

FRIDAY, 18 JULY 2008

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE D—CHILD SAFETY

Estimates Committee D Members

Mr PJ Weightman (Chair)

Ms G Grace

Mrs RN Menkens

Mr RD Messenger

Mrs DA Reilly

Mrs DC Scott

Mrs JA Stuckey

In Attendance

Hon. MM Keech, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Women

Mr D Smith, Senior Policy Adviser

Department of Child Safety

Ms N Deeth, Director-General

Ms J Bertram, Deputy Director-General

Mr T Hodda, Executive Director (Acting), Corporate and Executive Services

Ms D Mulkerin, Executive Director (Acting), Service Delivery Partnerships

Ms K Mandla, Executive Director, Policy and Programs

Committee met at 8.31 am

CHAIR: Good morning. I declare the meeting of Estimates Committee D now open. I would like to introduce the members of the committee. I am Phil Weightman, member for Cleveland. My fellow committee members are Jann Stuckey MP, the deputy chair and member for Currumbin; Grace Grace MP, member for Brisbane Central; Dianne Reilly MP, member for Mudgeeraba; Desley Scott MP, member for Woodridge; Rosemary Menkens MP, member for Burdekin; and Rob Messenger MP, member for Burnett. The original member was Dorothy Pratt MP, member for Nanango. Due to a family illness she has been replaced on the committee by Mr Rob Messenger, the member for Burnett.

The committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2008 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 Tourism, Regional Development and Industry, the Department of Communities and Disability Services Queensland. The committee will suspend proceedings for the following breaks: 10 am to 10.10 am, 11.40 am to 11.50 am, 1.20 pm to 2.20 pm, 3.50 pm to 4 pm, 5 pm to 5.10 pm and 6.10 pm to 6.15 pm.

I welcome the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Women, public officials and members of the public who are in attendance today. I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time 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 and an extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner.

The standing orders require that at least half the time be allocated to non-government members. I ask departmental witnesses to identify themselves before they answer a question so that Hansard may 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 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 remind members, witnesses and members of the public that no food or drink is permitted to be consumed in the Legislative Council chamber.

In relation to media coverage of the hearing, the committee has resolved that television film coverage, photographs and sound broadcasts be allowed for the chair's opening comments and the introductory statement of each minister and that television, film and photographic coverage be allowed at the change of organisational units being examined. The committee has further resolved that the audio and video of the hearing recorded by the Parliamentary Service's cameras and microphones in the Legislative Council chamber shall be broadcast by the Parliamentary Service via the service's web site and to receivers throughout the parliamentary precinct. I also ask that all mobile phones and pagers be switched off. I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Women to be open for examination. The question before the chair is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, would you like to make a brief introductory statement, or do you wish to proceed directly to questioning? If you do make a statement, I remind you that under the standing orders the statement must be limited to five minutes.

Mrs KEECH: Thank you. Good morning to the committee and thank you for an opportunity to address you this morning. The Bligh government is committed to the safety, wellbeing and best interests of Queensland's most vulnerable children. The Department of Child Safety has already come a long way since it was formed in 2004. We have taken some huge steps in that time but I am committed to taking even greater ones in the months to come.

Since becoming minister 10 months ago I have made a commitment to ensure that we continually raise the bar when it comes to caring for Queensland's neglected and abused children. This is not the same department that was created as Australia's first stand-alone child protection agency four years ago. There are now more than 2,400 staff working to protect Queensland's most vulnerable children and young people, an increase of more than 70 per cent since 2004. Around 87 per cent of those staff are working on the front line, compared to just over 50 per cent of those whom this department inherited in 2004. We are making a difference to the more than 7,400 children and young people in the care of the department, almost double the 4,431 cared for by the former families department.

Despite the increase in children in care, we have reduced child safety officer case loads from 32 down to an average of 21. We are providing more children with better care by building new infrastructure, funding new services and driving improvements to policies, practices and legislation. Building a whole new department on this scale—not only the bricks and mortar but the capacity of our staff, services and carers—does not come cheaply. That is why the Bligh government is investing well over half a billion dollars in child protection this financial year, more than three times the budget in 2004.

Since 2004 we have upgraded or opened 42 new centres, broadening our coverage so that people involved with the child protection system have more points of contact with our staff. We have gone from 21 child safety service centres to 49 in just four years. Many of these new centres have been opened in rural and remote areas of Queensland to ensure that children living outside the major cities are better protected than ever before.

We have also come a long way when it comes to finding safe places that meet the different needs of individual children. We are no longer using just one type of foster care; we have come up with a host of new options that allow us to provide what is best for each child based on the level of help and support they need. We know how important it is for Indigenous children to maintain connections with the families, communities and culture. That is why we are investing close to \$60 million building safe houses in Indigenous communities which will give children safe places to go while our staff find the best place for them to live or help their parents deal with any issues that might affect their ability to care for their children. This will improve our ability to keep Indigenous children safe within their own communities.

In four years we have changed the way we care for children with special needs. Many of the children who come into our care have been deeply traumatised as a result of the abuse and neglect they have suffered. They have trouble fitting comfortably into a family-style environment because they are unable to trust people. Some may need extra counselling and support; others may have disabilities requiring 24-hour care that family foster-carers are not able to provide. That is why we are spending more than \$26 million building small group homes and residential care homes to make sure children, no matter their circumstances, get the best help and support they need to recover and thrive.

Since 2004 the implementation of new information systems has meant that child safety officers now have vital information about children and families involved with the department at their fingertips. More than 2,000 entries are recorded in ICMS every day with information and updates about case management, notifications et cetera. No longer is information about families held only in individual centres or in the heads of CSOs; it is now all there on a computer system. We know there is still room for improvement when it comes to record keeping. We are dealing with a highly complex move to a new system and it does take time.

We are also bringing more carers into our system. We are recruiting more carers through a new \$15 million recruitment campaign. It is vital to attract the right people and make sure they have the right training and skills to keep children safe. Since 2004 we have vastly improved the processes and procedures for screening and training foster-carers. All our carers are subject to a criminal history check and all must obtain a blue card from the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian. They must also complete mandatory training.

I am proud of the achievements of my department over the last financial year and I look forward to investigation by the estimates committee.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister.

Mrs STUCKEY: Good morning, everyone. Minister, with reference to non-government question on notice No. 6, having been through the *Child Protection Queensland 2006-07 Performance Report*, can you advise me of the page and line which details the number of carers who had allegations of abuse made against them and the number charged with a criminal offence?

Mrs KEECH: I thank the member for the question. As my staff find the exact detail, I refer the honourable member to the answer I gave her. I am not sure if it was exactly that question but you did ask a question prior to the estimates with respect to the number of carers who have been charged with a criminal offence. My response to the honourable member was that we do not keep that information; that would be best asked of the police. I can assure you that we take every matter of concern regarding carers very seriously indeed. We are absolutely vigilant when it comes to ensuring that children who are placed with carers are safe. As you would be aware and as the committee would be aware, we hold our carers to a standard of care which is far higher than we do of parents, and that is to be expected. We follow that through very carefully indeed. What was the first part of your question?

Mrs STUCKEY: The first part of the question was detailing the number of carers who had allegations of abuse relating to that question on notice.

Mrs KEECH: I refer the member to the *Child Protection Queensland 2006-07 Performance Report*, which is what I referred you to.

Mrs STUCKEY: Yes, you did.

Mrs KEECH: I refer you to page 90 which discusses the matters of concern by carers. I have been advised that the information is child based data rather than carer based data. Are you happy for me to continue?

Mrs STUCKEY: I am happy for you to take that on notice.

Mrs KEECH: Certainly.

Mrs STUCKEY: I would like to follow on from question on notice No. 6 where I asked for the number of allegations from the past year, 2007-08. This is an important key indicator. If you do not have the data from 2007-08 then how can you forecast for the 2008-09 budget if you do not know what to expect? Could you please supply these figures?

Mrs KEECH: With respect to the individual details regarding the data, I will refer to my director-general.

Ms Death: The data for matters of concern is always 12 months in arrears. You can appreciate when matters of abuse are alleged it takes quite a period of time to go through all the investigations. The most up-to-date data is always published in our Child Protection Queensland report. At appendix—

Mrs STUCKEY: That is back in 2006-07?

Ms Death: That is the latest data. The next set of data will come in the next report. We certainly have the statistics which I can give you if that is what you are asking for.

Mrs STUCKEY: I certainly am.

Mrs KEECH: They are the statistics we were going to take on notice but the director-general is happy to provide them now.

Mrs STUCKEY: I am asking for statistics for 2007-08. You have none at all?

Ms Death: They are still in the process of being finalised and quality assured. They will appear in the next update of our child Child Protection Queensland performance report.

Mrs STUCKEY: When?

Ms Death: Early next year. The 2007-08 figures will appear in the next update. I have the ones for 2006-07 because they are our most recent available statistics.

Mrs STUCKEY: And you forecast your budget off that?

Ms Death: We forecast our budget based on the most recent available statistics. Matters of concern is an area of absolute priority. We will always prioritise the investigation of matters of concern.

Mrs KEECH: In some areas we are able to forecast the expenditure for the budget. When it comes to matters of concern we always hope that they are driving down. That is exactly what is happening.

Mrs STUCKEY: In relation to non-government question on notice No. 1, I would like to point out that I did not ask for a report; rather, I asked how many incorrect substantiations the department is aware of. In the SDS at page 1-229 note 3 it strongly suggests you must have some idea as to the number of incorrect substantiations, otherwise how can you know that there has been 'an increase in the number of unsubstantiations'. Would you please now provide the committee with these figures?

Mrs KEECH: The director-general is advising me that we are unclear exactly what you mean by 'incorrect substantiations'. When a parent is aggrieved about the decision that the department makes, as you would understand—and you do have many people coming to you and we are always very pleased to support you in that—there is a very long process to follow. There are many opportunities for people to have their complaints heard whether that is at the service centre level going to the child safety officer or the team leader or the centre manager. Then we can refer the complaint to the central departmental complaints and investigation unit which, I have to say, does a very good job and has a very high level of satisfaction. It has around an 85 per cent level of satisfaction. As members would be aware, complaints can be made to the children's commission, the Ombudsman, the Children Services Tribunal and the Crime and Misconduct Commission.

The information is there on resubstantiations. Children who come into our system and who staff have decided are not at a substantiated risk of harm but within 12 months come to our attention again and are found to be at risk are the ones that we have highlighted in our SDS. What we are seeing is that there has been a significant drop in resubstantiations from 15 per cent to 9.2 per cent. The director-general has additional information.

Ms Deeth: As the minister has said, we have the statistics for substantiations. We also have the statistics for resubstantiations. The resubstantiation rate has gone down extremely significantly. We have an estimated target of resubstantiations in 2008-09 of 17 per cent. The estimated actual in 2006-07 was 25 per cent. We are seeing a trend downwards on the rate of resubstantiations.

Mrs STUCKEY: Thank you for that. My next question has reference to non-government question on notice No. 7 and also the Department of Child Safety's 2008 policy paper proposing amendments to the Child Protection Act 1999 at page 14 dot point 3.4(b). The fact that you are including the breakdown of long-term guardian relationships in a discussion paper indicates that it must be an issue. Surely you must have some data on the number of children who leave out-of-home care following these breakdowns with their long-term carers. Just how big a problem is this? Would you disclose the numbers?

Mrs KEECH: Our carers do an absolutely amazing job. I thank the government members in particular for their hard work in supporting our \$15 million recruitment campaign. Our carers do a terrific job. In every instance we work very closely with our carers to ensure that they have significant training to be able to cope with children who are extremely challenging—children who come from horrendous backgrounds of abuse and find it problematic sometimes to fit into a normal foster care situation. I am going to defer to the director-general who has some additional information.

Ms Deeth: The reason we are making the changes to the Child Protection Act relating to long-term guardianship is that there has been confusion historically around whether long-term guardians are in fact entitled to the payment of foster care allowances. The changes are intended to put it beyond doubt that they are and will continue to be eligible for the payment of foster care allowances.

Mrs KEECH: With respect to the question regarding the breakdown in relationships, we do not hold those figures. What we do know is that on occasions children or young people for a particular reason will need to be placed with a different carer. But the important issue is the permanency of placements and the safety of placements. That is why the department is providing additional funds for our One Chance at Childhood initiative. We know how important it is to ensure that children have stability of placement as much as possible.

Mrs STUCKEY: My next question refers to the SDS at page 1-227, services to young people in care. The answer to my question on notice No. 1535 in 2007 stated that the cost for commercial accommodation, which you refer to as the last resort model of care, has gone from \$2,476,000 in 2005-06 to almost double that figure, \$4,500,000, in 2006-07. Would you please inform this committee of the estimated actual for 2007-08 and the target estimate for 2008-09?

Mrs KEECH: I know this is an issue that the honourable member has a particular interest in. We share an interest with respect to driving down the use of emergency accommodation. For the benefit of members of the committee, I point out that emergency accommodation is required when the department must remove a child because a child is being harmed. Often that situation has been referred to us by police. We may have to find accommodation for a sibling group of four children at 3 am.

On many occasions we are able to knock on the door of an emergency foster-carer and they will take the children in in the middle of the night, for example. But on some occasions, particularly in regional areas, it is difficult. I have heard of cases where we have had sibling groups of six or seven and it is simply not possible to find a carer in the middle of the night. In those cases we need to place the siblings or the individual in a motel. This is certainly a last resort.

Both the director-general and I have been working very hard with the department to drive down usage of emergency accommodation. I can report to the committee that for the period 1 July 2007 to 31 May 2008—that is, the latest data we have—it is estimated that \$775,031.19 was spent on commercial accommodation costs, which includes labour costs. We are talking about emergency commercial accommodation. This is a significant reduction from the \$4.2 million spent in 2006-07.

As you can see, we are working very hard indeed to drive down the number of young people who need to be placed into motel accommodation but also the number of nights they need to stay. On holidays we might like to spend a few nights in a motel but we certainly do not want young people who have been traumatised staying in commercial accommodation for a long time. I am very pleased indeed that we have been able through dedicated resourcing and dedicated focusing to ensure that the time young people stay in commercial accommodation has been reduced.

