: As you can see from the MPS we have allocated \$3 million this year to clearing the backlog. The figures are that as of 31 May 2005 the backlog of DNA crime scene samples greater than three months old was 11,336. A number of strategies are currently being implemented to reduce the backlog. We have already established a Queensland Police Service liaison unit at Queensland Health. They are providing assistance to the John Tonge Centre personnel in prioritising the crime scene samples that the police need to have processed to go to court.

I understand that there have been 22 new forensic biologists employed to undertake casework at the John Tonge Centre. I understand that the integration of information technology systems has enhanced efficiency at the centre. The tenders to outsource a lot of these DNA crime scene samples, which I talked about in last year's estimates, closed on 4 July. I understand that a number of tenders were received. They will be assessed. So we are putting great store in the fact that we can outsource some of this backlog as well as the fact that those new forensic biologists can complete some of this backlog.

You would be aware that we have established a ministerial oversight committee to look at this problem. I am on that committee, as are the Attorney-General and the Minister for Health. We have bureaucrats at a very senior level attending those oversight committee meetings. We have meetings once a month to look at this. The Police Service has nominated Assistant Commissioner Kathy Rynders to undertake this responsibility and work on this oversight committee. She is doing a fantastic job working alongside her counterparts in Health and Attorney-General's.

It is true that we are still grappling with this backlog. Every month the police are shutting down more clandestine drug labs in this state, for example. The police are doing their fair share of adding to the backlog every month, as we want them to. It is a challenge for us, as it is for other states, to get through this work. We are not unique in Queensland. Every state in Australia and, in fact, most countries in the world are experiencing these kinds of problems. However, we are taking it seriously. I am very confident that when we come back here next year we are not going to have the same sort of backlog issues to talk about and that we will have reduced it significantly.

Mr JOHNSON: We learnt that in the US. They have the same problem.

Ms SPENCE: That is right.

Mr JOHNSON: You might recall an article in *Courier-Mail* on 1 June in which a Brisbane magistrate was told that a scientist could not be assigned to a drug case until 2007. How many drug related samples are you advised make up the total number of cases at the John Tonge Centre?

Ms SPENCE: I know that as of 31 May there were 132 clandestine drug lab samples awaiting testing. The John Tonge Centre has recently put on three scientists—and they are about to start next week—to assist with that particular backlog. Given that last year alone the police closed down 212 clandestine drug labs, 132 samples awaiting testing is not too bad a backlog given the amount of effort that is required in testing those laboratories. I do not think that is necessarily the area of greatest concern in terms of the John Tonge Centre backlog. Obviously it is a concern that we still have 132 to be tested.

Commissioner Atkinson: Broadly, the analysis at the John Tonge Centre falls across four areas. The first is the crime scene DNA samples that have been referred to, which essentially come from property crime, breaking and entering offences and car theft. The second area is the illicit laboratories—and the minister has just referred to the number of those on hand and the number of finds in terms of illicit laboratories for amphetamine manufacture. The next area is also drug analysis but relates to drugs such as heroin where the purity of the drug is required in terms of quantity. For example, if police seize an amount of white powder they need to know what proportion of that is heroin. That can only be done at the John Tonge Centre. The final and fourth area is the area of serious violent crime such as rape and homicide where there is a need for forensic and pathological examination of samples that are taken from the crime scene and the victim.

The analysis across those four areas is highly complex and skilled. The analysis can be lengthy. One thing we have noticed—and it really surprised me—was the way the DNA samples blew out. I was surprised at the numbers of samples that our scenes of crime officers find at scenes. It is a critical and fundamental part of police investigation today. Previously one would have relied on witnesses and admissions. Today more and more police are relying on forensic evidence. This is not going to go away in terms of its importance in the future.

Mr JOHNSON: Minister, I refer to page 1-18 of the MPS. Dot point 7 states—

During 2004-05, the State Drug Investigation Group continued to enhance its capability to police the amphetamine market, through the establishment of a civilian illicit laboratory investigation team. This team will be responsible for the processing of illicit laboratories, enabling police officers previously used for this purpose to be used to enhance the State Drug Investigation Group's proactive investigation capabilities.

Minister, how many investigations have been undertaken by the group in each of the years 2003-04 and 2004-05? Of this number, how many prosecutions were commenced for each of the financial years?

Ms SPENCE: The first point of your question talked about the civilians who will be employed to assist the State Drug Investigation Group. This year, for the first time, there will be four civilians employed to assist the police do the work at the drug scenes. They will put the chemicals into containers and take those chemicals to the lab. I am told that the chemicals have to be taken to the lab via a special vehicle. You could appreciate that these labs are found all over Queensland. This involves two police officers driving, for example, for two days to a lab and then driving two days back to their station. You are taking a lot of police officers off the road. So civilians will do that work in the future. I am sure that that will be very successful. In terms of the other information that you just asked for, that is rather detailed and we might have to take that on notice.

Mr JOHNSON: That is a fair comment. Minister, I refer you to page 1-20 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement. The third-last dot point states—

The Child Protection Offender Registry will focus on proactive supervision and investigation of registered offenders to ensure compliance with the Child Protection (Offender Reporting) Act 2004.

I recognise that we cannot identify individual offenders. However, can you advise how many offenders are currently on this register, whether any offenders have failed to meet their reporting obligations to date and whether resources are sufficient for the QPS to ensure the register can be regularly monitored?

Ms SPENCE: A key focus of the first six months of operation of the register has been the back-capture of reportable offenders and to get them on the system—that is, reportable offenders currently in custody or released on supervision by the Department of Corrective Service. This involves around 13,000 offender records and was completed by 30 June 2005.

A risk audit of the back-capture process is being conducted at the moment to ensure that all reportable offenders are correctly identified and on the register. A computer based training package has been developed to assist in ongoing training of police and civilian support staff involved in managing, monitoring and reporting registered offenders in the community. This service has established a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Corrective Services to enable Corrective Services staff to serve notices to reportable offenders when they are released from prison.

To date there has been a high level of compliance by reportable and registered offenders. But, as I said in my opening statement, we have had the first two offenders who have breached their reporting requirements captured by the register. As well, the functionalities of the national database, or ANCOR, are still being developed. The service will continue to work with CrimTrac to implement additional functionalities as they become available. A memorandum of understanding with the Department of Communities and with the Department of Justice and Attorney-General is also being developed to enable Department of Communities staff to serve notices to reportable juvenile offenders and for magistrates and High Court staff to serve notice where appropriate. I am very pleased that Queensland is one of the first states in Australia to have got this register up and going on 1 January this year. The fact that in six months they have managed to get the records and the whereabouts and all of the information on 13,000 offenders obviously reveals that a lot of planning has gone into the establishment of this register. It has been a very good effort by the Queensland Police Service.

Mr JOHNSON: Thank you, Minister. Minister, my pet subject is the subject of the next question—a police helicopter. I refer to dot point 2 on page 1-17 of the MPS under 'Recent Achievements'. It states that funding provided in 2004 has seen the finalisation of the purchase of a 19-seat plane to improve the service's payload capacity. That plane is to become operational in 2005. Minister, this vessel is no doubt welcomed by the Police Service, but do you concede that the funding of a permanent helicopter for the sole use of the QPS would be invaluable as a tool in the fight against crime? When is your government going to make this commitment which would provide the Queensland Police Service with the same resources as their state counterparts? If you remember in your opening statement, Minister, you talked about tools, numbers and resources, and I draw that to your attention.

Ms SPENCE: I would have thought that the last thing the member for Gregory would have been advocating is a helicopter.

Mr JOHNSON: Not for me to get in, but no doubt these people will want to get in one. Let us be serious about this, Minister. I really believe that it would be a very valuable tool to the police.

Ms SPENCE: Okay. I do not think we can talk about this in three minutes. We would need a lot longer. As we have said so many times in the past, it is not a priority of the Police Service at this stage. The commissioner talks to me about the priorities of the Police Service. He has talked on many occasions about the—

Mr JOHNSON: And I respect that.

Ms SPENCE: If we had more money, the next thing on his priority list would be a plane to service western Queensland and then it would be another plane to service the Torres Strait. Then maybe after that we would look at a helicopter. The reality is that you have seen recently in the Lockhart River plane crash we had police on that scene in a helicopter immediately, and they were using Emergency Services helicopters, which are available to the police throughout the state and they use them regularly. If we had one helicopter, where would it be based? Likely it would be based in Brisbane. What are we going to use it for? A pursuit on the Gold Coast? If it is on the ground in Brisbane, it is going to take 20 minutes to get to a pursuit on the Gold Coast. Most pursuits are over within three minutes. So it is unlikely that even if the helicopter was in the air it would get near a pursuit, for example, to be of any assistance to the police.

Mr JOHNSON: But in life and death situations. I think that is paramount.

Ms SPENCE: Absolutely, but obviously the police throughout Queensland have access to Emergency Services and RACQ helicopters throughout the state and they use them—

Mr JOHNSON: Excuse me for interrupting, but those people are not trained personnel. They are not like our police.

Ms SPENCE: Yes, but police actually hop in those helicopters. The SERT team were being airlifted down to the Lockhart River crash in conjunction with Emergency Services pilots, and we got all of the SERT team onto that crash site immediately. There was no problem. If you have one police helicopter based in Brisbane, it is going to be of no use in the Lockhart River example.

CHAIR: The minister's time has expired and the time for the first block of non-government questions has expired.

Miss CROFT: Minister, page 1-37 of the MPS refers to the enhancement of the Queensland Police Service's capital works program to include an additional \$60 million over four years, which means a total of \$160.5 million in equity funding for 2005-06. How has this expenditure increased from last year and what will be the benefits for operational police?

Ms SPENCE: The \$160 million to be spent this financial year represents a \$58.8 million increase on the amount of capital funding spent from last year, so this represents an increase of over 57 per cent. The increase in capital spending is as follows: capital works spending this financial year will be \$46.81 million, which is an increase from last year's capital works expenditure of over 50 per cent; information technology spending this year will be \$53.33 million, which is an increase of over \$35 million from last year's expenditure; and plant and equipment spending also increases by nearly \$10 million to

\$60.3 million. The government is providing an additional \$60 million over four years for capital enhancement—that is, \$15 million each year commencing this year. This funding will form a component of the service's capital works program.

Key projects that will be progressed this year include continuation and replacement station and watch-houses at Gympie and Ingham; completion and replacement stations at Sarina, Southport and Stafford; the completion of the new police station at Mackay North; and the completion of stage 2 of Redland Bay and stage 3 of Toowoomba. We will provide new housing at various locations and continue our police beat program. The enormous \$53.5 million funding on IT will fund the continuation of major information management programs, including the integrated policing solution, the fixed data network upgrade and the desktop printer replacement program. Enhanced IT will provide significant productivity gains by reducing the time officers spend repetitively entering data and by providing systems that link data. Releasing operational police from data entry task time will mean an increase in proactive patrolling, investigation, community engagement and child protection. Finally, that \$60 million in plant and equipment will allow the service to continue to provide operational police with state-of-the-art plant and equipment including motor vehicles, vessels and communications equipment.

Ms STONE: The MPS on page 1-19 states that the service's sworn strength will be increased to 9,378 by September 2006 through the creation of an additional 228 new police positions, and I know that you also mentioned that in your opening statement. How is the service intending to achieve this increase? You also mentioned in your opening statement about the staffing supplement of an additional 50 police positions to assist to achieve this goal. Could you also broaden that comment, too, please?

Ms SPENCE: I think the police will have no trouble recruiting an additional 228 people from around Queensland who want to join the Queensland Police Service. In the past years the police have been training about 600 new officers, given that we have been adding to the numbers by 300 each year and allowing for the 300 attrition. I am very pleased that we are on track with our commitment to provide new police numbers in this state. As I said, we are going to have 9,150 police by September. The rolling program to train and recruit new officers is proceeding. As I said before, I am very pleased that this supplement of 50 new police positions to fill critical positions made vacant by those police who are on leave will, for the first time, start addressing some of the problems that police in various parts of the state have been experiencing when officers take extended leave. In smaller stations this is of course critical, because those officers have not been replaced.

But for the first time we will have 50 positions of officers who can go anywhere in this state to replace people who are on long leave. I know that the union particularly has been lobbying for this change for some time. Also, women police officers have talked to me about this issue over the last 12 months, because when they go off on maternity leave and are not replaced there is occasionally some resentment by their fellow officers because it means that they are short-staffed in that station. So these 50 new officers will certainly attempt to deal with that particular problem. As we have said, we are also allocating 50 of these officers as juvenile aid officers. We all know—and I am sure you know from grilling the child protection minister this morning—about the increase in child protection notifications and the fact that our juvenile aid officers are spending more and more time on child protection issues. So this will help alleviate some of that backlog for those juvenile aid officers.