I can also give the committee some additional information. For the period I just indicated the department used commercial accommodation facilities for 1,351 nights. These arrangements related to 186 individual children, 114 being male and 72 being female. I can give additional information if the member would like.

Mrs STUCKEY: I would be very happy if you would give me that on notice.

Mrs KEECH: I can give it to you now. The only additional information is that there has been a major reduction from the 346 children and young people in this type of accommodation in 2007. Of these people, 144 were aged 11 and over.

Mrs STUCKEY: My next question relates to the Capital Statement 2008-09 Budget Paper No. 3, page 30, services for Indigenous communities. Given the urgency to provide safe residential facilities to address this nationally acknowledged crisis, I ask you to justify your department's underspend of more than \$6 million on programs to strengthen child protection services in Indigenous communities.

Mrs KEECH: I thank the member for the question. Not only for me but for the Bligh government, service delivery for our Indigenous communities is a top priority. In particular, the area that we are focusing on is ensuring that we have additional facilities so that we can respond to children who need the care of the department in remote Indigenous communities.

With respect to underspending in terms of the completion of the delivery of safe houses, there is funding for six of our safe houses, and certainly the honourable member for Woodridge knows about safe houses because she accompanied me recently on a trip to Cape York and Torres Strait to open our child safety service centre hubs. Funding for six safe houses was announced in the 2007-08 budget. The communities identified for this initiative are Pormpuraaw, Kowanyama, Weipa/Napranum, Aurukun, Palm Island and Doomadgee, and this really goes to the heart of the question that the honourable member is asking me. I would love to be able to say that we have opened every one of those safe houses which were funded in 2007-08. The issue comes down to the difference between what we saw John Howard and his government do compared to what the Bligh government knows is the best practice when it comes to providing services in Indigenous communities. What did John Howard do? He sent the Army into Indigenous communities.

Mrs STUCKEY: With respect, Minister, I did not ask about John Howard. I asked about an underspend of over \$6 million and I am really disappointed that you do not seem to be taking it seriously.

Mrs KEECH: I am taking it seriously and I am giving the reason why we—

Mrs STUCKEY: But John Howard had nothing to do with it.

Mrs KEECH: In answering the question, the Bligh government is absolutely committed to ensuring that when we build infrastructure in Indigenous communities and when we provide services in Indigenous communities they are the services that are placed where the communities want them. That is why we have been negotiating with the mayors and the councils to ensure that safe houses are built on the land which is appropriate and that the services that we will be providing from those safe houses will be services that will be supported by the Indigenous communities.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The time for non-government questions has expired. The next round of questions will be from the government.

Mrs REILLY: Good morning, Minister. With reference to page 1-222 of the agency Service Delivery Statements under strategic issues, can you outline what your vision is for the future of the Department of Child Safety?

Mrs KEECH: Thank you, and I would very much like to do that. The Bligh government is committed to the ongoing improvement of child protection in this state. That is why this year's budget will see us invest a record \$586.6 million for child protection. We are also confirming our commitment to improving service delivery to Indigenous communities by putting safe houses on the ground to protect vulnerable children in these areas. The 2008-09 budget provides a funding boost of \$7 million for running costs and \$7.6 million in capital funding over four years to set up safe houses in four remote far-northern Indigenous communities. We are building new residential facilities for children and young people with complex needs and challenging behaviours to ensure that they receive the very best care. That is why we are spending \$35.5 million recurrently over five years and \$34 million in capital over the next four years to increase the number and diversity of placements in Queensland.

Therapeutic residential and small group homes will be built to expand the number and types of safe house places for children to stay. But the Bligh government's commitment to child protection is not just about bricks and mortar. We are also building capacity by investing in the heart and soul of child protection—our people. In May I announced a \$15 million investment in our foster-carers to deliver a major recruitment campaign, reduce red tape and increase support services for the more than 3,000 dedicated and compassionate Queenslanders who open their hearts and homes to children in need. We are also investing in boosting staff numbers to better protect Queensland children. Early this year we hired and trained 26 new specialist staff who are now working on the ground around the state as part of the \$12 million One Chance at Childhood program. There are another five staff to come.

We will also invest an additional \$29.8 million over the next four years to recruit and retrain child protection workers. This includes \$6 million in 2008-09 to employ about 40 new front-line workers and to improve career progression opportunities, work structures and job design for staff. The funding boost will ensure that additional workers are available for high-need communities where abused children and young people most need help and will also provide greater support and recognition for existing front-line workers. Something I have personally driven as minister has been the creation of reunification panels making decisions about whether to return children to their parents' care. These panels will involve an expert such as a child health nurse or a child psychologist who has had no previous involvement in any particular case in the decision-making process. We have come a long way, but we have a long way to go.

Mrs REILLY: Thank you, Minister.

Ms GRACE: Good morning, Minister, and good morning all present. Minister, with reference to page 1-222 of the ASDS there are around 7,000 children in care in Queensland. Can you advise the committee of why these children come into our care?

Mrs KEECH: I thank the member for Brisbane Central for her interest in our children. My department's role is to protect children and young people who have been harmed or who are at risk of harm and secure their future safety and wellbeing. We receive allegations of harm from government, community partners and members of the general public. The allegations we respond to are serious in nature. Children and young people subject to intervention by the department may have experienced sexual, physical or emotional abuse and neglect. We hear horrendous stories every single day of the issues of abuse that come to the attention of the department, and I really have to say that I am so proud of my department, particularly the front-line staff in the child safety service centres, who go every day above and beyond the call of duty in protecting Queensland's vulnerable children.

In many cases we have children who end up in care because their parents are simply not willing or not able to protect them. We have all heard of cases where parents or extended family members have been the ones responsible for subjecting children to harmful acts. My department has the very difficult job of intervening in these cases and taking all of the necessary steps to ensure the future safety and wellbeing of these children and young people. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that a maltreatment type does occur independently and that a significant proportion of children who are abused experience not just repeated episodes of one type of abuse but are likely to be the victim of other forms of abuse and neglect.

Children who have experienced so many painful things and who have not had comforting, healing relationships that everyone needs are at great risk of further harm, both at their own hands and the hands of others. In fact we all know that hurting people hurts others, and we see that so often from the children who come into care. That is why the department is working very closely with their families through our family intervention staff workers and we have ensured that we have had additional funding for those staff so that we can be working closely with families to stop that abuse happening earlier on. The department is focused on providing purposeful intervention to address traumas which are critical for these children.

Ms GRACE: Thank you.

CHAIR: With reference to page 1-222 of the agency Service Delivery Statements, can you please explain how the demand for child protection services is linked to substance abuse and other abuses?

Mrs KEECH: The member for Cleveland has asked a very important question. As I have said on many occasions, we are committed not only to providing services for the best interests of children; we are also constantly working to raise the bar, and this is something that I am absolutely dedicated to and committed to in terms of continuing the rollout of our services while ensuring that the quality of our practices is raised higher and higher every single year. The 7,000 children who come into the care of the department are our most vulnerable and abused children. Unfortunately, this abuse has been at the hands of those people whom we expect to be their protectors and supporters—their parents.

For those of us lucky enough to have grown up in homes where we were loved, nurtured and cared for, it is really difficult for us to even begin to understand what family life is like for these children before they came into the protection of my department. New research conducted by my department has painted a stark and disturbing picture of what home was like for many of these children before they came into our care. Sadly, drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness and, most of all, domestic violence are often a daily part of a child's life before they come into care. My department's report *Characteristics of parents involved in the Queensland child protection system* shows that 47 per cent had one or both parents with a drug or alcohol problem; 35 per cent had experienced two or more domestic violence incidents in the past year; for 25 per cent of children the primary parent had been abused as a child; and for about 20 per cent the primary parent has had or does have a mental illness. This is a very grim but realistic picture of the problems the Bligh government investigates as a result of the more than 64,000 reports a year of harm or risk of harm to a child in Queensland.

It is important to know the issues we are dealing with and also where government action can be targeted to keep our children safe. One of the most common risk factors for abuse, including sexual abuse, is that parents have been previously abused. That is why it is really important that we break the cycle of abuse and we do it very early in the child's life. That is why we are putting extra funding into prevention and intervention in terms of working with families. In particular, that is why we are rolling out the \$12 million One Chance at Childhood which is focused on children between zero and four to ensure that they get the best start in life by coming into the care of the department early in their lives.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, I refer also to page 1-222 of the Service Delivery Statements where we see that the Department of Child Safety is the lead agency for child protection in Queensland, yet recent media has highlighted that responsibility for the protection of children is much broader than one government agency. Can you please explain to the committee how other agencies and the community can help keep children safe?

Mrs KEECH: I thank the honourable member for her question. As I always say, child protection is everybody's responsibility. Certainly, the Department of Child Safety is very proud indeed to be the lead agency, but we cannot keep children safe by ourselves. The recent deaths of children in Queensland and other states have once again highlighted that the protection of children is a responsibility all of us must share—all of us in government and also all of us in the community. The role of family, friends and neighbours cannot be underestimated in providing parents and children with support and a helping hand, particularly when they notice that a parent is stressed or struggling. Sometimes a simple question to a neighbour with young children such as, 'How are you going?' or 'Is there anything I can do?' can open the door to someone accepting our support. I think the best thing often is just having a cup of coffee with someone or hanging around the school gate inviting somebody over the next morning for a morning coffee. That can go a long way in extending a helping hand to our neighbours who may be struggling.

If we are to reduce the shocking incidence of child abuse and neglect, we must start taking action on a number of fronts. The best way to do this is to ensure that the protection and wellbeing of children is on everyone's agenda. The states and territories, with Queensland as the leader, have been pushing for a national child protection framework for many years. As part of this strategy, we commissioned a body of research to inform us about the best way forward. The research found that there has been a shift in responsibility for the protection of children to the child protection department alone rather than being a broader community, health and welfare responsibility. As we know, the protection of children cannot rely on just one government department. Therefore, we need to reinvigorate how communities at a local level can support children, together with stronger partnerships between government agencies across all levels and within the non-government sector. I believe that we can be more effective in tackling child abuse and neglect in our community by addressing the problem across a number of levels. Firstly, we need our communities and individuals to more readily reach out to families and their support needs. I always say that it takes a village to raise a child but it takes a neighbourhood to protect one.

We are also working at the national level. I am very pleased indeed with the election of the Rudd government as with Jenny Macklin as minister there is more coordination than ever between the states and the territories and the Australian government departments in working together to protect children. I am looking forward to talking to the national framework for child protection systems when we have our ministerial council meeting next year. Over the last five years notifications of child abuse across Australia have doubled, which shows there is a lot more work we really must do together—both nationally and at the local level.

Mrs REILLY: If I can just stay on this same topic and ask you to elaborate a little bit further? You have been talking about the fact that child protection is everyone's responsibility and that it takes many people and agencies to protect children. Can you advise the committee if there are particular warning signs that members of the public or particular agencies should be looking for if they suspect that a child is being abused?

Mrs KEECH: Thank you. That really is a very important question, particularly when there are so many people out there who want to help others. It is important that they are educated and aware of the warning signs of suspected child abuse. That is why the department has produced a simple brochure describing what child abuse is and what to look out for. I am very pleased to be able to provide to all members a brochure. The brochure is available through our child safety service centres and it is also available on the web site. It is also available through the hotline number of 1800811810.

So just exactly what are the signs that people should look for in child abuse? Some of those include, particularly regarding neglect, malnutrition, begging, stealing or hoarding food. Children may have poor hygiene, matted hair, dirty skin or body odour. They may have unattended physical or medical problems. They may be making comments like, 'I don't want to go home because there's nobody at home.' They may be constantly tired, frequently absent from school, or late. They may come to school with inappropriate clothing—wearing long clothes in summer—which may indicate that mum or dad is making them wear long clothes so they can hide bruising or injuries. They can be frequently ill—runny noses—and not being taken to the doctor. There can be a presence of alcohol or drug abuse in the household. Other general indicators of child abuse include being frightened of adults, excessive rocking, sucking and biting, very low self-esteem, difficulty in concentrating—the list goes on.

As we know, just one of those indicators certainly is not an indication of child abuse, but taken together they certainly raise issues that should be referred to experts. There is much that we can do, I believe, to break the silence about child abuse, because every child has the right to be protected by caring adults. If those caring adults are not their parents, that is when the community—that is when neighbours, that is when schools, that is when the police—will step in and where our department will come in and investigate the issue.

If a child has been abused it is important for the family to reach out for help and not feel isolated. Also, it is important to ensure that if you suspect that a child has been abused it is better to report it—even if you are not sure—rather than do nothing. It is important that we—as neighbours, as friends and as relatives—trust our gut feelings, rely on intuition and speak out if we think someone is abusing a child. I would like to provide later, if that is okay, copies of the brochure to the committee.

CHAIR: If you are going to table the brochure, I remind you that you need to seek leave to do so.

Mrs KEECH: I see the honourable member for Currumbin already has one. I do not need to table it, because I think that would probably add an extra burden on Hansard. With your permission, I can make them available at morning tea, but I will not need to table them unless the committee—

CHAIR: No, that will be fine. Much appreciated. Thank you.

Ms GRACE: Again, page 1-222 of the ASDS outlines the department's commitment to children in care. I hear there are some wonderful success stories of children who have been supported by the Department of Child Safety. Without identifying any child, of course, can you provide the committee with examples of achievements of children in care?

Mrs KEECH: I would love to. Unfortunately, so often, particularly in the media when it comes to children in care, it is all bad news. I just love getting out and meeting with young people, particularly through the CREATE Foundation. We hear of just terrific stories and I would love to share some of those with the committee today.

Let me give you some examples. One person—and we are using substitute names here—who we will call John and who is aged nine achieved age champion for swimming both at club and at school. John now plays on the representative side for softball. Academically, six months ago he was at a reading level four levels below his age, but he is now reading one level above his age. That is thanks to the good work of his carers, but particularly thanks to his excellent teachers.

We also have one former foster-child who is now studying medicine. We also very pleasingly have heard of another foster-child who wants to become a Child Safety officer. I think that is terrific.

We also have a story of an Indigenous girl who is aged 16 from a remote community who has been accepted to participate in an international student exchange program from January to December 2009. This young person applied through her local state high school and will be placed with a host family and attend school in the United States of America. Again, that is just a wonderful story, considering the trauma that that young person has suffered.

Another young man, who is aged 17, was winning the school cross-country race when he came upon a relative who was unwell beside the road. Peter stopped to help his relative and ensured she got medical attention. He has been presented with a cross-country hero award by the relevant child safety service centre. So again, despite the fact that he came from a family of violence and neglect and was

winning the cross-country race, he was able to stop and help his relative. I have lots of stories of young people who are doing so well. We are very proud of them to see that they are recovering from their trauma through the excellent work of the department and also the loving care of foster-carers

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

Mrs STUCKEY: Thank you. It is heartening indeed to hear those stories—it really is. When you consider the number of absolute heartaches that we hear, it is wonderful. I refer to page 1-233 under the heading 'Child Protection Practice', dot point 4. Is the minister satisfied that the department's procedures, both in terms of database construction and departmental officer practice, are adequate to ensure that cultural and kinship issues are key to placing children with appropriate carers? Do they comply with section 83 of the Child Protection Act?

Mrs KEECH: I thank the honourable member for the question. This relates to the Indigenous child placement principle. As the member would be aware, this principle ensures that when Indigenous children need to be taken into the care of the department, there are two things that the department must adhere to, and that is through the Indigenous child placement principle. Firstly, wherever possible the child remains with their Indigenous family. If that is not possible, we have to ensure that the cultural connections with the child is ensured.

As we all know, the issues regarding the stolen generation are at the heart of this. There were two issues there. One was that children were removed—were stolen—from their families. That was a tragedy. I know of cases where, even to this day, people of my age are still searching for their family members. But I really believe that the non-Indigenous community is not fully aware that the double tragedy was that not only were they removed from their families but also they were removed from their culture. Therefore, we must always ensure that in placing children those two issues are paramount: placement with family, placement with culture.

My Child Protection Queensland 2006-07 Performance Report states that roughly 60 per cent of Indigenous children are in the placement of Indigenous carers. I would like that to be 100 per cent, but it is not possible for a couple of reasons. Often it is because carers are not available. Carers cannot access blue cards. As more and more young people from Indigenous communities come into the care of the department, we are continually searching for more foster-carers.

Indigenous kinship carers do an excellent job. Can I give you some statistics. As at 30 June 2007, 15 per cent of all approved carer families were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, but in comparison, 30 per cent of all children placed in home based care with approved carers were from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. So what we have here is that 30 per cent of our children who are in care are Indigenous, but only 15 per cent of approved carers are Indigenous. Clearly, that means that even though the department would like to, when it is in the best interests of the child to place them with Indigenous carers, because of the lack of carers and the significant growth in the number of Indigenous children coming into care, we are not able to. I can continue, given that I have not responded to the whole question, but I am happy to take another question.

Mrs STUCKEY: I am happy to follow on with another question, and I am glad you acknowledged that you have not said yet whether or not you are satisfied with your department. I refer again to page 1-223 under the heading 'Child Protection Practice'. According to the inaugural Indigenous child placement principle audit report 2008 by the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, your department breached section 83 of the Child Protection Act and failed to comply fully with any of the 101 files selected. How long has your department known of the adverse findings made by the commission as a result of the interim report, which is further indicated in a final audit report into Indigenous child placement?

Mrs KEECH: I thank the honourable member for the question. I will just go back to the first comment that the member made. She was right: I did not respond. Am I happy with my department's compliance? I am very happy. Can I go to the next question, which is in respect to a draft report referred to by the Leader of the Opposition in the Premier's estimates committee hearing earlier this week.

You talked about an inaugural report. My understanding is that there is a report, which the Leader of the Opposition tabled, which he had received. It was a Commission for Children and Young People report. On my understanding, this report is a draft report. With respect to the question of how long have we known about the report, I can advise that a draft report was provided to my department and responses were given with respect to the draft report. The major issues with respect to the draft report—and the draft report, for honourable members, and I know it will get confusing here, the honourable member is talking about an initial report where my understanding is there is a draft report, it is an internal report conducted by the—

Mrs STUCKEY: With respect, I asked you how long you have known about it, not the details of it. I asked how long you have known about it?

CHAIR: I must remind the member that the minister can answer the question however she sees appropriate.

Mrs KEECH: I thank the honourable member. With respect to how long have I known about the draft report, when I was sworn in as child safety minister, that was in September. So it would have been very shortly after that that the draft report was brought to my attention. In fact, I was quite surprised, because of the lack of rigour and the flawed research methodology within the report, that it had even been sent over to my department. To my understanding, it was more of an internal working document.

My department gave some response to that draft report to the children's commission. In particular, we raised very grave concerns about the final decisions that had been made in that report for the major reason, from a research methodology point of view, there were very strong flaws in it.

Let me explain that. There was a sample of only 28 children, which is actually only 1.4 per cent of Indigenous children in care. Several of those children in the sample had actually been placed prior to the CMC reforms. There were 21 children who were placed with non-Indigenous carers—that is, 75 per cent of them—so they skewed the results. The report assumes that because records were missing the child placement principle was not adhered to. Can I seek an extension?

Mrs STUCKEY: I agree.

CHAIR: An extension is granted.

Mrs KEECH: My understanding is that there is still an internal draft report. My department has on several occasions responded in the sense of the significant flaws in the research methodology. The fact that it was a sample of only 28 children, which represents only 1.4 per cent of Indigenous children in care, means that there is not a significant representative sample whatsoever. There is also the fact that 75 per cent of those children were actually placed with non-Indigenous carers. How there can be comment, as the honourable member stated, that we are not complying with the Indigenous child placement principle I cannot understand.

The most important issue is that whenever reports are provided to the department, particularly from the independent children's commission, we rely on learnings from those reports so that we can ensure we take on board the information and improve our practice. Because that is what our department is always about. My understanding is that there is still some to-ing and fro-ing regarding the report, in particular the fact that because of the significant flaws in its research methodology there is still much work to be done. However, I can assure the honourable member that when that final report has been completed and has taken into account responses about flawed research methodology, not only from my department but also from the Premier's department, we look forward to receiving that report and will consider it most thoroughly.

Mrs STUCKEY: Thank you, Minister. I would point out that in the recommendation to the report your department has actually accepted and agreed to implement all of those findings.

Mrs KEECH: Mr Chair, I am not too sure what report the honourable member is referring to, but can I ask that she table that so that I can have a look at those recommendations?

Mrs STUCKEY: I would be more than happy to table the executive summary of the inaugural *Indigenous Child Placement Principle Audit Report*.

Mrs KEECH: I believe that the member is speaking about a draft report. What is very important indeed is for us to ensure that we are getting the right messages across here. With the honourable member talking about an inaugural report it gives the impression that we are not ensuring that we comply with the Indigenous child placement principle. Every year my annual report records our compliance with the principle. What we do not show in our report is the process. I think what you will find in this report, which I have not seen—have I seen this?

Mrs STUCKEY: Mr Chair, that was not a question; it was a statement that the minister has decided to respond to. That was not a question. I made a statement and the minister interrupted before I could ask my question.

CHAIR: Would you allow the member for Currumbin to actually ask a question prior to providing any form of statement?

Mrs KEECH: Certainly.

Mrs STUCKEY: My question is: did your department specify and sign off on the user requirements of the \$49 million ICMS? If that is the case, and I expect that it is, how can you explain the lack of a field on the database for a child's cultural identity to be recorded? Did you not think that important?

Mrs KEECH: I thank the honourable member for the question. Just to be very clear with respect to the tabling of this report, which is called the *Indigenous Child Placement Principle Audit Report 2008* by the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, I declare that I have not seen this report so therefore I will not be making any comments. The honourable member indicated that my department has signed off on this report. That is completely wrong, given that I have not seen this report. I am just referring now to the director-general to ask her whether she has seen this report.

Ms Deeth: We have seen the draft report that you are referring to. We have never been made aware that it is actually a final report for publication. In fact, I have recently written to the children's commission to seek clarification on the status of that report. I have also sought from the children's commissioner the opportunity to have further input because as a department we have very, very serious concerns about the quality and the flawed methodology within that audit.

Mrs KEECH: I thank the honourable member for her patience. With respect to her question regarding ICMS, I would like to refer to the department.

Ms Mandla: ICMS does have fields for cultural support plans and Indigenous status. They are still being tested to be quality assured.

Mrs STUCKEY: There is actually a field where people can enter the cultural identity?

Ms Mandla: Yes.

Mrs STUCKEY: I would be very keen to see that.

Mrs KEECH: Just following on from that, for further advice to the honourable member, I am advised that through ICMS there are fields which can be entered for cultural heritage, ethnicity, clan group and language group.

Mrs STUCKEY: Would you please clarify whether that is a live system?

Mrs KEECH: Yes, it is.

Mrs STUCKEY: I also refer to the minister's comments about that report. There are actually two pages dog-eared where there is a response from your department about the methodology, but the commissioner, in her executive summary, does say that your department has accepted all of these findings. The Premier, during estimates, has actually said that this report will be released within the next month.

Mrs KEECH: I saw the draft report. I have not seen any final report from the commission for children and young people whatsoever. What was very clear to me in the draft report was that there was a real focus on processes: it was about going through and ticking boxes. The highest level of hierarchy is when an Indigenous child is placed with a relative—for example, a young child is placed with a grandmother. Because the child had been placed with the grandmother therefore it was not necessary to go through and tick all the boxes about language group et cetera, because the highest priority had been placed. In that instance, because the rest of the boxes had not been ticked, the indication from the commission was that we had not complied with the Indigenous child placement principle.

To me, much of the research methodology that is flawed is not only because of the sample but also because their focus is on processes. The focus of the Department of Child Safety must always be on children. Importantly, it must be on the safety of children. I make no apologies whatsoever for putting the safety of children first. In most instances we can happily ensure that a child is able to remain either with their family group or with their cultural group and ensure their safety. In instances where that is not possible, the safety of the child must always come first.

I have travelled around Queensland talking to Indigenous people, whether that is mayors, elders or members of the community justice groups, and in every instance people have agreed with me that if it has to be an either/or—culture or safety—then safety is paramount. I make no apologies for that whatsoever. In fact, as minister, I would not be doing my duty if I allowed or accepted recommendations that did not put the safety, wellbeing and best interests of the children first.

Mrs STUCKEY: With reference to page 1-225 of the SDS, you claim that case plans are developed and reviewed on an individual case management basis. Why is it, then, that the *Indigenous Child Placement Principle Audit Report 2008* found that 39 per cent of children in care did not have a current case plan when every child should have one completed and maintained, which I am sure you would agree with?

Mrs KEECH: The member once again is referring to this audit report; is that correct?

Mrs STUCKEY: I am more than happy to ask the minister what percentage, on her reporting, would have current case plans.

Mrs KEECH: First of all, given that the honourable member has referred to the children's commission report, which, as I said, I have not seen a final copy of, I will certainly not be making any comments whatsoever with respect to that, except to say that I believe that the research methodology is flawed, it is not rigorous and therefore the decisions and the final comments with respect to that report are still being negotiated.

With respect to case planning and case plan reviews, as the honourable member knows, every child in care who has a child protection order has a case plan. When it comes to case plan reviews, there seems to be some misapprehension that case planning review is something that is done on a one-off occasion. As the honourable member would probably be aware, case plans are living documents; they are used every single day when the child safety officer contacts the child, when they visit the child and when they talk to the carers. Case plan reviews are happening every single time that we are updating information, whether that is through ICMS or through contacts with children and carers.

Another way that we ensure the safety and the rigour of placements and children's wellbeing is through the excellent work that community visitors do. Community visitors, through the Commission for Children and Young People, do a great job in visiting children to ensure they are safe and happy in their placement. If any complaints whatsoever are received about their placement or their carer, those are forwarded to the Commission for Children and Young People.

CHAIR: The next round of questions will be from government members. Throughout proceedings today you have made reference to Indigenous initiatives. I understand that you recently attended an Indigenous round table in Cairns. Could you outline the results of this important event?

Mrs KEECH: I certainly can. This was a very important initiative which has been implemented by the Premier with the support of the Indigenous partnerships minister, Lindy Nelson-Carr. I am pleased to advise that there were a number of positive outcomes from the Bligh government's second Indigenous round table, held last month in Cairns, focusing on child safety and family wellbeing.

Mayors and councillors representing Indigenous communities are committed to working in partnership with the Bligh government to improve outcomes for children in their communities. We all agreed that child protection and wellbeing had to be a priority for us all. We know that action is needed by all levels of government to address the abuse and neglect of children. We agreed that it would not be easy, but I was very encouraged by the level of support from mayors and others who represented their communities. We were able to reach an agreement between the government and the mayors that focuses on all communities becoming child friendly and child safe. I said to the mayors that we needed a strong commitment for a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse and neglect. They gave me that commitment. I also asked the community leaders for a commitment to keeping their children safe and was heartened by their support.

We share the goal of no child being unsafe or needing to be placed away from their communities. This is something that the mayors are really committed to. They do not want their children being removed from their communities and neither do we. That is why we are working harder to build safe houses, so that children can be kept in their communities. That is why we are working to ensure that we can have more foster-carers and kinship-carers in the communities. The mayors have given very strong support to establishing the safe houses, but they do take time to develop. We know that if we impose on Indigenous communities where we want a safe house to be built it will probably be in the wrong place and it will probably not be used as efficiently as it could be. That is why I make no apology for the lengthy period of time taken to ensure we get the placements correct.

Other outcomes from the round table included attracting more kinship- and foster-carers to the communities and supporting more parents and families to declare their homes alcohol free. I was very pleased to be in Aurukun—and whenever I visit an Indigenous community I stay overnight wherever possible—when I would have liked to go for a run but the rest of my party were walking, and we came across a lovely, dear lady who had a big sign on the front fence of her house saying, 'This house is an alcohol-free house.' We have said to the mayors that we would like them to encourage more alcohol-free houses in their communities.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, following on from the previous question, we hear a lot of stories in the media about the disadvantage faced by Indigenous children. Can you tell the committee what the department is doing to address the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child protection system?

Mrs KEECH: I thank the honourable member for her question, and she is right. At the round table, mayors said to me how difficult it is for them to have their communities regularly on the front page of national media for all the wrong reasons. We know that we cannot hide from the child abuse and the extensive child abuse that is happening in some communities, but it is also important, I believe, to get a balance with that reporting. That is why the department is strengthening its service responses to Indigenous communities by being based either in the community or at least a lot closer to the community.