CHAIR: I think the notifications for child protection issues are up 14 per cent or something like that.

Ms SPENCE: Yes. In various parts of the state juvenile aid officers will tell you that they are spending 90 per cent of their time on child protection issues and only 10 per cent of their time on juvenile justice issues. We really have a very good story to tell in this state in terms of juvenile crime and we do not want that to slip behind as those juvenile aid officers give more of their important attention to child protection issues.

Mr CHOI: Minister, page 1-21 of the MPS mentions funding for additional crowd control equipment for tactical crime squads in Cairns, Townsville and Mount Isa. In addition, Townsville's Tactical Crime Squad will also be boosted from 14 to 21 personnel. How will this enhance the operational capacity of police in north Queensland?

Ms SPENCE: In the statewide roll-out of tactical crime squads three squads were established in the Northern and Far Northern police regions in Cairns, Townsville and Mount Isa. Funding of \$750,000 has been allocated to providing members of those three squads with specialist equipment and training needed to effectively manage incidents that may arise. Equipment that will be bought and supplied to those teams and for their personal use will include: for team use, capsicum spray canisters, fire extinguishers, soft shields, trailers, tow bars for vehicles, medical kits, loudhailers and mobile phones; and for personal use, protective body armour, fire retardant clothing, boots, batons, riot shields, gas masks and canisters, radio headsets and thigh holsters.

Time and distance of course inhibit the ability of the Police Service to provide a rapid public safety response to northern and far-northern Queensland. Currently, Brisbane based members of the Public Safety Response Team are deployed throughout the state to provide crowd management at major civic events and to provide defensive capability where there is civil unrest. Police are progressing a number

of initiatives that involve these tactical crime squads in Cairns, Townsville and Mount Isa, and staff of those squads will be provided with upgraded equipment and training to enable them to undertake those duties of public safety in the far north of the state with a capability that they did not previously experience. Would you like to comment?

Commissioner Atkinson: Thanks, Minister, as indeed I would. I think that is an important initiative. Regrettably, events of recent times have indicated that the police do need to have a capacity to respond quickly. One of the great challenges for us in the police department is the enormous diversity of Queensland and its decentralised nature, so we just cannot afford to have the response capabilities solely in Brisbane. With the tactical crime squads at Townsville, Mount Isa and Cairns, the combined net effect of that is 49 officers, and that is 21 in Townsville—we are upgrading—21 in Cairns and seven in Mount Isa. That is a very effective unit. We would hope that they never have to be used, but it is a very effective capability if a circumstance arises or there are any particular conditions where we need a quick response from a team that is fully equipped, trained and able.

Might I just add that our policy is not always to resolve things by the use of force. We have had our policy demonstrated in that recent siege down at Crestmead, where we were prepared to sit it out for as long as it took to resolve it peacefully. That is our primary policy. But regrettably at times you do have to use force and it is important that the people who are put in that position are fully equipped.

Miss CROFT: Page 1-18 of the MPS discusses the Queensland Police Service's ongoing commitment to NATA accreditation. How has this accreditation improved police facilities throughout the state, as I note you recently opened the new facility at Nerang on the Gold Coast dubbed CSI Nerang.

Ms SPENCE: I know of your interest in ensuring that the police have first-class facilities on the Gold Coast, member for Broadwater. You were also present when we opened CSI Nerang in April. That \$585,000 facility or lab is the largest forensic lab in the state and I believe well equipped to house the 20 scenes of crime officers and fingerprint experts who will work out of that particular building.

The QPS has successfully implemented the requirements of the international standard for accreditation of its forensic services and Radio and Electronics Section Calibration Laboratory by the NATA testing authorities. These improvements were part of a program to upgrade the Queensland Police's 31 forensic facilities across the state in order to gain accreditation from NATA. The accreditation was granted in January this year and this was part of a \$6 million upgrade program that began in 2001.

In addition, approximately \$1.8 million was spent to provide 15 additional crime scene vehicles, 195 cameras, 90 fingerprint kits and 12 variable wavelength forensic light sources. The RES Calibration Laboratory achieved NATA accreditation in the field of electrical and chemical testing on 17 March 2004. The service's 31 forensic facilities received NATA corporate accreditation in the field of forensic science in January 2005. Forensic facility upgrades that are being completed to satisfy the accreditation standards include the provision of fully equipped relocatable laboratories at Ayr, Charleville, Dalby, Kawana Waters, Kingaroy, Longreach, Maryborough, Nerang and, of course, Redcliffe. Other major facility upgrades have been completed at the Forensic Services Branch Brisbane and the last one to be completed I understand is at Upper Mount Gravatt. So do not say that the minister gives any priority to her electorate. The new forensic laboratory located at Maryborough is, together with Nerang, now operational and satisfies international standards for laboratory accreditation. We have also done minor upgrades at Bundaberg, Cairns, Cleveland, Emerald, Gladstone, Gympie, Hendra, Inala, Indooroopilly, Innisfail, Logan, Mackay, Mareeba, Rockhampton, Roma and Warwick.

Ms STONE: I just wanted to say, when were you talking about the tactical crime squads before, that the Gold Coast Logan Tactical Crime Squad does a very good job. Miss Croft and I discussed that between ourselves and we felt a bit left out so we thought we should mention that. The MPS on page 1-19 notes funding to the Sexual Crimes Investigation Unit of \$1 million to be spread over three years. How will this funding enhance the unit's operational capacity to target internet child pornography?

Ms SPENCE: That \$1 million will make a significant contribution to enhancing that unit's ability to target internet child pornography. The Queensland Police Service, and I think this is a really interesting story and one that is not very well known, is the only Australian law enforcement agency which is a member of the International Groove Network operated by Interpol and that network examines all new series of child abuse images as they appear on the internet. It is an attempt to identify the location of the child victim and then focuses on rescuing the child. The service's involvement has resulted in the closure of 93 open international investigations dating back to 1998. We are way ahead of any other state in Australia in terms of internet child pornography.

Task Force Argos was also responsible for the Queensland response to the national Operation Auxin in relation to Australian residents who had purchased access to child abuse web sites. To date the service has executed 109 warrants resulting in 72 arrests on 2,726 charges and this operation has removed seven Queensland children from identified sexually abusive situations and identified an international pedophile network.

Since 2001 a covert team within Task Force Argos has targeted predators who use online chat rooms to access child victims and has arrested 62 offenders who have arranged to meet a child for sexual exploitation. To date this \$1 million that you were talking about has been used to provide

additional staff member positions, equipment, education and training and to conduct research. Last year three investigative computer analyst positions were advertised and these additional positions will assist in the forensic analysis of sophisticated computer systems and in investigating and recovering evidence of computer based crime with particular emphasis on child sex offences. They will also provide evidence in court and advice at interviews at court or tribunal hearings with an emphasis on the computer related aspects of investigations. As well, a staff development officer position has also been established. That person will identify staff training needs, help develop training packages and assist in the delivery of lectures. The officer will also review existing courses in the area of internet paedophilia investigation and develop new course curriculum material.

As well, between 17 June and 4 July this year two officers attended an FBI Innocent Images unit to evaluate and enhance their practices. They also met with US immigration and customs enforcement agencies in Virginia, the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Ontario. So we have also been sending our officers overseas to learn international best practice.

Mr CHOI: Page 1-18 states that Queensland was the first state in the country to have DNA person and crime scene sample profiles loaded onto the National Criminal Investigation DNA Database administered by CrimTrac. How would that assist police in solving crime?

Ms SPENCE: I am pleased you have asked this question because we hear a lot of about the problems with DNA and the backlog with the DNA at the John Tonge Centre, but the good news is that Queensland was the first state to have the DNA person and crime scene sample profiles loaded on the National Criminal Investigation DNA Database that is administered by CrimTrac. The government provided \$2.6 million over three years to link our DNA onto that database and to allow for more DNA testing. The QPS, in collaboration with Queensland Health, has used the CrimTrac national DNA database for all interstate matching.

On 10 June this year the Queensland Police Service began the country's first interjurisdictional exchange of DNA information with the Western Australian Police and both states have loaded more than 130,000 DNA profiles onto the national database for comparison. Within minutes, the DNA samples of people taken by Western Australian Police were linked to 14 previously unsolved crimes in Queensland for offences committed as far back as seven years ago.

This shows that crimes that were unsolved or previously thought to be unrelated can now be linked through DNA evidence. We are at present entering into ministerial arrangements and memoranda of understanding with the Northern Territory, South Australia, Tasmania and the ACT so that we can start exchanging DNA information with those jurisdictions. Negotiations in relation to establishing those same arrangements with New South Wales, Victoria, and the Commonwealth Attorney are continuing. Queensland and Western Australia were the first states on the starting block; they are already exchanging information. But as the other states load their information onto the national DNA database we are going to see a lot more exchange of information and we really are going to see a lot more old crimes and new crimes being solved through this rapid exchange of information.

CHAIR: That concludes the first block of government members' questions. I will call the member for Gregory to continue for the next 23 minutes.

Mr JOHNSON: Minister, with the international fanfare of state development minister, Tony McGrady, and the director-general of Premiers going to the United States related to the hopeful return of Dr Jayant Patel to Queensland to face charges in relation to the Tony Morris QC inquiry at Bundaberg, I understand that the federal authorities have now short-circuited the paperwork to allow Queensland police to go to the United States to bring Dr Patel back to Queensland. Minister, when will the instruction to send officers to the United States to carry out this extradition of Dr Patel be issued?

Ms SPENCE: Firstly, I would like to say that I receive regular briefings from the police about the issues surrounding Dr Patel and the issues surrounding the Morris Health inquiry. I am very satisfied that the police have put a suitable number of officers onto this case and they are working as fast as possible to investigate all those matters that one would expect them to. With respect to the investigation around Dr Patel I might ask the commissioner to explain the process there.

Commissioner Atkinson: If I run out of time I am happy to follow up through the minister. The first perspective specifically in relation to your observations are that the two detectives are waiting to go to the United States. The process that has to be followed is that a mutual assistance agreement has to be entered into and approved by the United States Department of Justice. That is facilitated through the federal Attorney-General and the federal Minister for Justice. We have had good support from both of those entities and the agreement is with the United States Department of Justice now. It has only just very recently been forwarded for their consideration. Clearly I am hopeful that they will endorse that. The principle is that you simply cannot have detectives from another country who come and work as detectives in your jurisdiction. Equally, we would not expect that detectives could come from the United States and work here as detectives or investigators in Queensland without our approval. As soon as that is signed off by the United States Department of Justice the minister has already approved the overseas travel for the two detectives and they will leave. But just one qualification, if I could make it, is that they

are not actually going over there to extradite Dr Patel; they are going over there to conduct inquiries on two counts. One is in relation to Dr Patel's application to practice here in terms of the claim that he fraudulently represented his qualifications and did not advise of his disqualification and, secondly, in terms of medical procedures he has conducted there.

Mr JOHNSON: I refer you to page 1-39 of the MPS, the capital acquisition statement. A notable absence in the projects earmarked for capital works is the replacement of the district headquarters and the police station at Longreach—which I might say is in my electorate—which first had funding committed to it in the 2003-04 budget for planning. There was a sum of some \$200,000. Minister, why have you put aside this capital works project which has featured as the Police Union's 'Dump of the Month' and when is funding going to be provided for actual work to commence on this capital program?

Ms SPENCE: I believe that I have visited the Longreach Police Station and watch-house in the last year. I acknowledge that as it was constructed in 1961 it does not provide state-of-the-art accommodation for police officers in the modern world and it does certainly need replacing. Money was allocated to commence initial planning for a new police station and it is certainly the service's intention to build a new police station at Longreach. The Queensland Police Service has a 10 year capital works plan and the new police station at Longreach is on that plan. The reality is that we keep increasing police numbers. We have increased police numbers by 30 per cent in the last seven years and while a lot of the existing stations were quite serviceable police stations they have become overcrowded as a result of more officers being stationed there and it has put a lot of pressure on the service's capital works budget. As I said, last year they had a capital works budget of \$30 million; this year they have a capital works budget of \$45 million. So we have seen, and I have seen as minister, the need to put more money aside for these capital works. There is still pressure to provide new police stations in various parts of the state and we are providing a number of new stations this year alone. Longreach, as I said, missed out this year, as you obviously observed.