The Cape York and Torres Strait Islands Child Safety Service Centre services the communities of Pormpuraaw, Kowanyama, Lockhart River and Coen. Last month I had the pleasure, with the member for Woodridge and the member for Gaven, of travelling to open the three new branch offices. What a wonderful opportunity that was to meet amazingly strong community members. The Weipa branch office services the communities of Aurukun, Weipa, Napranum and Mapoon. The Thursday Island branch office services the Torres Strait and the northern peninsula area communities. The Cooktown branch office services Cooktown, Hope Vale and Wujal Wujal. The Gulf Child Safety Service Centre services gulf communities including Doomadgee, Burketown and Karumba, and there is a child safety support officer based at Normanton and on Mornington Island.

In addition to direct front-line community staff, we are also investing \$16.5 million in capital and \$29.1 million in operating over the next four years to build safe houses in 11 cape and gulf communities. Safe houses are specially built houses housing up to four to six children and they will have house parents. We will be ensuring that when we need to place a child away from their home, instead of the child having to be flown to Mount Isa or Cairns, we will be able to move the child to a safe place which

will be a home. They will be able to continue to go to school and they will be able to liaise with their family members in a safe manner. We will be able to do our investigation and work with the families, and then we hope to be able to return the child to their own family. We are also looking at intensive family intervention services which will be provided to work directly with high-risk families in Aurukun, Kowanyama, Weipa, Napranum, Pormpuraaw, Palm Island, Doomadgee, Mornington Island and Yarrabah.

Can I say in concluding my remarks with respect to our service delivery in the remote communities how appreciative I am of our amazing child safety staff who work in the communities. I know that the member for Woodridge was as impressed as I was, as was the director-general, when we met the great workers who are up there doing tough work but very good work.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Minister, on page 1-223 of the SDS there is a reference to stronger partnerships. Can you please provide the committee with more information about recognised entities, including their role and the services they provide?

Mrs KEECH: Thank you very much for the question with respect to recognised entities, which do very important work. This was one of the recommendations from the CMC, to ensure that when Indigenous children come into the care of the department we have Indigenous service providers who can provide us with strong cultural advice with respect to placements and all significant decisions, as the director-general advises me. Since 2004 we have boosted funding for Indigenous recognised entity functions by a massive 450 per cent on a recurrent basis. This increased funding, combined with recent reforms to the child safety system, has significantly strengthened the role of recognised entities since 2004.

Under the new Bligh government the commitment continues. In 2008-09 my department will allocate \$16 million to non-government agencies and statewide support to deliver recognised entity services. The Child Protection Act requires recognised entities to be involved in decisions made by the department regarding Indigenous children and families who come into contact with us. They work with child safety service centre staff to provide cultural and family advice and also to participate in decision making about the child protection needs of the Indigenous child or young person.

The REs participate in other significant decisions, such as intake, investigation and assessment, suspected child abuse and neglect discussions, court support, case planning and placement, and provide information to families throughout these phases of the child protection system. The department is committed to working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to keep Indigenous children with their own families and communities wherever possible and when it is safe to do so.

As I said, when I have spoken to the recognised entities the great majority of them have said to me that, when it comes to decisions with respect to placement, family connection and cultural connection are extremely important but more important is safety. If it comes to an either/or situation—the safety of children or the family and cultural connection—safety must always be paramount, because if a child is not safe in their placement they cannot embrace their culture. They cannot learn about their culture if they do not feel safe in their placement. I am very pleased indeed with the very strong support I have received from recognised entities with respect to this policy decision.

Ms GRACE: Minister, continuing on with cultural identity and the safety of children, can you please explain to the committee what work is actually being undertaken to maintain the cultural identity of Indigenous children?

Mrs KEECH: Thank you, and it is an important question. As I said, when children come into care the Department of Child Safety is committed to developing a cultural support plan for each child and young person as a standard part of their case plan. This helps these children by increasing their knowledge and understanding of their family and kinship networks so their cultural heritage is maintained.

The case plan for a child must include actions and arrangements to maintain and support a child's cultural identity, consistent with the statement of standard, the charter of rights and the principles of the Child Protection Act. This applies to an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child or a child from another cultural community. The department must ensure a child's cultural identity and relationships are maintained and provide opportunity for contact between the child and members of a child's community or language group.

The child safety practice manual is specific about requirements in the process to identify family and kinship networks. It requires the collection and storage of large amounts of personal information, gathered accurately from the notifier, about the child, other relevant persons, the concerns and the contextual situation for the child. It highlights the importance of gathering accurate information, such as given names, surnames, nicknames, ages and dates of birth, gender, cultural identity, addresses and relationships, to ensure that departmental records are reliable. It particularly emphasises that accurate details of a person's Indigenous status must be gathered and recorded.

I had a wonderful opportunity to visit a residential care service in Toowoomba where there were several young men residing at the facility who were all at school, pleasingly. The workers there were able to show me how they ensure that cultural identity and the cultural case plans are maintained. They talked about one young man who was about 16 who, although he was Indigenous, knew absolutely nothing about his culture. He had no connection whatsoever to his Indigenous mother or father or any other extended family. So what this service provider and the wonderful case workers did was they got another Indigenous community a little further away to adopt this young man. They had a cultural ceremony where this young man was adopted into the local Indigenous community. The worker was saying what a difference it had made to this young man who, he said himself, always looked Aboriginal but never felt Aboriginal in his heart. But now, because of the generosity of these Indigenous elders, he feels part of and is able to live his Indigenous culture.

Mrs REILLY: That is wonderful to hear. Minister, I want to stay on this topic about Indigenous children in care. You have talked a little bit about the safe houses and their construction in Indigenous communities and a number of other methods and programs that are in place around cultural identity and kinship and protection for children. Can you further outline what is being done to boost the child protection services for Indigenous children across Queensland?

Mrs KEECH: Thank you, and I will be pleased to do that. In the past few months, as I have said, the director-general and I have visited a number of Indigenous communities, staying overnight in Kowanyama, Aurukun, Palm Island and Thursday Island and stopping off in Pormpuraaw, Hope Vale, Cooktown, Napranum and Yarrabah. In my job as child safety minister there are many delights, but there is nothing that I enjoy more than visiting Indigenous communities and in particular staying overnight. The director-general and I really get a huge boost not only in meeting the leaders of the community but importantly in meeting our staff and congratulating them and supporting them in the tough but excellent work they do and in letting them know just how very, very proud we are of the amazing work that they do.

As part of these visits, as I said, I am able to not only see firsthand the projects that the Bligh government is putting in place but also meet the people who are delivering them. The protection of children in these communities is an absolute top priority for the Bligh government which is why we are building safe houses in a number of far-north communities, to provide safe accommodation for at-risk children while keeping them in their communities. This fantastic project is well underway.

Along with a number of community leaders, I inspected the sites in some of these communities where the safe houses are to be built. As the honourable member for Currumbin mentioned earlier, we have not actually opened one of these safe houses yet, although we are very close. I would love to be able to say that, yes, we have half a dozen of them open. But if I had done that I would have trampled over the respect and the rights of the leaders of the communities, and I really do believe that the best way we can do this is to do it in a sensitive and culturally appropriate way, to ensure that when the safe houses are built they are placed in the correct location and they will then be supported by their communities. We will be relying on the Indigenous communities to support not only the house parents, who will be in the safe houses providing care for the children, but also our staff and the family intervention service workers. That is why it is important that we get the decision right before rushing in and building any old house at any old location.

As I said at the round table with Indigenous mayors in May, I gained a commitment from these community leaders that they would fast-track approvals for the safe houses and put child protection at the top of their list of priorities, just as the Bligh government has done. I am very pleased to say that they share our commitment to the building of these safe houses. I believe that in ensuring we make responsive service provisions we must make them innovative but also culturally appropriate.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. The committee will now have a short break.

Proceedings suspended from 10.00 am to 10.12 am

CHAIR: The estimates committee D hearing is now resumed. The question before the committee is that the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Child Safety and the Minister for Women be agreed to. I call the member for Currumbin.

Mrs STUCKEY: I would like to clarify a statement I made earlier when I quoted the Premier as saying that the audit report document would be released. It was actually the commissioner, Ms Fraser, who said that the document had not yet been made public but it was proposed to release it in the next month or so. So I want to attribute those comments to the commissioner.

Mrs KEECH: Thank you for that. That cleared up the confusion I had. I am still confused about what you have tabled here as the actual document—

Mrs STUCKEY: I am sorry, Minister. I just wanted to make a clarification and go into my question.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. It was just a statement of clarification.

Mrs STUCKEY: With reference to SDS 1-222 and your statement that this year the department will focus on improving the quality of child protection and adoption services, can the minister confirm that the foster-carer audit team has completed the phase 3 real-time audit on 11 July 2007, and what were the findings of the audit?

Mrs KEECH: I thank the honourable member for the question with respect to foster-carers. As we all agree, foster-carers are the absolute heart and soul of our child protection system. There are roughly 3,300 foster-carers already providing wonderful support but we certainly do need more of them. That is why the Bligh government has committed \$15 million over the next five years to not only attracting more carers but supporting them and providing more training for them. With respect to the details of the question, I will refer you to the director-general who can give some details.

Ms Deeth: There were three phases of that foster-carer audit. I am almost certain that every phase has been fully completed but we will absolutely confirm that hopefully by the end of this session.

Mrs STUCKEY: Would you like me to take that on notice or accept that you will—

Ms Deeth: We will try to get you the answers before the end of this session.

Mrs STUCKEY: Thank you very much. I really appreciate that. Minister, have you completed that answer?

Mrs KEECH: Yes, I have.

Mrs STUCKEY: With reference to SDS 1-226 and services for children and young people in care and question on notice 380 this year, a little over 10 per cent of child clients received specialised sexual abuse counselling services. Would the minister please detail the process by which a child sex abuse victim is assessed as needing or not needing specialised counselling?

Mrs KEECH: I thank the honourable member for this question. It is an issue you have a particular interest in and I welcome that. Our annual report shows that when it comes to the abuse and neglect of children, thankfully, sexual abuse is the lowest of the risks. It is still an incredibly serious issue and we would all agree that children who have suffered such trauma through sexual abuse deserve the very best of counselling. We do provide a range of services for victims and perpetrators of sexual abuse. Sexual abuse counselling services are provided throughout Queensland both internally by the department and through the non-government sector. The Department of Communities also funds some sexual abuse counselling services.

It is a fact that children who have been sexually abused are more likely to become offenders. Therefore, it is so important that we break the cycle to prevent another generation of sex offenders. The department's internal sexual abuse counselling service is part of the statewide service branch in the child safety service division and is based at Woolloongabba in Brisbane. I recently had the opportunity to visit the service and I am very impressed indeed not only with the work they do but also with the tremendous support that foster-carers provide to these young people. The staff told me that many carers travel from around Brisbane and further afield to take the children to the service and I really do commend them for that.

In July 2006, the government approved an additional \$800,000 a year for four new non-government sexual abuse counselling services, taking the total recurrent funding available to 10 service providers to just under \$2 million a year in 2007-08. I presume the member for Currumbin would be well aware of the Abused Child Trust on the Gold Coast and the very good work they do.

Mrs STUCKEY: It is 'ACT' now—a new name.

Mrs KEECH: Yes, ACT. I visited them and they do very good work indeed and it is lovely to have that excellent service on the Gold Coast. Again, ACT is in Townsville and we have a range of other services throughout Queensland. As well, the Department of Child Safety provides \$200,000 a year and the Department of Communities more than \$400,000 a year to fund Bravehearts to provide counselling and education services to children who have suffered sexual assault. I put on record the very good work that Bravehearts do not only with the new office on the Gold Coast but also with the recently opened office in Cairns.

Mrs STUCKEY: Minister, as you failed to detail any processes regarding the assessment that is required, I now ask: as minister in charge of the department where decisions are made to implant contraceptive devices into children under the age of 16, can you detail in a step-by-step manner what pre and post therapy and specialist counselling these children receive?

Mrs KEECH: Can I first of all go back to the information that the honourable member required regarding who makes decisions about when children need sexual abuse counselling. I will refer to the department with respect to—

Mrs STUCKEY: The processes to determine need.

Mrs KEECH: If the honourable member approves, we will talk about processes for approval for counselling services and then in particular look at contraception.

Mrs STUCKEY: Particularly contraceptive devices that are implanted in children who are under the care of the department.

Mrs KEECH: Certainly. I will refer to the director-general for that information.

Ms Deeth: I will give you the information that I have to hand and if there is further information we can certainly provide it. Obviously, where there is a young person who has been sexually abused, we always refer young people who have suffered sexual abuse and are suffering very significant consequences from that sexual abuse to the available sexual abuse counselling services. There is careful consideration where there is sexually abusive behaviour in a child who is in an out-of-home care placement.

We have two things. We have children who have potentially been sexually abused and we also have children who demonstrate sexually abusive behaviour. In regard to both of those, we really need to have a very clear look at the nature of the presenting issues, the nature of the abuse they have suffered. The other thing we really have a close look at is the potential carer's skills and their abilities to be able to meet those needs while meeting the safety needs of any other children in the placement.

It really is an expert judgement around what level of counselling they require and what is the best place to provide that level of counselling. For example, there is some of the best expertise in the state at the Griffith University forensic sexual abuse counselling service. So where children in our care have potentially suffered sexual abuse and in turn become sexually abusive in their behaviour, they would be a very strong candidate if they are also involved with the youth justice system in Queensland to be counselled by that Griffith University forensic counselling service. If you require any further information in terms of expert assessment, then potentially we can certainly make that available.

Mrs KEECH: Just following on, as the director-general has indicated, when it comes to decisions about who should receive that counselling service and what types of counselling services it should be, we leave that up to the experts. The experts certainly involve Child Safety working with in particular Evolve, who do very good work to ensure that children are provided with the best of services.

Mrs STUCKEY: Chair, I seek an extension so that my question can be more fully answered, in particular regarding the contraceptive implant decisions. If you actually look at the drug that is implanted, there are some very serious side effects and there are some strong precautions and medical measures that must be taken and I would like an assurance that these are being undertaken with children with implants. I have a list of those.