Mr JOHNSON: And last year.

Ms SPENCE: And last year.

Mr JOHNSON: And it was on the year before.

Ms SPENCE: I can understand your frustration at that. I have observed police working conditions at Southport and in other parts of the state where officers are working in fairly unsatisfactory conditions and so there have been priorities, other than Longreach, that got attention last year and this year. I appreciate the desire of the Longreach community to have a new police station. In fact, I met with the mayor of Longreach. He came to see me about this issue last year. It will remain a priority for the police.

Mr JOHNSON: We will continue to talk about it.

Ms SPENCE: I am sure you will.

Mr JOHNSON: Minister, I refer you to page 1-38 of the MPS. The last paragraph on that page refers to the provision of \$9.36 million for resourcing support. Minister, this funding is the \$10 million that was committed in last year's budget, which means that only \$600,000 was spent in 2004-05. This brings me to the issue. We talk about police helicopters, tools and resources. I talk here about flak jackets. Maybe if Senior Sergeant Perry Irwin was wearing a flak jacket, maybe if we had a helicopter on the scene, then we might have saved some of our officers. I am talking about safety here. With \$600,000 spent last year, where has the rest of that money been spent?

Ms SPENCE: I might refer this question to Commissioner Atkinson.

Commissioner Atkinson: I will make some initial comments and then hand over to the finance director. The inquest in relation to Senior Sergeant Perry Irwin is commencing shortly. Again, just by way of clarification and without pre-empting the findings of the inquest, he was actually wearing a ballistic vest but tragically he was moving downhill and the person fired uphill. Ballistic vests are put on as a one-piece unit over the head and they are tied at the side, and the bullet went in between the tie and the vest. I guess that is fate. The bullet also travelled from about his hip and came out just above his shoulder. I am told that there was no chance of him being saved. But he was wearing a ballistic vest. It was bushland as well, so getting a helicopter would have been dubious. Equipment is critical, though, and the nature of this equipment is very expensive and fundamental. I will hand over to Mr Melville and possibly Mr Brown to respond further.

Mr Melville: Thank you, Commissioner. I am normally the Assistant Commissioner for the South Eastern Region and based on the Gold Coast. I think it is within that context that perhaps I could add some value to what has already been responded to. We have seen an exponential increase in funding in this area of plant and equipment over the past couple of years. If we look at the difference between this year and the previous year, we will see a movement of \$101 million to \$160 million. That is definitely going to make a significant difference at the coalface. There is no question about that. In my normal capacity as chair of the health and safety committee within the Queensland Police Service, when it comes to safety—when it comes to ballistic vests—the QPS will not compromise. If the situation were to arise where that boat of money had been spent, we would do everything possible to access other funds

for those health and safety issues, such as ballistic vests. Essentially from an assistant commissioner's perspective, we leave it very much up to the individual assistant commissioner to set priorities within his or her region. The assistant commissioner would take advice from the district officers in order to meet what is required for the individual area concerned. We are very pleased with the increase this year.

Ms SPENCE: In terms of that figure, you might make a comment, Paul.

Mr Brown: The increase in the services budget for plant and equipment will encapsulate items such as motor vehicles, greater communications, ballistic vests—things that are very important to the operations of the Queensland Police Service. We are very conscious that we try to spend all that money on the operational areas as much as possible.

Mr JOHNSON: Minister, why has it taken two years for the inquest into the late Senior Sergeant Perry Irwin to be conducted?

Ms SPENCE: That is not an area that is within my province to answer. You would have to talk to the coroner about those priorities. As police minister, I do not set the priorities for the coroner; nor does the government. It is up to the coroner to determine priorities and when inquests are going to take place. I cannot add any more than that.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: There has been a lot of work done over the recent past on a code of practice for the taxi industry. Is there any allocation of funds in this budget for police to be in attendance at taxi ranks?

Ms SPENCE: No. Can I hand that over to the commissioner to make further comment.

Commissioner Atkinson: Thank you for the question. It goes back to Mr Johnson's earlier question about safety in the central business district, particularly where one of the key issues—there are many issues—is getting people out of the Brisbane central district. In summer, particularly, there are around 40,000-plus people in the Brisbane city area with well over 440 licensed premises. So getting people home is critical. It is not only about getting them home but also about the down side of buses and trains, as people then go to a bus stop or a train station but many of them are still intoxicated and still have a way to go to get home. Ideally the goal is to get them out of the city and the Valley and quickly to their doorstep, and that is where taxis come in. We are happy to provide police where we have the resources available. That would clearly depend on what is happening at the taxi ranks. One of the issues is to try to get more cabs into the city so that we can get more people away using cabs. It is a very relevant issue.

Ms SPENCE: The issue is that you really would not want to see police act as marshals at taxi ranks. I understand that marshals at taxi ranks have been very successful in the CBD and in Cairns where they are using them as well. I do not think any of us want to see police officers undertake that particular job.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: The police would be in addition to the marshals who do crowd control. The comment was made to me at a meeting that in certain instances and at certain taxi ranks a police presence would be helpful, particularly on high-congestion nights—not every night but just on the high-use nights.

Ms SPENCE: I know that you would find in Brisbane, Cairns and any regional centres where there are issues at taxi ranks that the police are very involved in talking about those CBD crimes and would certainly station foot patrols around those hot spot areas because they regularly communicate with councils, the liquor providers and the taxi industry about when the problems are likely to arise.

Commissioner Atkinson: I agree. I do not think it is our job to be a marshal. But one of our strategies clearly is to try to prevent trouble before it starts. So by patrolling where there are long queues at taxi ranks you could possibly identify someone who is clearly about to cause trouble. In that context it would be helpful in terms of preventing some outbreak of drama.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: Question on notice No. 12 is in relation to the use of strip searches throughout police facilities. Based on the numbers that were made available, in 2003-04, 9,194 searches were conducted and, in 2004-05, 7,871 searches were conducted, which is a lot of searches given their very intrusive nature. You have stated in the beginning of your answer that, whilst there was no systemic abuse by police officers in relation to their powers to conduct the strip searches, there was going to be a change of policy. Can you touch on the sorts of changes that might be involved in order for the community to understand their susceptibility to searches?

Ms SPENCE: While we talk about the fact that there were 7,871 searches in 2004-05, for example, we do point out in that answer that that represents just over four per cent of the total number of custody entries into a watch-house in any given year. So I think we do have to have that in perspective. I actually thought it would have been higher than four per cent of people who are getting strip-searched in watch-houses. We are talking about four per cent of people who obviously the police suspect may have something hidden on them and who put themselves in danger. I know that the police have done a lot of work with watch-house officers on this particular issue to make sure that their procedures are improved. I will pass over to the commissioner to talk about that particular issue.

Commissioner Atkinson: It is one of our more challenging issues because we are in a very litigious world today and the police department has been sued by people because they were strip-searched and in once case sued by a person because that person was not strip-searched. The person had a razor blade and inflicted self-harm and is suing us on the basis that we should have identified that person as being at risk and we failed to strip-search that person. So whichever way we go it is difficult.

As the minister indicated, strip searches make up four per cent. The police actually do not like doing them. It is one of the more unpleasant jobs and certainly no-one gets any sense of satisfaction from it, but it is necessary. It is generally either for drugs or for some sort of weapon such as a razor blade or a cigarette lighter. In fact, a person incinerated themselves in the Cloncurry watch-house with a cigarette lighter. These are small items that are easily concealed.

It is something that we have under constant review and our goal is to try to minimise the circumstances under which we believe it is necessary to conduct a strip search. The strip searches are always conducted by people of the same gender as the person being strip-searched. So a woman is never strip-searched by anyone other than another female. We do endeavour to conduct searches with as much dignity as is possible under the circumstances. Regrettably, though, some of these people—many of them—are disturbed, angry, drug or alcohol affected and, in the worst case scenarios, potentially suicidal. It is a complex and difficult area and one that we take very seriously. At this point in time, given the numbers of people we put through—we keep around 90,000 in police custody each year—I cannot see that we will ever be able to totally avoid in the modern world the need to do strip searches.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: Without appearing to be fixated by the issue because I am not, the concerns that have been expressed to me have been in the area of civilians who are intercepted by police. We have read stories in the paper of people being picked up for unpaid fines and then they are strip-searched. The other area of concern that has been expressed to me is that of family members who go to visit somebody who is incarcerated. The last case in my electorate—and it is before your time as minister—was when the wife of a person who self-incriminated on child abuse 20 or 30 years was threatened with a strip search when she went up to visit him and, obviously, the visit did not go ahead. Why aren't statistics of strip searches, not of people who are incarcerated but of people who may have been arrested under a warrant or people who go to correctional facilities and are threatened with being strip-searched or who are strip-searched, kept separate?

Ms SPENCE: This person was a visitor to a watch-house, not a prison. Is that the case?

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: No, to a correctional facility.

Ms SPENCE: The reality is that people are only searched at correctional facilities if some presence of drugs is detected on them, usually by dogs, or when they go through the drug detection machines on entering the facility and there is some suspicion that they have drugs on them or are attempting to smuggle contraband. I talked to the media before about the fact that last month in Borallon Correctional Centre Operation Delta Fluid was undertaken by the Queensland Police Service, Corrective Services staff and Borallon centre staff. Each weekend last month visitors to Borallon who were suspected of taking in contraband were searched. I will give you some figures which I think are quite incredible.

As a result of that month-long operation, there were 14 arrests and 38 vehicles were searched. They retrieved over \$18,000 in cash believe to be the proceeds of crime, a mobile phone, drug utensils and prescription drugs. All of those items were attempted to be taken into one prison by visitors over one month. That just gives you some idea of how many people are trying to smuggle drugs and contraband into our prisons. I understand that as a result of this particular action a lot of people are no longer visiting friends and family in Borallon prison. But we do these kinds of raids throughout the prisons on a random basis throughout the year and I think for good reason.

CHAIR: You have time for another question.

Mr JOHNSON: Minister, did you make any representation to the coroner regarding the inquest into the late Perry Irwin being expedited in view of safety implications?

Ms SPENCE: No, I have not communicated with the coroner at all about that particular inquest.

Mr JOHNSON: As you can appreciate—

Ms SPENCE: The commissioner can state what the police have done.

Commissioner Atkinson: The deputy commissioner and myself meet with the coroner on a regular basis, sir. I think at our last meeting the coroner indicated that the inquest which has been announced in relation to Perry Irwin would be conducted soon. Again, without pre-empting the inquest, we debrief and review any situation at all. In this tragic case, of course, lethal force was used against a police officer. He was a fine, outstanding officer who was killed. In any circumstances where there is violence, and in circumstances as well where, tragically, from time to time police officers have to use lethal force against an assailant—the most recent one of those from memory was on the Gold Coast—we debrief afterwards in terms of the consequences and implications of that.

Personally, I think Perry Irwin acted heroically under the most difficult and dangerous of circumstances—there was a person who was armed with a high-powered rifle near a school who had also threatened to shoot at low-flying aircraft. At Caboolture there is an airport nearby for small aircraft. He made a decision to go in. He had a ballistic vest on. I just cannot see, personally, that it could have been done any differently or if, as a result of that, there needs to be any changes. We have not identified any at this stage. The coroner may well. But, in my view, it was one of those terribly dangerous circumstances where he had no choice but to take some action.

Mr JOHNSON: Thank you, sir.

CHAIR: The time for non-government questions has expired. Minister, page 1-10 refers to the review of the Queensland Police Service's radio communications and computer aided dispatch system, and how it interacts with other emergency services agencies and how this is leading towards establishing a long-term joint agency communication strategy. Can you advise if this review is complete and whether any initiatives have been put in place as a result?

Ms SPENCE: In November 2003 a Police Service and Department of Emergency Services project team was established to determine the feasibility of developing joint public safety communications or a computer aided dispatch system and related information communication networks and infrastructure. Its aim is to deliver world-class, mission critical communication systems for Queensland's emergency services. The project is being led by a steering committee that includes representatives of the department of Premier, Treasury, Public Works, and State Development and Innovation.