CHAIR: Does the minister need further time to finish the answer or has the minister finished the answer?

Mrs KEECH: Can I say briefly in addition that, as I indicated earlier, when it comes to these decisions they are made by the experts. The experts are medical experts, not Child Safety experts. Also, can I say that when it comes to any concerns with respect to a child or a young person's sexual activity, medical practitioners are obliged under section 191 of the Public Health Act to report a reasonable suspicion of harm to a child to the Department of Child Safety.

Neither the Department of Child Safety nor Queensland Health collect any data in relation to children being prescribed contraception of any form, and this is something we discussed earlier. When it comes to medical practitioners assessing children and young people, in deciding whether a child gives consent or whether the consent of a child's custodian or guardian is required for a medical procedure or treatment, the concept of Gillick competency is applied. The honourable member would be very well aware of that concept. Gillick competency is a legal term referring to a child's ability to understand and provide consent. Where a child is assessed as—

Mrs STUCKEY: With respect, Minister, this has nothing to do with the post therapy of this child. It is not addressing my question.

Mrs KEECH: Where a child is assessed as Gillick competent, doctors are not required to notify parents or carers. As I indicated earlier to the honourable member, when it comes to decisions with respect to counselling services they are best provided by the experts.

Mrs STUCKEY: Minister, I refer to the whole-of-government strategy ClimateSmart 2050. Can the minister please advise the total amount of greenhouse gas emissions that were produced by the department over the 2007-08 financial year and the estimate of greenhouse gas emissions for the 2008-09 financial year?

Mrs KEECH: I thank the honourable member for the question. I have a brief here which talks about all the things that we are doing. It is very important indeed with respect to the government strategy *ClimateSmart 2050—Queensland climate change strategy 2007: a low carbon future* that we do ensure the activities of the department align with ClimateSmart 2050.

I am happy to advise the honourable member and the committee of some of the things the department is doing and also in working with the Department of Public Works. For example, we are progressing a number of strategies to reduce vehicle fleet carbon emissions. We also have plans for Queensland government agencies, including my agency, to implement strategies to reduce vehicle fleet

carbon emissions initially by 15 per cent by 31 December 2010, working from a baseline of 30 June 2007. There are further subsequent emission reduction targets of 25 per cent by 31 December 2012 and 50 per cent by 31 December 2017 which have been set as part of a cabinet decision.

This goes to the issue of the member's question. The department's average vehicle emission rate as at 30 June 2007 was 231 grams of CO₂ per kilometre compared to a whole-of-government average of 247. So we are well below the whole-of-government average. I am very pleased about that. As at 30 January 2008 the department had already achieved a three per cent reduction in motor vehicle emissions as a result of policy changes which required all six-cylinder passenger vehicles to be replaced with four-cylinder vehicles. These changes have seen the total number of four-cylinder vehicles increase to 75 per cent of the total fleet, representing a 20 per cent increase in four-cylinder vehicles over the 2006-07 figure of 55 per cent. These are commendable achievements and demonstrate my department's commitment to actively managing the impact of climate change.

Can I say also that the department has been actively promoting the use of ethanol blended E10 fuel. The use of E10 fuel in the 2007-08 financial year represented 20 per cent of the total fuel usage. This compares with a usage rate of 16 per cent in 2006-07 and 5.6 per cent in 2005-06. So we are on track to ensure we meet the targets.

Mrs STUCKEY: With reference to page 1-224 of the SDS, 2007-08 achievements, dot point 10, and the recruitment of 23 specialist professional staff, what is the minimum professional qualification required to be appointed to a specialist professional role under the One Chance at Childhood initiative and how many of those individuals were previously employed as child safety officers?

Mrs KEECH: I thank the honourable member for the question. I do also thank her for her support for our One Chance at Childhood initiative. It is very gratifying to have bipartisan support when it comes to ensuring the safety and stability of our children aged zero to four. In saying that, I am very genuine in my appreciation.

Mrs STUCKEY: Thank you.

Mrs KEECH: I thank you for the question with respect to staff. The director-general advises me that the One Chance at Childhood program employs a number of specialist staff, as you have indicated. All staff have a degree from a recognised tertiary institution in social work, human services or behavioural sciences acceptable to the director-general or have a certificate from a recognised tertiary institution of eligibility for the award of a degree in social work, human services or behavioural sciences acceptable to the director-general. These include the employment of early childhood specialists to work with child safety service centres to meet the needs of high-risk babies and toddlers, reunification specialists to review practices surrounding family reunification and to ensure appropriate decision making about the safety of reuniting a child in care with their parents, and permanency planning specialists who will work with departmental officers to provide children in care with more permanent and stable placements when it has been assessed that they cannot return home. The honourable member, with respect, asked how many—

Mrs STUCKEY:—were previously employed.

Mrs KEECH:—of the staff that we have employed are new staff. Most of those staff whom I have met when I have travelled around and visited child safety service centres have been existing staff within the department. I am very pleased about that, because one of my commitments is to ensure career progression. If we have career progression in the department, that ensures we can keep our staff in the department rather than have them poached or go off to other government or non-government agencies. I can also advise the honourable member that two staff were recruited in the first round from outside the department, but the great majority were from within the department. I think this brings tremendous strengths to those decisions.

When the director-general and I visited our centres where the new specialist staff are now located, they were so enthusiastic and so excited about the work in ensuring that we focus on our zeros to fours and that in particular we look at stability placements as quickly as possible, whether that means the child will eventually return to the family in a safe environment or we make a decision quickly to decide that the best place for the child should be with a foster-carer in the long term.

Mrs STUCKEY: I just seek in my final question a quick clarification to a question I asked before—the systems question—regarding Indigenous markers in a field in ICMS. I do not have *Hansard* in front of me, but I think Ms Kath Mandla said that fields regarding Indigenous qualifiers were still in a testing phase, yet others have said that it is already live. Could I have clarification on that, please?

Mrs KEECH: Certainly. I ask the director-general to provide some clarification.

Ms Death: The ability for staff to actually record those categories around ethnicity—

Mrs STUCKEY: Cultural identity.

Ms Death:—and cultural identity are all there and field staff can actually enter them. I will get Kath to confirm, but it is the system-level data extraction that is under testing.

Mrs STUCKEY: If she could explain briefly I would be grateful.

Ms Mandla: We have the Indigenous fields but we are still doing some testing in relation to some of the cultural aspects of the data we are collecting. I do not have the details of that here, but if you want further detail we could take it on notice.

Mrs STUCKEY: I would be very happy if you would take it on notice. Thank you.

Mrs KEECH: Just to clarify, I will hand over to Deidre to give us some additional information.

Ms Mulkerin: In relation to your specific question, as staff enter information in relation to their clients, the actual client profile screen that comes up and asks them for information in relation to the children asks them about ethnicity, language groups and cultural heritage. So as a child safety officer, as I am entering information all of that is prompted. Again, if I am searching for information in relation to a child, as I look up their history, all of that information is available. The issue is that some of the back end under data reporting is still being tested. But in relation to our front-line staff, as they enter information and as they look for information, that is all available to them to do their front-line work.

Mrs STUCKEY: Thank you for that clarification.

Mrs KEECH: Mr Chairman, is the member satisfied with that response or is there additional information that she would like us to get for her?

Mrs STUCKEY: I am satisfied with the response but I would also like the information which Kath is getting me on notice. If there is more detail I would really appreciate it.

Ms Mandla: I have a little bit more information here. All Indigenous fields are there and the data quality is okay and they are reporting. All cultural fields are there. The data quality is currently being tested and it is not yet reporting.

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

Mrs REILLY: Parts of page 1-222 of the ASDS focus on strengthening the workforce. I understand that child protection work can be very challenging, and you have alluded to the high turnover of child protection staff and the difficulty in maintaining and keeping good staff. I understand also that many people do not appreciate what child protection workers have to deal with in protecting Queensland's most vulnerable children. Can you provide the committee with some information about the types of challenges faced by staff and how the department supports them in these circumstances?

Mrs KEECH: I thank the honourable member for her support of our hardworking staff. The business of child protection is often highly emotive and can place those involved under great stress. Parents whose children have been removed from their care can and often do react violently to the Department of Child Safety's involvement in their lives. Child safety officers aim to maintain good working relationships with the parents of children in the department's care by listening to parents and taking their concerns seriously. Our officers have one of the toughest jobs in government, but they return to work each day because they want to help protect and care for Queensland's vulnerable children. It is a job that requires them to maintain a delicate balance, something they do extremely well.

CSOs must regularly contend with threats to their safety and verbal threats and abuse. To them it is simply part of the job. They put the safety of children well above their own safety. The attacks they face can range from death threats, physical assaults and angry mothers stalking the front entrance of a service centre armed with a machete to an attempt to run an officer off the road with a car with children inside.

Officers have had to send their children away to boarding school. Others have had parents who have had children removed by the officer threaten to kidnap the officer's children. They are forced to deal with parents threatening to set themselves alight, threatening to bomb child safety service centres or threatening to harm officers or their families.

Late last year a father placed a gun on the table during an interview with child safety officers in Brisbane. In fact, he was being interviewed by the officers and lent down and said, 'I've got something to show you,' and brought out a pink towel. He then unwrapped the pink towel and inside was a handgun. Of course, as the member for Cleveland would know, every gun has to be treated as though it is loaded. Fortunately, the police were on the scene within minutes and so all was well. But it was a very frightening experience for the officers involved.

During a recent trip to central Queensland and Cape York with the director-general and the member for Woodridge, I heard the story of a meticulously planned operation to remove a young boy from his abusive family who were living in an outback town after being on the run from the department for over six months. Child safety officers worked very closely with the police to ensure the operation went off without a hitch. They were taking no chances because this father had said that if anybody came onto his property to remove his child, even though four of his children had already been removed from him, he would shoot them. The police knew that he had a gun. So it was a very carefully planned operation. Thanks to police intelligence we ensured that child safety officers did not enter the yard until all was safe. When they did the child was able to be removed quickly and, I am very pleased to say, is now with a happy and loving foster-carer.

The heartache was brought home to me, the member for Woodridge and the director-general when we went to the child safety office to meet with staff and carers and have lunch with them. When the carer came in she actually had the little boy with her. He was a beautiful little toddler. We could see he was very beaten up around the face. Our hearts really went out to him.

When the child safety officers went into the house they knew from their records that it was the boy's birthday. You would have expected for a toddler that there would have been a birthday cake and presents. Of course there was nothing. What was he getting for his birthday? His hair was being deloused. Thanks to the good work of child safety officers and the police that little boy is now in a very safe place.

Mrs REILLY: I think it is extraordinary the work they do and the circumstances they do it under.

Ms GRACE: In the SDS at page 1-222 I note and applaud the reference to strengthening the workforce. Can you advise the committee, after what we have heard, of any initiatives you will deliver in 2008-09?

Mrs KEECH: I am very pleased to provide an answer to the member for Brisbane Central. As she would know, an organisation is only as good as its people. My department has hundreds of fantastic people, all committed to delivering good outcomes for Queensland's vulnerable children and young people. They put the children's wellbeing way ahead of anything else.

The department's passionate officers deserve a reward for their hard work, I believe. That is why I am very pleased to announce this morning that we are giving up to 300 of our front-line staff a pay rise. I believe they sincerely deserve it. Thanks to extra funding provided in the Bligh budget, we will be promoting around 40 per cent of child safety officers from the PO2 level to the PO3 level. To all of the CSOs listening on the web right now I say, 'Congratulations to you for the good job that you are doing. We are very pleased indeed to be providing you with a pay rise.'

When I became minister in September last year I committed to supporting our staff. In fact, I made it my No. 1 priority. As I travelled the state visiting the front-line staff in centres from the Gold Coast to Thursday Island and west to Mount Isa many of them told me a drawback was a lack of career paths. I heard the same story when I met with QPSU general secretary, Alex Scott, and delegates.

I am happy to say that those discussions did not fall on deaf ears. I have been listening. I took their case to the Premier and Treasurer. I thank the Premier and Treasurer for listening and approving a budget allocation of an extra \$2.2 million this year and \$15.1 million over four years for better career progression opportunities. I thank them for the budget allocation of \$10.5 million over four years that will allow us to employ an extra 40 front-line staff to help protect children.

We are doing much to deliver short-term and long-term benefits to our staff. I want my department to set the benchmark for flexible work practices. With the workforce comprising 85 per cent women it makes sense to work towards this goal. With the cooperation of the QPSU and our staff we are converting temporary employees to permanents. This has been one of my real priorities.

At the very first child safety service centre I visited a staff member was waving a letter around with excitement. This letter said that she had just been made permanent. That was a real thrill for her. I am happy to announce that so far this year we have converted 219 temporary staff to permanent, providing more job opportunities and more flexible working hours. That is nearly 220 staff members who were previously temporary are now permanent.

Ms GRACE: I agree to an extension.

Mrs KEECH: I thank the honourable member. I am very proud indeed to be delivering on these quick wins. Our staff are our greatest asset. I am absolutely determined, on the behalf of the Bligh government, to ensure they get the resources and the support they deserve.

CHAIR: I note in your last answer you said an organisation is only as good as its people and you spoke about pay rises. Under the 2008-09 highlights on page 1-222 of the SDS I see your department is committed to supporting its front-line workers. Can you advise of any initiatives aimed at achieving that goal?

Mrs KEECH: Yes, I certainly can. I thank the honourable member for the question. Part of the Bligh government's commitment to child protection is finding innovative new ways to make the best use of our resources. Delivering services to Queensland's most vulnerable children is a massive job especially in such a decentralised state as Queensland.

That is why we have put together a special child safety flying squad—a crack team of troubleshooters who can be mobilised quickly and sent anywhere in the state to help deal with short-term staffing and practice issues. This quick response team of five senior child safety officers and soon to be seven and a Brisbane based manager will be sent in to relieve temporary workload issues.

They might deal with situations such as workload backlogs caused by delays in recruiting specialist staff, particularly in smaller regional centres. This team has the added advantage of being able to provide skill development and mentoring for local staff while they are there, boosting the capacity of

our front-line workers in the long term. Having a team like this ready to be deployed wherever and whenever they are needed gives us another effective way of supporting our dedicated front-line workers. We can make sure we are providing the best possible service to Queensland's at-risk children while providing some much needed relief for our hardworking staff.