In 2005-06—this year—the government has allocated \$565,000 to develop business requirements and relevant business cases for a joint CAD system to be operating by 2008, a joint communication facility pilot in Townsville to be functioning by 2008; and a future statewide digital radio network for all emergency services in 2006-07. As you can appreciate, it is a big budget commitment by the government. The project will submit a progress report to CBRC in October this year, and present the CAD and joint communication facility pilot business requirements and business cases in March 2006. CBRC has approved a further \$950,000 for 2006-07 to develop business requirements and business cases for a statewide digital radio network for all of the emergency services. All of that money is being set aside now for the business cases for what is going to be considerable government investment into communications between all of our emergency services for the future.

As you are all aware, the CMC undertook an inquiry into digital technology for radio communications last year. It recommended the rollout of digital radio progress concurrently with the development of software that is capable of interrogating CAD, extracting relevant information on call-outs and dumping this information into a database that is accessible to any authorised media. The government accepted all of those CMC recommendations, and the Queensland Police Service is examining the rollout of digital radio in that context.

In terms of the public safety network, \$1.9 million is allocated in this budget for that project. That depends on enhanced data network services that are being progressed through a joint initiative between the Police, Corrective Services, JAG and Emergency Services. The police are the host agency for the public safety network project. This project aims to implement a shared, fixed data network whereby the four agencies will share common information and network services in the future.

Miss CROFT: Minister, I refer to page 1-20 of the MPS and the reference to Indigenous communities. Can you please outline the extent to which police are enforcing alcohol management plans and the outcomes of this enforcement?

Ms SPENCE: I thank the member for the question. When I introduced the alcohol management plan legislation, and we all debated and supported that in parliament, we all knew that the policing of these alcohol management plans was going to be critical to the success of them in the future. Here are some statistics. From 1 July 2003 to 31 March 2005 there were 1,210 charges for reportable liquor offences in the 18 communities that had alcohol management plans in place. The enforcement includes intercepting vehicles, vessels and aircraft, conducting random breath testing and other traffic related strategies. As well, for your interest, police conducted an operation in March this year on Mornington Island targeting alcohol including home brew, drugs and firearm offences. Police officers from Mount Isa and Mornington Island executed 22 search warrants between 19 and 22 March this year. The operation resulted in 20 people being charged with 38 offences including possessing home brew alcohol, possessing home brew kits, processing home brew concentrate, and drug and firearm offences. Joint operations with the Liquor Licensing Division have also contributed to the general enforcement effort and will continue to do so in the next year.

The tactical crime squads, which we talked about before, will also continue to carry out sly grog operations on a needs basis and support the local police who are in those communities. A computer based training module in the Queensland Police Service called 'Prevention and enforcement of unlawful sale of liquor', or sly grog offences on remote communities, provides ongoing liquor training to police throughout Queensland.

I think you can see from those statistics that the police are working in partnership with other agencies, Liquor Licensing in particular, to ensure that these alcohol management plans are enforced on those communities.

Ms STONE: I refer to page 1-37 of the MPS. I was going to say that I think I could safely ask the question on behalf of myself and the member for Gregory but he is not here so I had better not say that. What is the current police involvement on Palm Island and what initiatives have been commenced by police on Palm Island?

Ms SPENCE: As a member of the government appointed task force that is looking at Palm Island you would probably be aware of some of these initiatives. After the unfortunate incident on Palm Island in December last year, the five-point plan has focused on restoring law and order and establishing services. Since that time a \$1 million temporary police station and courthouse complex has been built on Palm Island to replace the previous station that was destroyed. The Queensland Police Service has increased its police numbers on Palm Island. At any given time there are likely to be 16 to 18 officers on Palm Island. It is now a 24-hour police station. As well, two new police liaison officer positions have been created for the island. It is expected that they will be filled shortly. This will take the total number of PLOs on Palm Island to three.

In March this year members of the Palm Island community met with the police to establish an Indigenous community police consultative group. The community police consultative committee creates a forum where members of the community and police can sit down together and resolve local policing issues in a partnership approach. The Palm Island community police consultative committee has met three times to progress discussions on a range of issues including a diversion centre and youth activities. Police are working with DATSIP to ensure the ongoing development of effective diversion from custody for Palm Island residents.

You would be very well aware that one of good initiatives on Palm Island is the establishment of \$5½ million PCYC on the island. Since the opening of the PCYC I am told that the children have been flocking to this centre every day with an average of 500 to 600 children—which must represent just about every child on Palm Island—attending the centre every week. The centre is now open seven days a week. The current activities are boxing, computers and play stations in a pulse centre. It has an internet cafe. It is conducting sporting competitions. It has after-school care. It has vacation care. It has a weights training area, and there are even further activities planned such as judo.

There is a full-time manager, who is a police sergeant, who is running that PCYC, who I am told is providing a very positive role model for the children of Palm Island. He is someone whom they can talk to in a relaxed and friendly environment. Also, a project officer has been employed to assist the sergeant and coordinate the youth development. I am also told that the PCYC and the youth of Palm Island opened their own radio station yesterday. It formally started in conjunction with the radio station in Townsville 4KIG. So the PCYC, despite reservations of certain people before it opened, has certainly proved to be very successful.

Mr CHOI: Minister, page 1-11 of the MPS refers to the progressive deployment across Queensland of the bench charge sheet initiative, which was developed as part of the integrated justice information system. Can you please detail how this initiative is progressing?

Ms SPENCE: I thank you for your interest in that subject. That is part of the integrated justice information strategy that is being progressed by the Queensland Police Service, the Department of Justice and Attorney-General, and the Department of Corrective Services. In February this year we commenced the staged rollout of the transfer bench charge sheet system which enables the electronic transfer of the information to the department of justice. A staged rollout was required in order to allow the significant training and charge management activities to impact on day-to-day policing activities. Significant amounts of money have been set aside for this particular initiative. There are approximately 7,000 police using the charge prep system.

I might actually pass the rest of this answer over to the commissioner who might be able to explain, in much more plain English than I can, how it really will benefit police officers and the justice system.

Commissioner Atkinson: Thank you, Minister. Minister, I would be delighted to do that but there is a person here who would probably be far better able to speak to it. David Melville was actually the project manager from the police department for this initiative. It was started in his region, the south-east region. So I might, if it is all right, hand over to David for him to speak to it.

Mr Melville: Thank you, Minister and Commissioner. Certainly, if I can tell the committee, we are very pleased with this particular project. It is the culmination of about two years work. In fact, in the latter half of last year our ISB—the promotion services branch within QPS—started the actual development of the charge prep initiative within IJIS. We have moved to a situation where, on 21 February, it was rolled out in the south-eastern region. I am pleased to say that in late June it finished the rollout in the northern and far northern region of Townsville and Cairns. The reception from officers generally throughout the state has been excellent. Also, importantly, our friends in the Department of Justice and Attorney-General and the court system are finding benefits as well.

I think it really highlights how government departments can work together to receive mutual benefits from IT. It is also very pleasing from that aspect. But the standardisation—the processes—it is the first stage of IJIS. There will be further stages in the future that will rollout over the next few years. Overall, I believe the Queensland community, and particularly the justice system, including Corrections, will benefit greatly.

CHAIR: Thank you. Minister, I refer to page 2-1 of the MPS and the reference to the CMC's review of the Prostitution Act. I understand the CMC commented on the programs assisting sex workers to leave the industry. How successful have the exit and retraining programs been for sex workers wanting to exit the industry?

Ms SPENCE: I thank the member for the question. Before I answer it I would like to acknowledge that we have here with us today in the audience the newly appointed chair of the Prostitution Licensing Authority, Mr Manus Boyce QC. I have not met him yet today. If you have any other questions I am sure he will also be happy to answer them for you.

You would all be aware that at the commencement of the Prostitution Act, funding was specifically provided to Queensland Health to fund appropriate programs for sex workers who may wish to exit the sex industry. Southern Edge Training are responsible for delivery of career training and employment training programs in Brisbane, the Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast and Townsville.

To date, 74 clients have been case-managed, with 53 currently actively registered on the program. There is an average of seven new clients per quarter participating in employment and training activities, and 40.5 per cent of the clients registered on the program have exited the sex industry and achieved employment, with a further 12 per cent entering into higher learning, university or TAFE. Queensland Health advises that, given the client base, the program has been highly successful. The program consists of competency based modules that are delivered in a supportive, positive and empowering environment in a confidential manner covering basic computer skills, resume writing, job search training, interview techniques, job preparation and basic first aid. The individual's training needs are assessed, and services cover living skills, literacy and numeracy skills development as well as accredited vocational training. Importantly, the program provides support and referral to other agencies for specific problems unrelated to employment—for example, drug and alcohol providers.

Participants are recruited in a variety of ways. Representatives of Southern Edge Training attend licensed brothels. SQWISI, Queensland Intravenous AIDS Association and adult shops all engage to outreach streetworkers via Drug-Arm and to make those streetworkers aware of this organisation and the possibility of attending their classes, their courses and accessing help to exit the industry.

Ms STONE: I attended the opening of the new dog development complex which you performed in January this year. Page 1-12 of the MPS addresses the use of dog squads in the Queensland Police Service. How will dog squads continue to support police in Queensland during the 2005-06 year?

Ms SPENCE: The member for Springwood would be well aware of the great opportunities and support that those new kennels will offer Queensland's Dog Squad. The QPS has 11 German shepherd pups in the dog development complex at the moment. Once they reach the age of 15 to 18 months, they will be placed on a 14-week police dog training course and, if successful, will be operational in the next year or so. At present there are 67 police dog teams throughout the state who are operating in every region of the state. The Brisbane Dog Squad, for example, currently has an allocation of six drug dog detection teams—two active response teams for searching places, two passive response teams for searching persons and two multiresponse teams available for searching persons or places—which will commence training in this year. I think that example just shows the diversity of the work that is undertaken by police dogs throughout the state.

New legislation is being drafted now to enable drug dogs to be used by police to be taken into nightclubs and hotels to detect drugs in those establishments. I expect to have that legislation in parliament this year, and at present the police are specifically training dogs to undertake that particular activity. Putting those dogs into licensed establishments in Brisbane is part of the government's 17-point plan to tackle inner city violence. So we are keen to make sure that these laws are in place this year and that the dogs are in place to enable that detection work to begin.

CHAIR: Minister, page 1-12 refers to the Beattie government's election commitment to build 25 new police beats this term. In fact, one of these police beats will be in my electorate of Mount Ommaney, although it will not be established until the next financial year. Could you please advise of the status of the commitment to set up 25 new police beats including the police beat in Biggera Waters in the member for Broadwater's electorate?

Ms SPENCE: I am very pleased that you two members are getting police beats. We do not have one in the Mount Gravatt electorate. As you could imagine, establishing 25 new police beats over a three-year term is a significant commitment for the Police Service, but they are managing to get these beats under way. I am pleased to report that as planned during the past 12 months work on new beats has been undertaken at Vincent-Heatley, Point Lookout, Seaforth, Mooroolool, Burpengary, The Strand, Yorkeys Knob and Highfields, which I have already had the pleasure of opening.

In addition to this work, the police have started work on fast-tracking the establishment of four new beats. These beats were also election commitments and they will be established at Tewantin, Jacobs Well, White Rock and Bald Hills. During the next 12 months they will also be working on Arundel, Biggera Waters, Edens Landing, Hemmant, Pacific Pines and Rainbow Beach. At present there are 37 neighbourhood police beats in Queensland and 48 shopfronts which are increasing the community's access to policing services and strengthening the partnership between police and the community.

The police, when looking for the location of a police beat, have very specific requirements in terms of geographical location and the types of establishment which will house the officer and also establish an office. There have been some challenges, I know, for the police to find just the right location in many parts of the state, but they have been working hard on all of those election commitments to make sure that the right location has been established. I might ask David Melville to comment further, seeing that he is the man responsible for the delivery of this outcome.

Mr Melville: Thank you, Minister. It is a challenge during the course of a year. Twenty-five beats over three years is quite achievable, but to find best value for money is something that we are very keen on doing and we do insist on meeting certain basic standards. But we are very sure that we will meet the government's requirements in this respect.

CHAIR: That is good to hear. Thank you very much. This brings the committee's examination of estimates for the Department of Police to a close. I thank the minister, the Commissioner for Police and portfolio officers for their attendance today and for all the hard work that goes into these estimate hearings. The committee will suspend the hearing until 3 pm and then commence examining the estimates for the Department of Corrective Services.

Ms SPENCE: I have a quick couple of acknowledgments to get on the record. I would like to acknowledge the hard work of Senior Sergeant Simon James and Acting Senior Sergeant Mark Jackson, who have really done a lot of work on briefing us all on this estimates process. Thank you very much to the committee.