We have already sent the flying squad to areas such as Atherton and the Cape Torres Child Safety Service Centre. Their mission was mainly to investigate and assess complex potential child abuse cases, complete outstanding court work, help with intake processes and investigate matters relating to carers. The team also provided professional development to local child safety officers by sharing their extensive knowledge and skills.

The team has now divided to conquer some short-term situations emerging in Mackay and the Mount Isa based gulf centre. The Mackay trio is investigating and assessing potential child abuse cases. The two officers in Mount Isa are developing case plans for intervention with parental agreement cases where the department is working closely with families. The next troubleshooting mission is Toowoomba where the team will head later this year.

Apart from the positive impact on the front line, joining the response team is an opportunity for staff members to enhance their skills, experience and knowledge and work in a variety of settings and communities. Team members will rotate every six to 12 months so that the opportunities as well as the requirement to live away from home are shared.

CHAIR: I think that is a great initiative.

Mrs SCOTT: I think we probably all realise how challenging it is to attract staff to child protection and other human service agencies. What is the department doing to help attract, retain and support staff in the department?

Mrs KEECH: I thank the honourable member. I thank her for coming with me on our epic journey to the cape to see firsthand the tremendous good work that is happening out there. You are right; attracting and keeping staff is always a challenge when we work in such a difficult area. On top of local recruitment programs the department has coordinated the following campaigns since November 2007: four statewide recruitment campaigns; four interim campaigns; three zone specific campaigns in the Ipswich and western zone, northern and far northern zone and central zone; and four service centre specific campaigns in Emerald, Gladstone, Cape Torres, Mount Isa and the gulf. We are also looking at education to employment programs that focus on work experience for Indigenous high school students, migrant worker programs, field placements for university students and other trainee and placement programs.

The department has a dedicated central recruitment team. This team attended six university fairs in March this year to speak with university graduates interested in working in child protection. The team also attended a number of carer fairs including the Queensland '@ Work & Play' expos in Sydney and Melbourne and Country Week in Brisbane.

The department has supported 26 scholarship holders, 25 trainees and 15 cadets in 2007-08 to improve the quality and diversity of staff within the department. As a result of our front-line work analysis and job design project we are also reviewing our selection methods and processes for front-line staff. Following the highly successful recruitment campaign for foster-carers we are also progressing work in relation to designing new and innovative campaigns and advertising to attract the best staff to this important vocation.

Staffcare, a unit in our human relations branch, manages a range of psychological and emotional support programs across the department, including a network of 106 peer support officers who are accessed by around 270 front-line staff each month. We certainly work to support our staff, particularly when they are managing very challenging and contentious front-line issues.

Another area that is very important is our rural and remote incentives scheme. A survey of staff in rural and remote locations was undertaken in late 2007. The results showed that the scheme has been successful. The survey revealed that 14 per cent of the 64 respondents moved because of the financial incentives package. Recently I was in Kingaroy, where for the first time they have a full complement because of the rural and remote incentives scheme.

Mrs SCOTT: Sounds like a good plan. I remember a young police officer on Thursday Island who is planning to join you. Could I refer you to page 1-223 of the Service Delivery Statement where it mentions an investment of \$2.8 million in the rural and remote financial incentives scheme. Could you provide the committee with further details about how this scheme operates and whether it is making a difference in attracting staff to these areas?

Mrs KEECH: I thank the honourable member for the opportunity to follow up on the important initiatives of the remote and rural incentives scheme. For any government, attracting and maintaining staff in our very remote areas is always a challenge. That is why the Department of Child Safety is taking action.

I am happy to announce that my department's rural and remote incentives scheme is producing results. We have been achieving great things in some areas where there have been problems with recruitment. Centres like Kingaroy and Emerald now have strong staff complements thanks in part to this scheme and in part to resourceful recruitment by managers.

The member and I were together in Emerald recently with the director-general. I spoke to two new team leaders who have come to the child safety service centre. They have moved there from working in Brisbane. Both absolutely love their new jobs and their new home. I have heard that many young men in Emerald and Kingaroy enjoy the fact that extra staff are coming, particularly when they are young women. It is good news for everybody.

In July 2006 the department launched the rural and remote incentives scheme, providing staff with a suite of financial incentives and allowances, including individual annual bonus payments, accommodation assistance and access to learning and development funding to aid in the attraction and retention of staff in these remote areas. Under the program, full-time staff each receive a \$10,000 annual bonus paid in six-monthly instalments. They move to a centre, stay for six months and they get the first instalment of \$5,000. If they stay another six months they get the other instalment. There is accommodation assistance of up to three years for staff who relocate to specific locations. As well, there is a \$3,000 per year learning and development allowance and priority transfer to their preferred location after a qualifying period of 12 or 18 months, depending on the location. Allowances are provided pro rata to part-time employees.

Kingaroy is a wine and cheese mecca, which we know from my previous portfolio responsibilities. I was told that there is a waiting list for people wanting to work in Kingaroy. Part of that is not only because of the excellent work that the centre is doing but also because of the remote and rural incentives program. With regard to other areas in the cape and the gulf, I am also very impressed with the quality of people we are recruiting now through the program.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The next round of questions will be from non-government members. I call the member for Currumbin.

Mrs STUCKEY: Minister, with reference to pages 1-227 and 1-228 of the SDS, will you provide to the committee a breakdown of how much money has been allocated to the rollout of child health passports and how many children will receive a completed passport in this coming 2008-09 year?

Mrs KEECH: I thank the honourable member for the question with respect to child health passports. As the member is aware, this is an issue that is of real priority to the Bligh government. That is why we have indicated that there is a time frame of ensuring that all children who come into the care of the department will have a child health passport. The long-term aim is for all children in out-of-home care to have a child health passport by 2010. The implementation has been progressed on a priority basis, initially focused on children with significant health needs and vulnerabilities, vulnerable children aged zero to four, and young people transitioning from care.

The department's ICMS, through the field of the health plan creation date, now provides the capacity to record data on children with a health plan. I can advise the honourable member that, as of 18 May 2008, there were 1,149 children with a health plan recorded on ICMS—1,149. The child health plan is a component of the child health passport process. So there are 1,149 with a health plan and that is a component of the passport.

The child health passport process has been in place for a year and some issues have been identified with its implementation. The department has consulted with staff and will streamline the completion of the process by improving the integration of health plans with ongoing case planning, negotiating with key health providers to facilitate improved access and communication, and simplifying health assessments. I have been advised after speaking to general practitioners that there certainly have been some issues affecting the completion of child health passports, including difficulties in accessing GPs, the willingness of some GPs to undertake child health passports, and delays by GPs in returning reports. Complex processes that are unclear include unnecessary steps and limited flexibility in health assessments.

I want to be able to support GPs who do very good work in providing for the safety of our children's health through the child health passports, and for this reason I believe that GPs need more support. For the ministerial council in Canberra next week I have put on the agenda an improvement in the level of health care provided to children in care. I have asked my department to look at options to accelerate the take-up of health passports and I expect to see further improvements. Through you, Mr Chair, could I ask for an extension?

Mrs STUCKEY: Yes, you may.

Mrs KEECH: Thank you very much. I have asked my department to look at options to accelerate the take-up of health passports, given that the deadline for full completion is 2010. I would also anticipate practices adopted by some child safety service centres to prepare health passports as soon as children come into care to be expanded statewide. In May 2008, in consultation with Queensland Health, a streamlined process was developed. This revised process is expected to significantly increase

the uptake of child health passports and improve the capacity of staff to integrate health needs planning into ongoing case work. What I can say is that we are off to a good start, but we certainly have a lot more to do to reach the deadline of 2010.

I intend to support the good work that general practitioners are doing in supporting us with the implementation of our passports by taking to the ministerial council in Canberra the need for GPs to have their own Medicare numbers so that when foster-carers bring children to GPs they will have a Medicare number. Currently, I am advised that it can take extensive time and also up to \$250 for a child to have their baseline child health passport completed. Of course the department can reimburse the carer, but this can take some time and carers would much prefer to simply have a bulk-billing number. I look forward to the support of other jurisdictions and the Commonwealth government in supporting GPs.

Mrs STUCKEY: I thank the minister for the detailed answer. I did ask how many would receive a completed passport. That does raise the issue of how many have not. Also, does that mean that some children, because it is on a priority basis—as I can understand in a sense it should be, although I also believe that every child deserves a passport—actually never receive one because of the nature of the time in care?

Mrs KEECH: As I said, what we are doing currently is prioritising the rollout of the child health passports, but of course every child who needs medical attention is provided with that. They can be assured that their foster-carer will take them to the local clinic, the local hospital or a GP to ensure their health needs are met. If the member has any concerns about any individual children whose health needs are not being met, I would sincerely appreciate that advice being provided to us, because the health of children is extremely important. Wellbeing checks in Indigenous communities are continuing currently.

As we know—and I was recently reading the latest reports on deaths of children who are in the care of our department—many children who come into the care of the department have significant health problems. Many of them are born with very severe disabilities and the parents relinquish the child at birth and, sadly, then the child dies very soon after having been relinquished into our care. It is most important that children receive the medical attention that they deserve and that they need, and that is why we are ensuring we are prioritising child health passports, so that it is firstly directed to children with significant health needs. It is also focused on vulnerable children aged zero to four and young people transitioning from care.

Mrs STUCKEY: The minister failed to answer how many children were not receiving any. That was the beginning of my question.

CHAIR: I just remind the member that the minister may answer the question in any manner she deems appropriate.

Mrs STUCKEY: Thank you. I will draw it to the minister's attention; she completely failed to answer. I will now move to my next question. With reference to page 1-224, can the minister elaborate on how the education support plans for children in care were developed and who has responsibility for ensuring these plans are in place and implemented?

Mrs KEECH: I thank the honourable member for the question. Mr Chair, just in responding to the negative comments that the member made with respect to the response to her previous question, as I indicated in that response I have answered the question because I said that the initiative is being phased in. The target is a 2010 completion. I gave the numbers of children who do have a health plan, so it is inaccurate and it is unfair for the honourable member to be alleging that I did not respond to the question.

The member has asked another important question, and that is with respect to education support plans. I can advise the honourable member that in the 2007 calendar year figures indicate that, of the 3,512 students enrolled in state and non-state schools, 88 per cent had an education support plan developed within one month of the school being notified; 11 per cent had an education support plan under development; and for the remaining one per cent an education support plan was still to be commenced, and that would obviously be because those children may have just initially enrolled at the school.

I really do want to thank in particular the teachers who are doing such good work in ensuring the education support plans are being delivered to every single child. Children who come into the care of the department frequently have very serious issues when it comes to their education. They have frequently missed school as parents drag them all around the state. They also are regularly ill and so therefore are absent from school. So it is very important indeed that they do have an education support plan. I also take this opportunity to thank my colleague the Hon. Rod Welford for his strong support of the plans.

Support strategies that have been funded for the most challenging children have been able to provide additional mentoring, teacher aide time, speech and language therapy, specialist group programs, coaching, anger management therapy, teaching social skills and community engagement programs. The honourable member asked the question regarding who is responsible for developing

education support plans. This is through an agreement with my department and the Department of Education, Training and the Arts to assist in providing children and young people in care with effective cross-agency support to maximise their educational outcomes.

Mrs STUCKEY: Thank you. Minister, as per section 246A of the Child Protection Act, I refer to child deaths, and you have just mentioned child deaths in the review. How many child deaths did the department review in 2007-08 which found that department involvement was insufficient in the delivery of service to the child and the child's family?

Mrs KEECH: While we get the information from the department, I want to say that the death of any child is a tragedy, but when it is the death of a child in the care of my department we take that issue very seriously indeed. The majority of the children who die in the care of the department die from natural causes. In fact, I have here the latest statistics, for 2007-08, that the honourable member has asked for. In 2007-08 a total of 63 children and young people known to the department died. At this time, the cause of death for 12 young people is yet to be confirmed. Of the 51 remaining deaths, the most common cause of death is disease and morbid conditions accounting for 21 deaths, which is 41 per cent. This refers to what I said earlier about the majority of the causes of death being due to natural causes, with the children often having significant and very severe disabilities. This is followed by 15, which is almost 30 per cent, attributable to accidental death including road fatalities, drowning and house fires.

Seven of the 51 deaths related to fatal assault. In six cases the department had no information whatsoever that would have alerted staff to the risks and in one case the child was unborn. In one case there was no Queensland child protection history and the department became involved after the injury was inflicted. In four cases the fatal assault was perpetrated by a partner or relative with no known child protection history. In one case the department had no knowledge of the father's mental illness, a condition which led to the fatal assault. The final case involved an unborn child notification. The child died before the department was notified of the birth.

Over the period 2004-05 and 2006-07, the number of children dying who are known to the department has been increasing by approximately 20 per cent each year. This happens as more children are known to the department and as our population increases. However, the director-general advises me that over the last 12 months the number of children known to the department dying has slowed to an increase of 14 per cent.

Mrs STUCKEY: Thank you. At page 1-222 of the SDS regarding improving adoption services, why have you not substantially increased funding for post-adoption services when you knew changes to the adoption act were forthcoming? Minister Boyle last year in the estimates hearing predicted that the review changes were imminent. So you have had plenty of time. What support services are you supplying for people who will be affected by the release of the most recent discussion paper?

Mrs KEECH: I thank the honourable member for her comments with respect to the recent announcement by the Premier and me after cabinet on Monday about reform of the adoption act in Queensland. The Queensland adoption act is the most restrictive in Australia and, I would expect, one of the most restrictive in the world. The information in particular that we will be looking at reforming is access to identified information, but at the same time ensuring the protection of privacy.

With regard to post-adoption services, which is the issue that the member in particular is asking about, I advise that adoption services Queensland in my department do a great job. They provide support in the form of information and advice to adopted people, adoptive parents and birth relatives. I can also announce that from the budget of this year one additional support officer will be provided to adoption services Queensland. This person will in particular be able to provide additional support, given the reforms that we have identified.

Post-adoption services currently case manage and facilitate correspondence for the families of over 336 children. From 1 July 2007 until 30 June 2008, there have been more than 261 exchanges of information. The work of adoption services Queensland is absolutely commendable. They work very hard indeed with very sensitive issues. I am very pleased, given that the great majority of the issues that they have to deal with relate often to young people or people who have been denied access to the most basic personal information.

Young people who have been adopted prior to June 1991, if there is an objection to access to information, cannot get the most basic personal information that is held by the department, which says your name at your birth, the name of your mother, the name of your father at your birth, or whether you may have any siblings. This information has been denied up until now by legislation. That is why I am very pleased indeed to have supported the Premier in making announcements that we will be conducting a consultation process and asking people their thoughts about ways of opening up access to identifying information for those who have been adopted prior to June 1991, but at the same time recognising that there are some people, in particular birth mothers, who do not want their privacy breached.

Mrs STUCKEY: Thank you. I think you mentioned earlier—and I do not have the *Hansard* in front of me—that the department has no further involvement once a child leaves out-of-home care if there is a relationship breakdown. I ask the minister: what about those who do not have a relationship

breakdown? I am talking about transitioning care here. I notice there is some half a million dollars to the CREATE Foundation. How many children does the department, in effect, help to leave care? How far does this money stretch in comparison to the number of children requiring it?

Mrs KEECH: I thank the honourable member for the question. When you are talking about the department not having any further interaction with children when they leave due to breakdown, I would just clarify—and I would go back to the *Hansard* record—that, clearly, if a child is past 18 we would be looking at supporting them in their transition from care. But if the child is under 18, of course, we would have our ongoing and usual interaction and support of that child, which is something that is legislated through our Child Protection Act.

Making the transition from foster care to independent living can be a difficult one for young people. That is why the government supports the good work of CREATE in that transition from care. All of us know with our own children, children are staying at home longer. Even when they do want to leave home, they need the support of their family and friends. If you do not have a family to return home to, the department is there, as are our non-government agencies, to support young people who are transitioning out of care.

The director-general advises me that currently there are approximately 1,100 young people in the 15- to 17-year age group in out-of-home care. The department supports 200 or so of these children and young people to leave the care of the department each year. Research has shown that young people leaving out-of-home care are at significant risk of experiencing homelessness, unemployment, substance abuse, young parenthood, social exclusion and mental illness. Planning for transition from care commences at roughly around 15 years of age and intensifies as the young person approaches 18 to assist in their planned exit from care.

We have some very good examples of the sort of support that we give—whether that is supporting young people continuing on with their education, supporting them in finding jobs and even supporting them in setting up their new unit. Recently, I personally was contacted by a young person who sought assistance in getting some whitegoods for her unit. I was very pleased indeed that we were able to support her in that request through the good work of CREATE. So that young person now has a brand-new washing machine, which she was so thrilled about that she was even kind enough to write me a letter, which was very gratefully received.

On 21 May 2008, I announced the Bligh government's commitment of \$1.5 million over the next three years to implement a joint initiative with the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations to enable young people leaving care to receive additional help to develop life skills as well as undertake education, employment or training opportunities. This is an innovative project, focusing on the goal of future workforce participation for young people leaving care. The department also provides funding of about half a million dollars annually to CREATE, which, as I said, does a very good job indeed in working with our young people as they are transitioning from care.

Mr Chair, for the information of the honourable member for Currumbin, I can give a response to the question about the foster-carer audit team. If I could provide that now?

CHAIR: Yes, go ahead.

Ms Deeth: I can confirm that the 2003-04 audit was the final retrospective audit that was to be conducted by our foster-carer audit team. As you may be aware, the audit focused on foster-carers subject to a child protection notification that had been received by the department during the period 1 July 2003 to 30 June 2004 and which related to children placed with those foster-carers at that time. So they were all of those foster care notifications pre the formation of the new department.

I can confirm that that third and final audit has been completed. In fact, it was finalised in April 2007. There are limited recommendations arising from that report, as most of the 2003-04 audit findings are concurrent with those that were previously identified in the first two audits and those recommendations have already been addressed by the department. Certainly, that third and final audit, in terms of its findings, recognised the need to prioritise and improve the foster care system. That is what the basis of our 110 recommendations has been since the formation of the new department.

The other areas that it identified that we needed to improve, which we have been seriously putting investment into, are obviously improving our child protection practice and supporting our staff through training. The other thing I can also advise is that we have a new matters of concern review team that we have formed centrally with expertise in assisting the field staff in conducting reviews into matters of concern.

Mrs STUCKEY: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr Chair, for that.

CHAIR: Thank you. The next round of questions will be from the government members. Minister, you have been speaking a lot about our child safety workforce. You have outlined some of the situations they have been placed in. I understand that child protection work is both challenging and rewarding and that front-line staff have to deal with violent families, particularly where children have to be removed from their parents to ensure their own safety. What is the department doing to ensure the safety of staff in this difficult role?

Mrs KEECH: I thank the honourable member for the question. In his former profession as a police officer he would understand the importance of safety when it comes to our staff. The Department of Child Safety is finalising a comprehensive consultation process with staff to examine safety practices across the department. I am committed to the safety of my staff and the implementation of new initiatives the department develops in response to this consultation process.

The department has established a dedicated workplace health and safety team to address staff safety. This team consists of seven officers across all our zones dedicated to proactively managing the safety, security, health and wellbeing of staff. These officers conduct annual internal workplace health and safety audits and coordinate the quarterly health and safety inspection of child safety service centres. These orders and inspections provide a platform for the department to proactively address workplace risks and to undertake specific projects to ensure that the prevention of harm is given a high priority.

The workplace health and safety officers also conduct regular training of staff in workplace health and safety, including worker safety in child protection, zero tolerance to workplace aggression, non-violent crisis intervention and emergency management. In 2007, a specific workplace health and safety training program was developed to enhance existing training and induction initiatives. This program involved the making of a departmental DVD with a major focus on front-line staff safety. It provided all staff with the tools and skills to remain physically safe in and outside the workplace. The program was rolled out across Queensland to over 1,000 front-line staff. This program continues to be presented to new and existing staff in child safety service centres across the state.

Staffcare, an employee assistance program, is the department's key program to prepare staff for, and to be able to respond to, potentially psychologically damaging events. There have been 196 critical incidents reported to Staffcare from June 2007 to June 2008 and 125 of those critical incidents required a post-incident report response. Staffcare has developed approximately 35 psychosocial education sessions for front-line staff, developed information tools and provided 167 individual counselling sessions in the period June 2007 to June 2008.

With respect to accommodation, the safety and security of child safety staff remains a key priority for the department. In particular, when it comes to child safety service centres accommodation, guidelines in April 2005 outlined clearly a significant number of physical safety and security features to provide a safe, supportive work environment for staff. We have done a lot of things since then. We have built-in closed-circuit TVs covering reception, interview rooms and, where appropriate, staff access to the car park area. We have continuous voice-recording systems at reception and a combination of fixed and personal duress alarms. We use electronic locks between public access and back office areas. We have dual access to interview and conference rooms to provide a safe escape point for staff.

CHAIR: Excellent. Thank you very much.

Ms GRACE: Safety is always important for staff and it is an issue dear to my heart. Also on page 1-223 of the SDS it states that the department will facilitate staff access to more flexible work arrangements—another issue that is also dear to my heart. Can you provide the committee with more information about this initiative and why it is a priority?

Mrs KEECH: I thank the honourable member for the question. I know that flexibility of staff, particularly when we have so many female staff, is something that is dear to your heart. Building resilience and confidence commences as soon as new staff enter the department. We have established a workplace health and safety induction program. All our child safety officers receive a significant, locally conducted, on-the-job, structured learning and assessment program during their first year. This process is assisted by our training and specialist support branch staff who undertake more than 600 individual support visits to child safety officers each year. We also have peer support programs and pre and post incident support which I discussed earlier.

With regard to flexible work arrangements, the department is committed to providing flexible work options for our staff. This is particularly important. The workforce profile consists largely of young female staff. In fact, more than 85 per cent of the department's workforce is female—a level that is significantly higher than the Queensland Public Service average of just 66 per cent. Additionally, the Department of Child Safety is a comparatively young workforce, with 46 per cent of the workforce under 35 years of age and 16 per cent under 25 years of age—again, a significantly different distribution to the public sector as a whole. This workforce profile means a high proportion of our staff are likely to be working mothers or mothers-to-be and so flexibility in work practices is vital to their retention. Indeed, there are currently 35 staff on paid maternity leave and 29 staff on unpaid maternity leave. We congratulate those staff who have just had babies. Three quarters of those on paid maternity leave are taking half pay. There are a number of other staff currently using other types of leave to extend their paid maternity leave. Flexible work arrangements have been developed to encourage employees wanting to work non-standard corporate hours or a range of working options in order to retain their often extensive corporate knowledge and experience. We want to keep these good staff with us so that is why we are arranging flexible work hours.

Currently nearly 18 per cent of the child safety workforce is part-time, up from 16 per cent in the previous quarter, indicating that the department is attuned to the needs of staff and the requirement to offer flexible modes of work to attract and retain workers. To ensure that the department does this and supports our workforce, we are investigating options for promoting and expanding flexible work arrangements. We are doing this in collaboration with the Queensland Public Sector Union. In fact, we have commenced a joint working party. My department is also investigating broader staff wellbeing programs and we look forward to the implementation outcomes later.

Mrs REILLY: In ASDS 1-223 there is reference to the foster care recruitment campaign. You have referred to it a couple of times today already but I wanted to ask you to elaborate on it a little bit. I have seen the ads a fair bit on TV and I have to say that they are very overpowering. I have to remind myself that I cannot reach for the phone and volunteer that time or else my two children would leave home. What I am keen to know is what sort of results are coming through. Can you give an update on the campaign? And how can I, as a member of parliament, and other members of parliament, support the campaign?

Mrs KEECH: I thank the honourable member for her questions and I thank her for her offer as a member of parliament to support the campaign. As you indicated, we launched our new foster care recruitment campaign, part of the Bligh government's \$15 million campaign, on Mother's Day in May of this year. I can announce today that it has been amazingly successful. We have had a massive 3,600 calls from people interested in opening their hearts and homes to children in need. If we had not had the campaign, during the same period we would probably expect, maybe if we were very lucky, 50 calls. To have 3,600 calls is absolutely fantastic and I am very pleased indeed. On 5 July I attended a Drive for 25 barbecue with Bonny Barry and other government members of parliament on the north side. There I was advised that the first final approval for a foster carer through the campaign had recently been made. We are now transferring those 3,600 calls into general approved carers which shows that the campaign in such a small amount of time is working.

I am looking forward to other members of parliament conducting their own Drive for 25 campaigns, as the member for Aspley and her colleagues on the north side have. That campaign was very successful indeed. Bonny and other members have given themselves a target of recruiting 25 new carers. I encourage all members from both sides of the House to join me. I have the campaign information here: 'A message from kids of Queensland suffering abuse and neglect. Real carers really needed.' That information is here and I would encourage you to take it and present it to your P&Cs. What has been particularly successful has been awareness raising in our community that you can make a real difference in a child's life by being a foster carer but you do not have to be a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week foster carer. Even a couple of days a month or a couple of days a week would make a difference. We are getting large numbers of potential carers ringing to inquire how they can become support carers or emergency carers. It really is very exciting because the more carers we have, the more flexibility we have for the placement of our children. I look forward to other members of parliament, such as the member for Cleveland, supporting us in our Drive for 25 campaign.

Ms GRACE: As a very lucky adoptive mum post June 1991, can you advise the committee of how the proposed provision of contemporary adoption law fits with the adoption services referenced at 1-225 of the ASDS and how your announcement earlier this week has been accepted?

Mrs KEECH: I thank the honourable member and I do acknowledge your pride in being an adoptive mum; is that the right term?

Ms GRACE: Probably, yes.

Mrs KEECH: The member for Brisbane Central has been tremendous in the support and advice she has given to me personally with respect to raising children who are adopted. I am very pleased with the announcement on Monday from cabinet that the Bligh government is overhauling the state's adoption laws, some of which are over 40 years old. Reform of the Adoption of Queensland Act 1964 is very much overdue. We have taken this issue out of the too-hard basket where it has been for far too long. Our adoption laws, which have not been comprehensively reformed in over four decades, are the most restrictive in the country. I want our adoption legislation to reflect modern Queensland. We will have a bill before the parliament before the end of the year. As part of the reform, the government will examine the best way to give adoptive people and birth parents equal access to information about their history. Under current laws anyone involved in adoptions before June 1991 is denied identifying information if the child or birth parent has lodged an objection. This objection remains in place even after their death. Even after a birth mother may have died, the objection still remains. We have heard of cases where the birth mother literally on her death bed writes a will revoking the objection. However, a will cannot allow it to be lifted. It is an absolutely heart-wrenching circumstance where even though the mother has passed on the birth child cannot get access to that information. This means that an adopted child seeking information about their family history is denied access to it. With close to 3,000 Queenslanders affected by this outdated legislation there are a lot of unanswered questions. It is time we took a good look at the nature of these laws that essentially deny a small group of people a right to their identity. This is a complex and sensitive issue and there are many considerations, especially

around a person's right to privacy. But that is not a reason to ignore it. Neither is it the fact that only a small group of people are affected by this issue. We have a responsibility to all Queenslanders to ensure that our laws are fair, balanced and in line with contemporary society's views. There are birth mothers affected by this who essentially had their children forcibly removed from them due to social stigma at the time their children were adopted. Many of these women are haunted by not knowing what happened to their child. I have heard very sad stories from women and we are looking forward to reforming the adoption act.

CHAIR: I look forward to watching that process closely. Obviously it is in great need of an overhaul. Child protection practices outlined on page 1-223 of the ASDS are guided by legislation. I note that you are proposing to make changes to the Child Protection Act to boost children's safety and wellbeing, which I commend. Can you please provide the committee with information about these proposed changes and what they seek to achieve?

Mrs KEECH: I thank the honourable member for the question. Proposed amendments to the Child Protection Act are designed to better protect Queensland's most vulnerable children and young people. Through these changes the Bligh government aims to improve services, reduce red tape and boost protection for Queensland children. Many of the children who come into the department's care are deeply traumatised and have suffered horribly at the hands of those they trusted most, their parents. That is why we will ensure that they receive the best possible care to give them every chance at a bright, happy, healthy future.