Proceedings suspended from 2.47 pm to 3.02 pm

CHAIR: The Estimates Committee B hearing has now resumed. The committee will now examine estimates for the Department of Corrective Services. I ask departmental witnesses to identify themselves before they answer a question so that Hansard can record that information in the transcript.

In the event that those attending today are not aware, I should point out that the proceedings are similar to parliament to the extent that the public cannot participate in the proceedings. In that regard, I remind members of the public that, in accordance with standing order 206, strangers—that is, the public—may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the pleasure of the committee. I also ask that all mobile phones and pagers be switched off. The first round of questions will be from non-government members for a period of 20 minutes. That will be proceeded by questions from government members and then following that a session from each side for about 25 minutes. I call the member for Gregory.

Mr JOHNSON: Minister, on page 3-1 of the MPS the first paragraph under 'Strategic Issues' states—

As a strategic partner in criminal and social justice for the Queensland Government, the department's purpose is community safety and crime prevention through an integrated correctional services system delivering humane containment, supervision and interventions for offenders.

Minister, can you confirm that the Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre has recently purchased an electronic walking machine for its executives' health services at a cost of \$3,600? How will this fringe benefit to the centre's executives help the department achieve its purpose, which I just read out?

Ms SPENCE: Can you just repeat what the purchase was?

Mr JOHNSON: \$3,600.

Ms SPENCE: For what?

Mr JOHNSON: For an electronic walking machine.

Ms SPENCE: Before I begin answering, I would like to introduce departmental representatives. On my right is Mr Frank Rockett, the director-general. Next to him is the Manager of Executive Service, Peter Hollis, and on my left is the Acting Director of Finance and Administration, Chris Udemans. We do not have any knowledge of the purchase of the walking machine, but I am happy to take that one on notice.

Mr JOHNSON: Thank you, Minister. In last year's MPS the first point identified under the 'Highlights' section for 2004-05 was the allocation of \$6 million to the department as part of a five-year program for perimeter security upgrades to ensure state-of-the-art security is maintained for the management of high-risk prisoners. The capital acquisition statement on page 3-28 of the MPS reveals that only \$150,000 of the \$6 million allocated in the last financial year to perimeter security was actually spent. Why has expenditure for perimeter security, which has to be a major priority, been delayed? This is putting at risk the safety of the community. Which centres have been affected by this delay?

Ms SPENCE: It is true that there has been some underspend in terms of the capital works budget of the department. You talked, I think, of \$5.85 million for the upgrade of perimeter security.

Mr JOHNSON: That is right.

Ms SPENCE: The investigation and consultative phases of the perimeter upgrade project were more complex than at first believed. The project, which will upgrade security systems around the state over the next four years, is certainly a critical initiative in ensuring the operational security of correctional centres for the next decade. We have had, as you say, a slow initial spend, but there is planning to rectify this in the coming financial year through the department entering into an alliance based arrangement with a major security provider this month. In terms of further comment?

Mr Rockett: You could ask the Director of Facilities, Mr John Forster, to provide further information, Minister.

Mr JOHNSON: We can go on and come back to it, Minister.

Ms SPENCE: He is obviously not here but we will come back to it.

Mr JOHNSON: Minister, I refer you to page 3-6 of the MPS and the staffing table, and specifically the numbers for facility based containment services and correctional intervention services which make up the staff for a correctional centre's operation. Minister, these staff numbers are full-time equivalents which in 2005-06 are supposed to increase by 23. Will you please detail the number of casual staff employed over the last couple of financial years across Queensland's correctional centres in total and whether you would anticipate an increase in their employment in 2005-06?

Ms SPENCE: We saw an increase of 70 staff for the department between the 2003-04 and 2004-05 financial years. This can be attributed to the training of additional staff to accommodate the expansion of Woodford in the last 12 months. We have also employed additional casual staff at correctional centres. The increase of 23 staff between the 2004-05 and 2005-06 financial years has been as a result of enhanced capacity for delivery of sex offender programs, the project improvement project, the gambling program and the offender risk needs inventory program training.

The Department of Corrective Services, I and this government are committed to maximum employment security for permanent public employees. The department is similarly committed to providing permanency to long-term casual staff and is finalising arrangements to allow long-term casual staff to access permanent offers of employment. All custodial officers, whether they are casual employees or permanent, undergo the same security checks and the same full-time entry level training. Casual or temporary forms of employment are only used where permanent employment is not viable or appropriate. The need to operate 24/7 means casual or temporary staff need to be used in some instances for shift relief or unplanned absences. In these circumstances, this practice is more viable and appropriate than overtime, which could lead to workplace fatigue given that our officers work 12-hour shifts.

As of 31 May this year less than 10 per cent of custodial correctional officers employed by the department were casual staff. We have to also acknowledge that some staff choose to work casually because it suits their work-life balance needs. The department has taken the decision to maximise permanent employment for a number of reasons. We believe that staff permanency provides stability for employees, a career structure and assists with the better retention of staff.

Mr JOHNSON: Minister, in last year's MPS the first point identified under the highlights section for 2004-05 was the allocation of \$6 million to the department as part of a five-year program for perimeter security upgrades to ensure that state-of-the-art security is maintained for the management of high-risk prisoners. The capital acquisition statement on page 3-28 of the MPS reveals that only \$150,000 of the \$6 million allocated for perimeter security last financial year was actually spent. Minister, why has expenditure for perimeter security, which has to be a major priority, been delayed as this puts at risk the safety of the communities? Which centres have been affected by this delay?

Mr Forster: The reason for the delay in the upgrading of the perimeter security systems is that the department has entered into long and protracted negotiations with Public Works over a number of issues. Firstly, the reason we need to upgrade the perimeter security systems is that the current system, which is an XSM security management system developed by Honeywell, is reaching the end of its life. This does not necessarily mean that the perimeters are not secure at this stage, but these systems will be unsupported within the next few years. While there is an urgent need to upgrade these systems, they are not critically wounded at this stage.

What we have done in partnership with Public Works is undertake investigations around Australia and New Zealand to determine what systems are available within the market or that have been developed within the market that would be suitable to replace that system. That has taken longer than we had originally anticipated. Having done that investigation we have come up with a system that we believe is the correct one to use in Queensland—that is, the one being installed in New Zealand. It is an EBI system, a Honeywell system. There is no comparable system. We are faced with a dilemma where the department will need to go to a single tenderer for this replacement system.

The legal and contractual branch of the Department of Public Works have been working away at a method whereby we can do that. We are now at the stage where we will be entering into an alliance type contract with Honeywell this month to replace those systems. We will actually catch up expenditure this year by accelerating the program. We had intended to roll it out at two centres per year over a five-year program. We will now accelerate that and roll out four in 2005-06 and then go back to two per year after that. We will be able to catch up. It was extremely important that we get it right at the start. So at the risk of underspending the budget we elected to do the investigations to deliver the best outcome.

Mr JOHNSON: So we will see movement on that pretty soon?

Mr Forster: We will see movement on that. The contractual meetings are all but over. We expect that we will sign a contract before the end of this month. The meetings that will deliver the actual work on the ground have commenced.

Mr JOHNSON: How many prisons will be incorporated in that package?

Mr Forster: We will be doing 10 secure centres in total. It is our intention to roll out EBI to each of the 10 centres this year and do complete upgrades on three to four of the centres this year.

Mr JOHNSON: Minister, I refer you again to the MPS at page 3-28. In addition to the delay in \$7.3 million of funding for the perimeter security and lightning protection there is also a total of \$3.6 million in underspends for capital works across correctional centres. This is a total of \$10.9 million in delayed capital works for 2004-05. These delays have already contributed to the 30 June escape of an armed robber and burglar and an attempted rapist from Lotus Glen prison in north Queensland. When are you going to take some responsibility for this department and make certain we do not have that happen repeatedly? Joe Citizen out there does not understand whether Lotus Glen is a high security or low security farm. I think that has got to be highlighted.

Ms SPENCE: I agree with the member. I draw to the committee's attention that there has not been an escape from secure custody under the Beattie government. That compares favourably to the 2½ years of the Borbidge government when there were over seven escapes from secure custody. We actually have a very good story to tell in terms of containing prisoners in our secure facilities in Queensland. It would be wrong for anyone to say that the escapes from prison farms are as a result of the underspends in capital works. That would be absolutely wrong because none of the capital works underspends were intended to go to prison farms. All of the underspends are related to the secure facilities. The underspends certainly have not led to any breach of security or any escapes from those centres.

Let us look at the underspends. You have looked at the perimeter security system and we have had that explained. One of the underspends is \$2.6 million for Capricornia. That prison has been completed for some time now and open for some time, but the finalisation of a contractual matter with the builders has led to that \$2.6 million appearing on the underspend list. In terms of the \$1.5 million for correctional centres' lightning protection, we have some delays associated with the Department of Public Works engineering investigations. John can talk about that further if you wish to.

We have had an underspend of \$300,000 for the additional security for Townsville. Funds were only provided for that at the mid-year review. The underspend is a direct result of the inability of the local industry in Townsville to meet project delivery time frames due to the current overloaded market conditions. Some \$880,000 was for the officers' station at Woodford. This underspend is a result of current market conditions relating to the availability of workmen and materials and access issues in terms of working within a secure correctional centre. So I do not think anyone could say that the inability to upgrade an officers' station has led to any concern about breaching security at Woodford. Some \$780,000 was for the replacement of an intercom system at the Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre. \$763,000 was for scanning and handling equipment at secure correctional centres' laundries. The installation of handling equipment in Townsville was delayed, whilst a similar installation was installed and trialled at the Sir David Longland centre. Sir David Longland is complete. They have not finished the Townsville one yet.

The \$3 million odd minor capital works and plant and equipment program underspend comprises a number of small projects: the Beenleigh area office upgrade of \$310,000 and the Emerald area office, the Pine Rivers area office, the Mackay area office and the Mount Isa area office upgrades. So there is nothing there that should give us any cause for concern about prisoner containment.

Mr JOHNSON: Minister, I draw your attention to the issue of prison officer training. I refer to page 3-12 of the MPS and specifically the employee expenses in the output income statement for facility based containment services. Minister, how much funding was allocated for the training of prison officers in 2004-05? How much is budgeted for 2005-06? Do these figures include training for all employed casual staff?

Ms SPENCE: I will refer that question to Chris Udemans.

Mr Udemans: In the 2004-05 financial year we expended about \$1.2 million for prison officer training. For the 2005-06 financial year we are budgeting about \$1.5 million for training. Those

allocations are intended to mainly cover losses of staff through natural attrition. We estimate we lose around 100 staff per annum. The amounts budgeted are fairly constant from year to year. The make-up of the people who are trained varies according to need. There is not a set allocation for so many casuals, so many permanents or so many temporaries. It varies according to operational need.

Mr JOHNSON: Minister, on page 3-2 of the MPS, under 'Managing Growth in Prisoner Numbers', you refer to the anticipated growth—and you said this in your opening statement—in prisoner numbers in Queensland of 90 per cent in the next decade. I find this figure concerning. You are well aware and I am well aware of this after our recent visit to the US where they have five per cent of the world's population and 25 per cent of the world's prison population. What are you doing with your colleague the Attorney-General in terms of looking at sentencing options for people who have committed very petty crimes so we keep these people out of prisons?

Ms SPENCE: I thank you for the question. We are working closing on this issue with the departments of Premier and Cabinet, Treasury, and Attorney-General and Justice. Corrective Services has the lead agency role in the strategy. The strategies we are looking at will ensure that low-risk offenders successfully complete their orders in the community and provide support for high-risk offenders to access rehabilitation programs.

Fundamentally we are looking at strengthening community corrections. We have talked at length to the judiciary about this particular issue. We believe from those discussions that if we can strengthen our community corrections through providing more programs and greater supervision we might see more people who have committed minor crimes diverted from our prison systems on to community based orders. That is going to make some people very happy and some people will not appreciate that. But fundamentally that is what we are going to have to do.

Mr JOHNSON: It will stop giving them an apprenticeship as hardened criminals.

Ms SPENCE: That is right. They are the ones that we are going target to keep them out of prison. We are not going to see a change in the long-term prison sentences, and no-one wants to see that, I do not believe. We need to look at diverting low-risk people out of custody if possible.

I make no secret of it: besides this great expansion of prisoner beds in our existing prisons we are probably going to have to build two new prisons in the south-east corner of the state in the next 10 years to cope with the increase in prisoner numbers. The reality is that all of our security facilities are maximum security facilities at present. I think the general community looks at it and says, 'Why did Di Fingleton or Pauline Hanson go to a maximum facility?' The reason is that we do not have any other options. When we look at building two new prisons they may be different looking prisons from the ones we are seeing at present.

CHAIR: That completes the first block of questions for non-government members.

Ms STONE: Page 3-3 of the MPS states that \$22.1 million will be allocated next year to start new prison infrastructure projects including the redevelopment of the Sir David Longland Correctional Centre. What consultation has there been with staff as part of this redevelopment? What strategy is there in place to manage staff during the temporary closure of the prison? Could you also tell us the benefit of changing the function of a prison to a reception centre?

Ms SPENCE: Obviously one of the major initiatives in this budget is the changing status of Sir David Longland. We have committed \$76 million to the expansion of this centre. This year we have invested \$10 million to start the process. The director-general has already addressed a meeting of staff at the centre where he outlined the processes in principle that would be used to redeploy staff and prisoners because we are going to have to close this centre while we rebuild it.

We have said that there will be no forced job losses because of the redevelopment project. We have announced a statewide human resource management strategy for the department. It covers all facets of the careers of staff in the department including recruitment, career progression, permanency, in-service training, a fair and equitable transfer system as well as leadership and management development opportunities. The reality is that in this department we have not had a staff transfer system in the past where prison officers could move from one prison in the south-east corner to another, so that is a new initiative.

Staff of Sir David Longland have three weeks to place questions about the redevelopment and receive answers. The director-general again attended the centre on 29 June to talk about the issues. A project manager and team of specialist personnel will individually case-manage the redeployment of staff to their new positions around the state. The Queensland Public Sector Union has been invited to participate in a joint task force to consult and monitor the temporary closure process. We acknowledge that the project may create some concerns for staff at Sir David Longland in the short term, but I believe that we are doing all we can to manage those concerns and make sure that those staff get appropriate support as they make decisions about their next workplace.

Sir David Longland will become the reception centre for south-east Queensland. The underpinning principle is to ensure the health and safety of a person on admission—that is, identification

and management of immediate needs and risks of self-harm. On initial reception into custody, once legal, demographic and personal details have been established, an interview is conducted with each prisoner for the purposes of identifying any immediate risks or needs. For this reception function a prison needs highly skilled staff and flexible infrastructure to cope with the diverse needs of people coming into it, and I am keen to see the Sir David Longland centre transformed into a centre capable of meeting that need. Of course we will also be at the same time establishing Arthur Gorrie as a specialist remand centre, so for the first time this state will have separate prisons—one is the reception and one is totally as a remand centre—and prisoners will be selected immediately into the appropriate location around the state.

Mr CHOI: Minister, page 3-3 of the MPS mentions a three-year program of \$231 million for prison infrastructure. It also notes that this will lead to the accommodation of prisoners according to risk. Could you please explain how the expansion of the Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre and its role as a remand-only facility fits into this strategy?

Ms SPENCE: Currently, Arthur Gorrie accommodates a range of prisoners including remand and sentence prisoners. In addition, the centre holds a small number of prisoners detained for DIMIA. The number of remand prisoners across the state has increased from a percentage of the total prison population of 12.6 per cent in 1999 to 21.1 per cent in 2005. As a consequence, Arthur Gorrie can no longer accommodate these prisoners at the one centre. The expansion of Arthur Gorrie will increase the number of beds at the centre to accommodate the increases in the south-east corner of Queensland of the remand population.

The government's commitment to expand the current 710-bed facility at Arthur Gorrie by an additional 180 beds will see the total built capacity of this centre increased to 890 beds. There are a range of advantages to having a dedicated remand centre in the south-east of the state. Importantly, this initiative will limit the requirement of other correctional centres to contain and supervise remand prisoners. This will enable the department to further specialise the roles and functions of these centres and to effectively and efficiently respond to the risks and needs of sentence prisoners. For example, offender rehab programs and vocational education and training resources can be targeted to centres holding sentence prisoners.

By virtue of their remand status, remand prisoners attend court more frequently than other prisoners and receive more legal visitations. A dedicated remand centre in the south-east will increase community safety and reduce costs associated with court appearances through the effective use of video conferencing facilities for such appearances and consultations. Additionally, when required to present at court in person, the costs of transporting prisoners to court from one dedicated remand centre in close proximity to the Brisbane courts will be reduced. The infrastructure design of the Arthur Gorrie centre provides a secure correctional environment with the placement flexibility necessary to accommodate both high- and low-risk remand prisoners. The design and services within the centre maximise capacity for close prisoner supervision throughout the centre. The allocation of \$3 million to commence the expansion of the Arthur Gorrie centre is just part of a, as you say, \$21.2 million plan to develop our prison infrastructure.

Miss CROFT: Minister, you have just spoken about the new capacity and functions for the Sir David Longland and Arthur Gorrie correctional centres. Can you please tell the committee what the time frames are for the redevelopments? For example, when will the construction start and how long will it take? When will the Sir David Longland centre commence operations as the new reception centre?

Ms SPENCE: That is a very good question. Sir David Longland at Wacol will be boosted, as I say, from 342 beds to 558. It will still include the 18 maximum security unit cells. The upgrade of the facility should be completed by June 2007. This means that the 84-cell B block will be demolished and a new 300-bed purpose-built unit constructed in its place. With regard to the Arthur Gorrie centre, the final drafts are currently being compiled. The current program calls for the brief and sketch plan documentation to be completed by December 2005 and for Sir David Longland September 2005. Managing contractors will then be sought by tender process and will be engaged in November for Sir David Longland and in January for Arthur Gorrie. In both cases the final design will be developed by a managing contractor, the Department of Corrective Services, the Department of Public Works and engaged consultants, and I expect that this will be completed by February 2006 for Sir David Longland and April 2006 for Arthur Gorrie.

It is anticipated the construction at Sir David Longland will take 24 months. The centre will be vacated by the end of this year, enabling early works to commence in the first quarter of next year. During construction prisoners will be housed in vacant cells at other Queensland correctional centres. The redeveloped centre should be ready for reoccupation in a staged process from late 2007 or early 2008. The privately operated Arthur Gorrie will also be expanded. The commissioning for this should commence in late 2007 or early 2008 with prisoner occupation from early 2008. In terms of Arthur Gorrie, offenders will remain in custody while this construction takes place.

Ms STONE: Page 3-3 of the MPS discusses funding to expand rehabilitation programs for sexual offenders, including programs for child sex offenders. What will this involve and how will it reduce reoffending?

Ms SPENCE: Thank you for the question. The government has provided \$5.9 million for an additional 300 sex offender program completions by June 2007. To meet the anticipated ongoing demand, recurrent funding of \$1.01 million from July 2007 has also been provided. During last financial year, 23 offenders completed the sex offender treatment program at Wolston. This program has been replaced with a revised close-ended, high-intensity sexual-offending program which runs for about nine months. The additional funding should see a significant increase in offender participation in sex-offending treatment programs. Until recently the Department of Corrective Services was not providing sexual offender programs to every offender who wanted access to a program of this type. Additional funding will help us meet current and future demand, and the department has predicted an increase in referrals largely due to the rise in the number of child pornography offences and related child sex offences.

The enhanced capacity for delivery of sexual offender programs in custody project was established in January this year to support the delivery of additional program places. This program will reduce the outstanding demand for sexual-offending programs in custody and provide an effective means of addressing rehabilitative needs through a number of new initiatives. Fundamentally, we are training staff at the moment to deliver these programs. I am pleased that we are able with this new money to deliver programs to a lot more prisoners than we have in the past. I have also asked the department to explore programs—and there are a number happening overseas—for people who do not admit to their offending and do not admit their guilt and also for people who have low cognitive ability who at present are being denied programs. I think in many respects we can improve the delivery of our sexual offender programs and expand the number of people who are able to access these programs in the future.

Mr CHOI: Minister, I have another question on prison infrastructure. I notice that on page 3-3 of the MPS a new 150-bed women's correctional centre in Townsville will be built to replace the old one. Can you please explain to us how that will help the families of inmates in northern Queensland? What is the time frame for this infrastructure?

Ms SPENCE: We expect to spend approximately \$100 million on building a new women's prison in Townsville. The final design brief for the new prison is being compiled. When it is finalised it will enable us to engage design and engineering consultants who will develop sketch plans needed to advance the projects. Site investigation work has already commenced with respect to the most suitable location for the new prison on the Townsville precinct. We expect that the brief and sketch plan documentation will be completed by October this year. A managing contractor will then be sought by tender process, and it is planned that this managing contractor will be engaged in November this year. The final design will be developed by the managing contractor, DCS, the Department of Public Works and consultants, and this should be completed in July next year. Construction should then start in October next year, with a planned completion date of March 2008.

We are looking at building a prison with a capacity of 45 to 47 prisoners. We are looking at an additional 24 residential-style beds. Sorry, the new prison will have a capacity for 150 female prisoners, so that means that we will be able to accommodate more prisoners in the north of the state. The existing Townsville women's prison beds will then be part of the Townsville male prison and expand the capacity of the male prison in Townsville. But the women will benefit from having their own stand-alone prison. Anyone who has visited the Townsville prison will see that the women's accommodation there is substandard in comparison to the women's accommodation here in Brisbane or indeed the men's accommodation in most of the state. It has been unsatisfactory for the women to share a fence with the men and to have to share some of the men's facilities and go inside the male prison. I am very pleased that the government has made this decision to build this stand-alone women's facility in Townsville. We are going to see a growth in the number of women prisoners in the north of the state in the future, and this stand-alone facility will mean that we will be better able to cater for their needs, for their training, for work and also for women who have babies in the prison in the future.

Miss CROFT: Minister, the MPS on page 3-14 discusses collaboration with the Queensland Police Service by transferring offender information between the two departments. How does this assist in managing offenders on a community supervision order and managing the community risk of an offender?

Ms SPENCE: This initiative has been progressed, as you say, by the police and Corrective Services. Its objective is to integrate the justice information system. The new IJIS system is really quite a groundbreaking initiative by Police, Corrective Services and the department of justice. I will hand over to the director-general to talk about how it is going to work in practice.

Mr Rockett: In late 2003 QPS and our department recognised an opportunity to enhance community safety through electronic exchange of active community based information—this is pre IJIS—and one of the issues that IJIS will solve is this major issue downstream where all the IT systems

will work for each other and that is being built. The first stage of that was bench charge sheets for Justice and Attorney-General and the QP9s which have already gone live. In relationship to us, at the moment if the police pick up an offender they are not aware or they were not aware of whether that person was on a community based order. So now our system CIS and the police Polaris system can now talk to each other. So if they picked up somebody who had committed an offence they can immediately access our system, they can identify that that person may have been on a probation order and then the two departments can work together fairly quickly.

In relationship to IJIS, which is the long-term IT system, that will link not only the Queensland Police Service, but also the Department of Corrective Services, the Department of Communities who have a responsibility for juvenile justice and also the Department of Child Safety who will need to access some of that information.

The government's capital operational funding in the next year's budget is \$1.5 billion and is money that will take us to where we need to be within that. I think it is certainly well on the way. It is a project that has some years to run, but we have seen some very early benefits with immediate information exchange between our department and the police and immediate exchange between the police and officers of Justice and Attorney-General and the courts, and police officers are already reporting that it is a huge time saver for operational police; that they can get things done much more quickly.

CHAIR: It is great to see that that is happening.

Ms SPENCE: Fundamentally, people will find it harder to escape the long arm of the law when IJIS is fully implemented because this exchange of information means that everyone's record is going to be immediately available across the services.

CHAIR: It is great to see that sort of cooperation. The MPS mentions a number of improvements to security and safety in correctional centres. What has been done to improve the safety of staff in these centres?

Ms SPENCE: Of course we are very concerned about safety of staff and while any assaults by prisoners on officers is intolerable, I am pleased to report that in the report on government services Queensland compares very favourably with other jurisdictions both in terms of prisoner assaults on staff and prisoner assaults on each other.

For serious assaults by prisoners on staff the reported rate per 100,000 officers ranges from .56 in the Northern Territory. Queensland reported .08. The Australian average was .06. We are faring well but we know that we can do more to train staff to avoid prisoner assaults. One of the things that we have financed this year is a new mobile duress alarm system. Some of the prisons have it, some of them do not. This year we have allocated \$1.4 million to ensure that officers at Lotus Glen and Arthur Gorrie get these mobile alarms. These are duress alarms that they carry on them all the time so if they are concerned or if there is an incident happening they can press them and they will get the support of other staff immediately.

One of the other things that we have done in the last 12 months, which has been probably well documented, is we have put new perimeter patrol vehicles in the prisons. We have seen them in a number of prisons. They are still being rolled out and they will be rolled out within the next two months. We are confident that those perimeter patrol vehicles will be efficient and also enhance the security of our centres.

CHAIR: That ends the first block of government questions. I call the member for Gladstone

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: MPS 3-3 outlines funding for the delivery of sex offenders programs. In your answer to question on notice No.20 you state prisoners with a sentence less than 12 months are not eligible for offender intervention programs. In 2004-05 76 prisoners with convictions for serious sexual offences completed custodial sentences. Twenty-two of those were for less than 12 months. Nine further offenders served approximately two years yet these also did not participate in any program. Why is 24 months an insufficient time for a serious sexual offender to receive counselling of some sort?

Ms SPENCE: These are very complicated issues. I would like to invite Mark Rallings from the department to give us his explanation.

Mr Rallings: My name is Mark Rallings. I am the director of offender intervention programs for the department. Related to that issue is how we deliver sex offending programs to people at a time when they are going to benefit from it. The therapeutic programs, the most intensive programs which are targeted at people with higher risk, take nine months just to deliver. But that is only part of the picture in terms of the rehabilitation and reducing the likelihood that these people will re-offend so those figures and those numbers relate to sex offending programs only. But for all of these offenders there is a range of other interventions that they receive, one of the most important of which is the support that they receive in transitioning into the community. Things like adult education, vocational education and some of the other offender programs, also contribute significantly to reducing their risk of reoffending. So while they may not have received a sex offending program at that period of time there would have been other interventions that occurred.

There are quite a number of offenders who are very reticent to participate and take part in that training. We work very hard to increase, the term is responsivity, their motivation to engage in treatment. Sometimes that takes a considerable period of time as offenders settle into the prison system. When prisoners are on a very short sentence often they do not see the need to participate in these programs and, despite our best efforts, are not willing to engage in treatment.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: As a follow up to that, in 2003-04 94 prisoners who had convictions for serious offences completed their custodial sentences and only 14 of those participated in a program, 13 completed. Why was the level of involvement so low?

Mr Rallings: That really is a case-by-case basis. The effort by the facilitators that goes into trying to engage these offenders in treatment is very significant. Just looking at the delivery rates of the programs only gives a small part of the picture. We know from a very strong research base that the more we can engage these people in treatment rehabilitation the less likely they are to reoffend. Sex offending programs are a small component of that and that certainly presents some of the picture. But all the work that goes in the front end and preparing them and getting them to engage in treatment and all of the work that goes into preparing them for release and transitioning that return to the community is equally important and those numbers do not really reflect that work as well.

Ms SPENCE: Fundamentally, I have to say to you that we have not performed well enough in the past in terms of offering sex offending programs to prisoners. I acknowledge that. That is why we have more money in the mid-year budget and this budget to put into that area. Prisoners who want access to these programs should have access to the programs. One of the concerns has been that prisoners have been able to self-select so they actually do a number of programs to make themselves look more attractive to boards. That is not the intention of the programs either. As I said before, I think that we need to be able to give programs to people who deny they are offending, to particularly address that, and there are examples overseas of where that is occurring. We are also looking at delivering programs to people with low cognitive abilities, and there are many of those in our prisons. We will be offering more programs. But at the end of the day, and I have read a lot of research on this, there is no guarantee of the success of these programs at all. I would never want to see these programs be made mandatory or for us as politicians to give the general public the idea that mandatory programs are going to cure these people and that they can be released and they will never re-offend. Obviously the programs are going to work for a number of people but most certainly not in all cases.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: Just one question on prison capacities: in your answer to a question you have outlined capacities and their actual carrying numbers. There were four prisons that had overcapacity populations, although the overcapacity was not large. How is the overcapacity managed? There are four prisons where they are over their stated capacity.

Ms SPENCE: We know that we have some issues in north Queensland. Townsville men's prison is overcapacity and the building of the women's prison ultimately will relieve that because it will free up the beds to increase the men's prison. We know we have overcapacity at Arthur Gorrie which I have talked about before today. The new Sir David Longland will alleviate the Arthur Gorrie issue. Sir David Longland is another one. But basically people are doubled up on some small number of occasions when there is overcapacity. That is not the optimum situation. We prefer that that does not occur, but I just think it signals why we need to have this prison expansion, expansion of a number of beds, so that we do not have this occur in the future. We have to make sure that we target those new prison beds at areas of the state where they are most needed.

CHAIR: Member for Gregory?

Ms SPENCE: Member for Gregory, before you ask your question, I am happy to answer at any time in the proceedings today the question about the electronic walking machine. I have just got an answer. Do you want to do that now?

Mr JOHNSON: Go ahead.

Ms SPENCE: I am informed that an electronic walking machine was indeed purchased as part of a healthy lifestyle program at the Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre. It was purchased within the budget and is aimed at ensuring a healthy and balanced life for staff who work for long hours in a stressful environment. Because I have not been briefed on this before today I will undertake to ensure that every single staff member of the Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre has access to this walking machine for their own health and benefit, that it is not just put aside for certain members of the Brisbane women's prison. Given that we here at Parliament House have a couple of nice electronic walking machines and a very nice gym and we all acknowledge the need to keep ourselves healthy, it is a legitimate thing for prison officer staff to also have a machine such as this to use to promote their own good health.

Mr JOHNSON: The government members have already asked a question in relation to Townsville Women's Correctional Centre, but I want to recanvass the situation. On page 3-26 of the MPS you refer to the \$101 million for the 150-bed new facility at Townsville. Nobody agrees more than I, because I have visited that facility and have seen the deplorable state that those women live in. But what I want to bring to your attention is that the majority of those women within that institution are of

Indigenous extraction and many of them are probably there because of alcohol abuse. One of my colleagues on this panel here today is a member of the Palm Island Select Committee with me and I hope that we will have findings that will result in some very positive and advantageous outcomes for not only Palm Island but also other Indigenous communities around Queensland. It may be used as a template. Whilst you highlighted already the importance of this institution, do you believe that this is going the right way to fixing the problem as far as the incarceration of some of these women goes because many of them are there because of alcohol abuse?

Ms SPENCE: I have had a look at the types of crimes for which women are sentenced to prison and, in particular, Indigenous women. It is true to say that many of those women are in prison for crimes of violence. It is wrong to say that they are in prison just from alcohol; they are actually there because they have committed very violent crimes in many respects or there are child protection issues.

Mr JOHNSON: I am well aware of that.

Ms SPENCE: I do not see that they are the group of people we are going to target to divert from custody if they have committed violent crimes. Obviously if we are going to address the causes of crimes and the cause is the alcoholism then I support the work that your committee is doing and, indeed, the government is doing in the alcohol management plans on each of the communities. It is a multifaceted approach to reduce prisoner numbers because, of course, we have to look at the causes of crime and alcohol and gambling, which is mentioned in the MPS, is another cause of crime. Drugs are certainly one of the major causes of crime in our society. So they all have to be addressed. But in terms of reducing the Indigenous prison population, this government has a commitment to do that. We have signed a justice agreement. We are not doing very well; we acknowledge that. We have not managed to reduce the number of Indigenous people in incarceration in the last five years, although we have been trying to do that.

We are still working on that particular project. The government has engaged a professor from Canberra to work with us on how we might develop some further strategies to do that. I think the alcohol management plans were a really brave first step, but we are not seeing the positive results in terms of reduction in prisoner numbers yet as a result of those alcohol management strategies.

Mr JOHNSON: Yes, I admit that they have to be revisited. But the majority of the women at the Townsville Correctional Centre are of Indigenous extraction, as I said. As you said earlier, we are going to see those figures increase over the next 10 years. I am alarmed to think the majority of those increases are going to be Indigenous women. I feel that some of the policies—and I am not being contradictory here. I am trying to be positive about this because no-one more than me wants to see those women not have to go to prison if they are going to be driven there by programs that are not working and by defending themselves or defending their children. I feel that the two have to go arm in arm. Maybe the Department of Communities as well as your department and the Department of Justice and Attorney-General have to look at how to get an outcome here.

Ms SPENCE: It is fair to say that about 25 per cent of our prison population is Indigenous. I think we report on this in the department's annual report. So while 25 per cent of the prison population is Indigenous, the Indigenous prison population of north Queensland is much higher in Townsville and in Lotus Glen than the south of the state because that is where the communities are. I certainly support any initiatives that the opposition wants to put forward to assist us in reducing this Indigenous prison population in the future.

Mr JOHNSON: Thank you, Minister. Minister, in relation to a response you gave a moment ago on prison officer training that most of the funding for training is allocated to train new staff who come on line to replace about 100 staff lost through attrition each year, will you confirm that very little of this funding then goes towards ongoing training for existing prison officers already in the system?

Ms SPENCE: I will ask the director-general to answer that.

Mr Rockett: Mr Johnson, when we reviewed the department through the business model review, we identified that training and professional development of all staff was a major issue. What the department has now established is a Learning and Development Board, which I chair, and we have just had our first meeting. On that board we have representatives from Griffith University, Queensland University of Technology, the Police Academy, the Combined Emergency Services Academy and Aboriginal and Islander representatives. The issue you raise is correct. What the department is looking at now is not only what are the entry level needs for new staff as they come in but also what are the ongoing training needs that staff need to remain competent to do the jobs they are doing.

One of the issues in the corrective services industry—and this is an issue not only nationally but also internationally—is that it is a difficult industry to attract people to come into and it is a difficult industry in which to attract people to take on higher positions within the department. It is something that we have recognised nationally as administrators. We need to invest, as states working together, in the future training of our managers and leaders. That is something that we have put as one of our very, very high priorities within the department—learning and development needs for all staff. So, through succession planning, we are looking at what are the staff needs for the next 10 years and starting to make those changes now.

Mr JOHNSON: Minister, reference was made by you and the member for Gladstone in previous questions and answers to sex offender treatment within our prison system. I refer you to the answer to non-government question on notice No. 20, which reveals that of the 170 prisoners with convictions for serious sexual offences over the past two years who completed a custodial sentence only 23 per cent, or 39 of these offenders, had participated in a sexual offender program. Minister, it alarms me greatly to think that only a small percentage of these offenders are participating in this program. Would you not concede that these are appalling figures when we are dealing with these abhorrent crimes? While I do support the additional funding provided in this budget for places for sex offenders in treatment programs, would you not admit that the first step to increasing numbers completing rehab programs is through a policy of mandatory treatment for all serious sexual offenders?

Ms SPENCE: From all the literature I have read I have never read any suggestion that mandatory treatment works. Forcing someone to undertake a program when that person is denying his or her guilt certainly does not work. As I said today, I do think we need to explore programs—and the department has started to do this—to assist prisoners to admit their guilt and acknowledge that they are offending. A lot of them do not do that, so that is the first step. But that is not always necessarily going to work either. So we do not want to put prisoners who do not want to be in programs or who deny they have a problem in programs with people who are quite legitimately trying to work through their problems.

You have to look at the prison population and acknowledge that a lot of the sex offenders who are in Wolston—and that is our sex offender prison—are also very old. They are in their seventies and eighties, too. I do not see the value of necessarily putting them through a program. Are they going to reoffend? Some of them are already getting Alzheimer's et cetera. A number of our prisoners have Alzheimer's. There are prisoners with severe intellectual disabilities. They are not being accepted into programs at the moment because they do not have the cognitive ability to be part of that program. That is not to say that we should not be attempting to provide something for those kinds of people in the future.

For all those reasons, I think the concept of mandatory programs is very problematic. I am very concerned, as I said before, that as politicians we just use this mantra of 'We're providing mandatory sex offender programs, so people are going to come out of our prisons cured,' because it simply will not happen.

Mr JOHNSON: No-one is saying that they will come out cured. If it is mandatory in a situation where we have these horrible, horrible crimes against our younger generation, maybe we are going to get a better outcome.

Ms SPENCE: I certainly acknowledge that we need to improve our performance. We have put some money in this budget and we will be able to offer more programs in the future. The department is continuing to look at overseas practice. We do not have to be ashamed of what we are producing here in Queensland. Our programs are world's best practice and they have been judged that. We are providing very good sexual offender programs in our prisons. Can we provide more of them? Yes, we can provide more of them, and we will be providing more of them in the future.

Mr JOHNSON: Minister, page 3-13 of the MPS outlines a community supervision services output. Included in this output is the provision of drug testing facilities in community corrections area offices, which is important in detecting and responding to offenders of illicit drug use. In last year's hearing you confirmed that only 70 per cent of corrections area offices have in-house drug testing facilities, with the remainder having to rely on a mobile van getting around the state. Minister, I cannot see it detailed in the MPS. Can you detail to the committee whether all of these area offices have the facility to carry out that drug testing?

Ms SPENCE: We have 32 corrections area offices and 103 reporting centres. In the last year we upgraded Maroochydore and Southport offices, \$880,000. We are continuing an ongoing program of corrections area office upgrades. As I mentioned before, two area office upgrades, Beenleigh and Emerald, have been carried over. We have also carried over Mackay and Pine Rivers. Because we are looking for appropriate commercial premises at Mackay and Beenleigh, the department has requested the Department of Public Works to obtain expressions of interest to design and construct a proposal in both of those cases. As for Emerald, a lease for the new area office has been signed and a fit-out of the office will commence in the near future. It is intended to relocate the Pine Rivers office itself to a pre-committed lease in the Pine Rivers area and the Department of Public Works has been requested to obtain and evaluate expressions of interest for this proposal. It seems to me from all of that—someone from the department might be able to explore this further—we have upgraded an additional two with those facilities in the last year.

Mr Rockett: It is a rolling program of upgrades. There are presently eight area offices left that rely on external pathology laboratories or services of the department's mobile urinalysis. So on this rolling program over the next few years all of them will come up to speed. We have budgeted \$2.7 million in the next financial year as part of this upgrade of area offices. Out of 33 we have eight left, and we will do several more this year.

Mr JOHNSON: In relation to the WORC camps, you would have to admit that they have been a very successful program since their inception. At this point in time are you going to expand those programs and is the government going to retain the current policy it has in relation to those programs in western regions? The real issue, as I see it, is trying to get some certainty into the lives of the officers in charge, the prison officers who oversee those operations, so that we can give them some certainty of being based in those western areas so that they can have their families with them. Whilst the camps are successful, due to the longevity of them we need to look after the officers' personal needs in relation to their families.

Ms SPENCE: I do not know whether you are aware but we have realigned the WORC camps in the last few months. They were all based from a WORC camp centre at Wacol. Now we have attached the WORC camps to prisons. For example, Townsville Correctional Centre has responsibility for Bouliia, Julia Creek and Winton. Capricornia Correctional Centre has responsibility for Blackall, Clermont and Springsure. Darling Downs Correctional Centre has responsibility for Mitchell, Charleville, St George and Dirranbandi. So, instead of one central office in Wacol determining who is going to the WORC camps, the prisons themselves who know the prisoners will be moving people out to WORC camps. The reason for that realignment is to fill up the WORC camps and increase the number of prisoners going out to WORC camps. We have seen a bit of a dip this year in the numbers because of this realignment, but we are very confident that in the future we will have those WORC camps at maximum capacity all the time.

In relation to the supervisors, we certainly want to give permanency to those staff at WORC camps. Everyone is certainly going to be employed who wants to continue to work in WORC camps, although there have been some changes because of this realignment. I expect that we will actually see greater staff in the future if we can make more of these WORC camps permanent. We have one permanent WORC camp at Winton. That is just a trial. We would like to make them all permanent WORC camps instead of this two week on/two week out business.

The other thing we are doing is talking to the state corrective services board to see whether people going out to work camps on a permanent basis can be taken into consideration when their parole date comes up to make it more attractive to get prisoners out there working rather than sitting in prisons.

Mr JOHNSON: Thank you, Minister.

CHAIR: The time for non-government members' questions for this portfolio has expired. I call the member for Springwood.

Ms STONE: Thank you. On page 3-3 the MPS states that planning funds have been committed for the future expansion of the Lotus Glen and Townsville correctional centres. What does this involve? What are the likely futures for these two regional facilities?

Ms SPENCE: As we have heard, both the Townsville and the Lotus Glen centres have had pressures in terms of prisoner numbers. The commitment of \$4.7 million to plan for the expansion of Lotus Glen and Townsville responds to that demand. The male prison population in the north of the state is expected to grow at a rate of 70 per cent over the next decade. The future expansion of Lotus Glen and the male division of Townsville will deliver facilities capable of meeting that future growth.

In recognition of the ageing prison infrastructure for female prisoners, we have talked about the new facility in Townsville. We are also looking at Lotus Glen in terms of the future requirements of that facility. I might pass over to the director-general to talk about the expansion of Lotus Glen.

Mr Rockett: What we have gained from Treasury for the next financial year is money to begin the planning for Lotus Glen. What we do know is that the major growth in prisoner numbers is in the south-east corner and the second part of it is in north Queensland. Once we have those funds we will then be able to go back to Treasury and determine exactly what we need to do with Lotus Glen. We certainly have the capacity to expand the existing prison—to add more cells and cell blocks there—within the current footprint. Attached to Lotus Glen is the prison farm or the open custody centre. There are certainly some options that need to occur there. The money is there for planning and we will use that promptly. We will be going back to Treasury again and seeking funds to get the capital money for the current expansion of Lotus Glen.

Mr CHOI: Page 3-9 discusses the development of action plans for specific need offenders including those with mental or intellectual disability and the aged. What will these strategies and actions cover? How will they assist staff and improve the management of offenders?

Ms SPENCE: I might start with the aged in answering that question. The reality is that as of May this year prisoners who are over the age of 50 make up 9.2 per cent of the prison population. In 1989 elderly prisoners made up only five per cent of the prison population, so every year our prison population is getting older. We have people in their seventies and eighties in prison now, particularly sex offenders. Elderly prisoners obviously have complex health needs. They incur a higher per capita cost than younger prisoners. There are significant resource implications. Their medical, pharmaceutical, nursing and dental needs are a lot higher. They have additional costs of diet and nutritional supplements, bedding, chairs, railings, cutlery, walking frames, application of non-slip surfaces in showers and all the things that the elderly in our general community require.

A series of consultation papers that referred to special needs prisoners went out as a review of the Corrective Service Act. The department is certainly doing all it can to respond to the special needs of prisoners—not only the elderly but also those who might be Torres Strait Islander or Aboriginal—who are culturally and linguistically diverse. We have, for example, in Lotus Glen usually eight or 10 Indonesian-speaking prisoners. We have prisoners with disabilities. I think we have one prisoner in Wolston who is paraplegic. We have prisoners who are transgender.

There are a variety of special needs prisoners to cater for. It is a very important issue for the department, which wants to acknowledge the needs of minority groups within its prison population. Their safety issues and their other needs are, of course, very important. The department is doing a substantial amount of work not only on managing those existing special needs prisoners who are in the system at present but also on how we, as a system, are going to look after these people in the future as the number of special needs prisoners will undoubtedly grow.

Miss CROFT: Minister, page 3-7 refers to the report on government services. How does Queensland compare to other jurisdictions on corrective service matters, as outlined in the report?

Ms SPENCE: We do actually compare favourably against other jurisdictions. For example, I would like to address the issue of recidivism. Queensland reported the lowest rates of recidivism in three out of four categories of measurement and the second lowest in the remaining category. We achieved the lowest percentage of ex-prisoners returning to prison, at 27.7 per cent; the lowest percentage of ex-prisoners returning to community corrections, at 11.2 per cent; and the lowest rate of ex-offenders returning to either prison or community corrections, at 18 per cent. Queensland also has the second-lowest percentage of ex-prisoners returning to either prison or community corrections, at 40.2 per cent. Obviously any level of recidivism is unacceptable, but we should be very pleased that our corrective system in Queensland is producing the lowest recidivism rates.

In terms of escapes, there have been no escapes from secure perimeter custody since 1998. The rate of escape and/or abscondment from open perimeter custody was low at 1.48 of 100 prisoners per year. This result compares favourably, between a high of 3.16 reported by Tasmania and a low of 0.21 reported by New South Wales.

In terms of deaths in custody, the rate of unnatural deaths for all prisoners at 0.09 per 100 prisoners per year in Queensland was low and close to the Australian average of 0.08. In terms of assaults, as I mentioned before Queensland compares favourably against other jurisdictions in terms of prisoner-on-staff assaults but also on prisoner-on-prisoner assaults where we are below or close to below the national average.

It should also be noted that corrective services in Queensland are also cost efficient. Queensland has the lowest recurrent cost per prisoner per day for all prison categories at \$138.70. This compares favourably to the Australian average of \$162. In community corrections, Queensland also has one of the lowest recurrent costs per offender per day. So even though we are running a cheaper prison system in Queensland in terms of our secure custody, we are certainly, in many respects, running a more successful prison system than they are in other states.

CHAIR: Page 3-21 discusses the work of the Serious Sexual Offenders Review Committee. What role does the Department of Corrective Services play in this committee, and how has it worked to keep the most dangerous offenders behind bars?

Ms SPENCE: This committee is an interdepartmental committee chaired by the deputy director-general of our department. It also includes the department of public prosecutions, Crown Law and the Police Service. As we have with us the deputy director-general and the chair of this committee, Ms Alison Hunter, I thought I might ask her to talk about what this committee does.

Ms Hunter: The serious sexual offenders committee operates under a relatively new piece of legislation to enable us to look at sexual offenders coming towards the end of their sentence to see whether there is a necessity to refer them back to the courts for consideration for either continuing detention or continuing supervision. Continuing detention would mean that they would remain in the prison system. Continuing supervision would mean that they were going to be supervised for an extended period of time when they were back in the community. Both of those options are available to ensure the greatest degree of safety possible in terms of the management of those offenders.

The committee meets on a monthly basis and considers all of the sexual offenders coming to the end of their sentences. We look at them when they have 18 months of their sentence left to serve. During the 2004-05 financial year we considered 105 cases. We referred 15 of those cases to the Attorney-General for consideration as to whether an application under the act should be made to the Supreme Court. In that same period the Supreme Court issued seven final orders under the act. Of these seven orders, five were for supervision and two were for continuing detention. An interim detention order has also been made with respect to another prisoner while a psychiatric assessment is undertaken.

The first prisoner to be detained beyond the completion of his sentence under the provisions of the Dangerous Prisoners (Sexual Offenders) Act challenged the constitutional validity of the act in the High Court. On 1 October 2004 the High Court upheld the validity of the legislation. This legislation

provides for the most dangerous sex offenders to be held in custody and kept out of the community despite them having completed their sentences. Additionally, the granting of supervision orders ensures high levels of supervision and intensive restrictions on movement, employment and accommodation for any offender who would normally walk free and unsupervised at the completion of their sentence.

Ms STONE: Page 3-20 discusses the success of the postrelease employment assistance program in south-east Queensland and in Townsville in 2003-04. How has this been successful? What are the department's plans to expand the service?

Ms SPENCE: I am happy to talk about this program because it is quite good news. From July 2000 to 31 May this year approximately 6,500 prisoners have participated in it, and 1,524 of these prisoners have been placed into employment. The evaluation is to expand the program to all centres. The report of the evaluation identified that this program shows a return of between \$7 and \$8 for every \$1 invested in it. Employers who participated in the program reported that they were very positive about its objectives, that they were willing to take on more ex-prisoners and that they would also recommend the program to other employers.

The report also considered the effect of program participation on recidivism rates of participating prisoners compared to those who did not participate in the program. It has found that the recidivism rate for program participants was 18 per cent compared with 31 per cent for nonparticipants. One of the reasons for Queensland's low recidivism rate is certainly this postrelease employment assistance program.

Following a submission to CBRC, approval was given to extend the program to all Queensland locations. Since October 2004 the program has been available for prisoners in Mareeba, Rockhampton and Maryborough as well as Townsville and south-east Queensland.

I think it is a good story. I do not think enough attention is given to the fact that this government does offer assistance to people once they are released from prison and attempts, at all times, to offer them particularly employment assistance. We are seeing some reasonably good results as a result of this postrelease employment assistance.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. There being no further questions, this concludes the examination of the estimates for the portfolio of the Minister for Police and Corrective Services. I thank the minister, the portfolio officers and the director-general for their attendance today. For the information of those attending today, the hearing transcript for this portfolio will be available on the parliament's web site in approximately two hours.

That concludes the committee's consideration of all the matters referred to it by the parliament on 10 June 2005. I wish to thank my deputy chair, committee members, our research director, Rob McBride, Hansard reporters and the attendants for their work before and after today's meeting. I declare this public hearing closed. Thank you everyone.

Committee adjourned at 4.24 pm