The Child Protection Act is, as it suggests, about protecting children. Its fundamental and overarching principle is 'the welfare and best interests of a child are paramount'. This applies to every decision made under the act—for example, whether a child can safely remain at home or whether to refuse or restrict contact between a child and members of their family. I propose to state more clearly the government's commitment to children who have been abused or neglected by changing the paramount principle to clearly reflect a child's safety and wellbeing are paramount considerations in promoting their best interests. The aim of this change is to reinforce my department's focus on a child's immediate safety from harm as well as their long-term development and wellbeing.

The current act, however, does not provide guidance about how to determine a child's best interests. To address this gap I propose to include a framework of principles in the act to be considered in determining a child's best interests. This proposal has been very widely accepted. The framework would consider decisions made by authorised officers, the chief executive, service providers and separate representatives. I want to see a framework that is child focused and emphasises the need for stability, including consideration of the child's developmental needs and their need for secure attachments in a stable and nurturing home.

The act requires that the Children's Court should regard the best interests of a child as a paramount consideration in exercising its power under the Child Protection Act. To make it easier for all parties to understand the court's decision-making processes, I propose the act should require the court to refer to the framework of best interest principles in making its decision about what is in the child's best interests in every case. I also propose to amend the act so that it formally recognises that harm to children can be of a cumulative nature and clarifies that the department is required to take into account the effects over time of accumulated incidences of harm. Currently when an incident of harm is reported about a child to the department it is logged, but what is very important indeed is to take into account accumulation of harm that is happening to a child over their life span.

CHAIR: The time allocated for consideration of the estimates for the Minister for Child Safety and the Minister for Women has expired. I thank the minister and the portfolio officers for their attendance. For the information of those attending today, the transcript for this portfolio will be available on the parliament's web site in approximately two hours. The next portfolio to be examined relates to the Minister for Tourism, Regional Development and Industry. The hearing will resume at 11.50.

Mrs KEECH: Through you, Mr Chair, may I thank you and all members of the committee and the hardworking support team from Hansard for their good work today. I really do appreciate an opportunity to deliver on my portfolio. I also thank the Director-General of my department, Norelle Deeth, the deputy director, Judy Bertram, and all of my ministerial staff. In particular, special mention to David Smith, Joanne Crompton and Jo Whitaker for their hard work, as well as all the other ministerial staff. Members would be aware that a lot of hard work goes into preparing for estimates and that is exactly what we want to do to ensure that we can respond to issues raised by both government and non-government members.

I thank the departmental staff, including those from the Office for Women, who have been involved in the estimates process. Through you, Mr Chair, can I mention some people because they really are deserving of mention?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mrs KEECH: To Jacqui Craig, David Herbert, Norma McNaughton, Deidre Mulkerin, Jodie Drummond, Kath Mandla, Sandy Cooper, Gail Wright, Stephanie Ryder, Bettina Stelzer, Sue Thomson, Tim Hodda, Jan Metcalfe, Kylie Stephen, Nicole Hunter and Alexandra Winter, a very big thank you.

I am very proud indeed of the officers in my department; they do amazing work. They get little credit for it but through the Director-General I say thank you to all of them for the great work that they are doing in protecting our vulnerable children. Thank you, Mr Chair.

Mrs STUCKEY: On behalf of the non-government members on this committee, I would also like to extend my thanks and appreciation to the minister and all of her staff, to you, Mr Chair, and our committee members and also to my one sole opposition staff who is here today, Michael Read, thank you.

Mrs KEECH: Thank you to non-government members.

Proceedings suspended from 11.41 am to 11.51 am

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE D—TOURISM, REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND INDUSTRY

In Attendance

Hon. D Boyle, Minister for Tourism, Regional Development and Industry

Department of Tourism, Regional Development and Industry

Mr R McCarthy, Director-General

Mr B Coulter, Deputy Director-General, Industry, Investment and Development

Mr B Anker, Deputy Director-General, Science and Technology

Tourism Queensland

Mr A Hayes, Chief Executive Officer

CHAIR: The Estimates Committee D hearing is now resumed. I welcome the Minister for Tourism, Regional Development and Industry, 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 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 allocated to non-government members. I ask departmental witnesses to identify themselves before they answer a question so that Hansard may 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 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 remind members, witnesses and members of the public that no food or drink is permitted to be consumed in the Legislative Council chamber. I ask that all mobile phones and pagers be switched off.

I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of the Minister for Tourism, Regional Development and Industry to be open for examination. The question before the chair is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, would you like to make a brief introductory statement or do you wish to proceed directly to questioning? If you do wish to make a statement, I remind you that the statement is to be limited to five minutes under the standing orders.

Ms BOYLE: Thank you, Chair, I will make an opening statement. In fact, it is usual to use the time for opening remarks to give an overview of my department's great work over the past year and to signal plans for the future. I am instead this year going to focus on a particular issue of importance to Queenslanders and an issue I am pleased to say is of importance to the opposition as well as to the government. This is the issue of biofuels. Exactly 100 years ago Henry Ford built the first Model T Ford motor car, a car you may be surprised to hear was designed to run on ethanol or petrol. At that time oil was cheap, very cheap. Middle Eastern countries had found large oil deposits. Meanwhile, prohibition of alcohol in the United States made ethanol production very difficult.

So, despite the opportunity then to build an ethanol industry, the choice was made to build cars to run on cheap, easily available fossil fuel based petroleum. Here we are now in 2008 with oil extremely expensive and ethanol becoming a more economically viable fuel alternative. That is why the Queensland government made a decision to help secure Queensland's future energy and environmental wellbeing when it committed to a five per cent ethanol mandate by 2010. However, after 100 years of an oil-driven economy, you cannot just flick a switch and turn on alternative fuels. You need a planned and educated approach. You need to build a sustainable alternative fuel industry, educate people and ensure that not only the environment but also the local economy and the residents of Queensland will be better off.

Where have we got to so far? We have two ethanol plants under construction. The Dalby refinery has the capacity to produce up to 90 million litres of ethanol per year and is scheduled to open in November this year. The Queensland government has supported this project by providing \$1 million to support a recycled water plant that will provide water to both the biorefinery and potentially the wider community. The second project is at Rocky Point and will be based on a combination of grain and sugar. Once completed, this project will have the capacity to produce around 35 million litres of ethanol per year and is scheduled to open in January 2009.

In order to decide how to build the industry towards the date announced for the mandate, my department set up an ethanol mandate advisory committee consisting of ethanol producers, oil companies and other interested stakeholders. This committee has continued to provide expert advice along the way. Also, we have been shaping our future industry by studying and learning from other international biofuel industries including Brazil and the United States. We have also spent considerable time discussing the future of ethanol production with Queensland sugar and grain growers. This is a new opportunity for them. It is they who can be the big winners from local ethanol production.

I was pleased to examine the New South Wales government's recent announcement of a graduated mandate. This is also supported by the opposition. It sounds good but the industry experts say that there are problems with it. This is not the industry's preferred approach to assist new ethanol producers. It will in fact make it more difficult for new and greenfield ethanol producers to enter the market as existing operations will simply step up their production in line with the graduated mandate. Should a new industry not develop, it may trigger a need to import ethanol from other states or from overseas thereby removing benefits to farmers, producers and Queenslanders and putting us at price risk.

Under the Ethanol Industry Action Plan 2005-2007, the government invested \$4.8 million in the Queensland ethanol conversion initiative. We have worked with petrol companies to increase retail accessibility. The number of service stations retailing ethanol has risen from just 40 in December 2005 to over 370 today, an 825 per cent increase—very good, you might say. But the estimate of the total number of service stations in Queensland is 1,400, so we have a long way to go.

I am pleased to say that since 2005 state government consumption of E10 has increased from 6.2 per cent of total government fuel purchased to above 20 per cent. We have laid the foundation for ethanol in Queensland and now it is time to build upon it. Today I call on the federal government to maintain the current excise arrangements on alternative fuels beyond 2011 and so continue to provide excise relief to domestic ethanol producers. With the excise, industry has a chance to get on its feet and be profitable. I am pleased to inform committee members that there is breaking news that suggests that the federal government may be persuaded to continue the excise.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. I call the member for Burnett.

Mr MESSENGER: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I am glad that the minister mentioned ethanol in her opening comments. We will get to that a little bit later. We will go with the easy one first. Minister, I draw your attention to the performance statement on page 3-187 of the SDS where it shows that your government plans to decrease the budget of your department, which looks after an industry which you acknowledge is a fundamental contributor to the Queensland economy, from \$66.45 million to \$63.498 million. That is a loss of \$2.961 million, or a decrease of 4.45 per cent in one year. Minister, I also remind you that if you examine the estimated actual Tourism figure in 2006-07, which was \$69.75 million, you will find that the department has suffered a decrease of \$5.57 million in two years, or in real terms a decrease of 8.8 per cent. Minister, can you explain how in the depressed world economic environment your department plans to further development destinations with a significantly reduced budget?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. I am pleased to put on the record again that in fact the base budget for Tourism Queensland was not decreased in the announced budget at that time, and in fact events have since taken it to an increase. What has always been so for Tourism Queensland in its budget is that there is a base budget with various special allocations. There are special allocations because of the volatile industry that is tourism—the unpredictability of when events may occur that are opportunities or, worse, challenges that require special and targeted funding. Therefore, I am pleased to say that the base budget was increased modestly, but nonetheless increased, and that the special allocation that had been made that had been a huge boost to Tourism Queensland's budget, which was a three-year allocation from 2006-07 for the Queensland Tourism Strategy, was progressively reducing over that three-year period, as you would expect, as it was used to implement the Queensland Tourism Strategy.

Events since the announcement of the budget in relation to the Qantas-Jetstar reductions in services to Proserpine and Cairns in particular have meant that the government has added \$4 million to Tourism Queensland's budget. Tourism Queensland received a base budget in 2008-09 of \$41.878 million, and that is up \$230,000 on the 2007-08 base budget. The total Queensland government contribution in 2008-09, then, is \$53 million, with additional special purpose funding of approximately \$11.3 million now allocated.

The importance in Tourism of having special allocations to deal with unpredictable events, special occasions, restructures or new moves in tourism cannot be overemphasised. I dare suggest to members that not only has that been the pattern through the years of the Beattie and then the Bligh governments but it would also be the pattern were there to be a National Party or Liberal Party or whatever kind of blend of government in the future. That is the industry that is tourism—volatile, unpredictable, susceptible to international shocks and requiring, therefore, a government that is responsive to the needs of the day.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, once again I draw your attention to the performance statement where it clearly shows that you plan to decrease the budget of your department, when compared with figures from two years ago, by \$5.577 million. Even after you have added the extra \$4 million to the Queensland Tourism budget, you will have spent \$1.57 million less than the 2006-07 budget estimated actual figure at \$69.075 million. Minister, why did your government plan to go ahead with the cuts? Was it cost cutting to pay for the \$60 billion of government debt? And whose idea was it? Was it yours or the Premier's?

Ms BOYLE: I am pleased to repeat the answer that is the correct answer. If a minister, for example the minister for main roads, builds a road and so he spends the money that was allocated for it and that money is no longer in his Main Roads budget, that is not a cut to the Main Roads budget—not at all. That is what has happened with the Queensland Tourism Strategy, which is an excellent strategy and, I might say, one that is very innovative. The other states of Australia are copying it. In fact, some other international jurisdictions are copying the Queensland Tourism Strategy.

Tourism Queensland, with the assistance of the department, have been successful in implementing that strategy and spending the money, and it is absolutely to their credit. As that strategy has wound down, so has the special allocation for the Queensland Tourism Strategy. It would be a matter for some criticism of my government, I should say to the honourable member, if that money was still there unspent. In fact it is to our credit that it has been spent. I again remind honourable members that the base budget has increased and in fact now the special allocation has similarly increased.

It is really important that we understand the priority projects that have been achieved under the Queensland Tourism Strategy—for example, the regional tourism investment and infrastructure plans. They are absolutely essential for the regions of Queensland to find their way forward. They have already been announced for Mackay-Whitsunday and completed in Brisbane and are beginning to be implemented, whereas they are in progress in the other regions of Queensland.

We have refreshed destination management plans for Brisbane, Townsville and tropical north Queensland, the Fraser Coast, the Whitsundays, central Queensland, the outback, south-east Queensland country, Mackay and Bundaberg. That took money which was well spent. We have developed international marketing strategies for China and Japan, formed a Tourism Investment Attraction Group to facilitate investment in sustainable tourism infrastructure in Queensland and updated the Queensland Commercial and Tourism Aviation Plan.

The other thing I want to mention when we consider tourism funding by the Bligh government is that not all tourism funding is marketing dollars that goes to Tourism Queensland. How about the money spent—\$10 million—by the EPA on the MaMu canopy walk? That is tourism funding. How about the announced plan for a 50 per cent increase in national parks? That is tourism funding. How about the Andy Warhol exhibition, the Picasso exhibition, the Indy race, the Gold Coast marathon? They are all through Queensland Events. How about the Tugun bypass and the \$543 million, and how about the \$28 million for the Burke Developmental Road upgrade? How about the various regional events, like the Mount Isa rodeo, the Airlie Beach festival of sport and Go Troppo in Port Douglas? They are also tourism funding.

Mr MESSENGER: Thank you very much, Minister. I was quite impressed by the list you read out, but the fact remains it has been shown in the budget papers that there was a significant underfund in tourism and that the government was forced to inject that \$4 million worth of cash after considerable media and industry pressure. I can remember reading the headlines that said, 'Beautiful one day, short of cash the next'. How did the government expect to further develop destinations in these very tough times without a substantial increase in funding—not already existing funding, but an increase in funding? Is the government short-changing the tourism industry in Queensland?

Ms BOYLE: The honourable member can continue to tell the story to suit his own purposes but it does not make it true. It is not a fact that the budget was reduced; in fact the base budget was increased and has been further increased. I need to inform the honourable member that he would be the laughing stock of the tourism industry if he went out to them and claimed that the budget was increased with a \$4 million package to assist the tourism industry thanks to the honourable member's representations and publicity. That is not correct.

Far more serious than any little words verballing and any little papers around Queensland by the opposition spokesperson were the announcements by Qantas Jetstar of cuts to a third of the international access to Cairns and to all of the direct access between Sydney and Proserpine by Jetstar. That is why our \$4 million went on the table and very fast. The Premier did not hesitate in the circumstance to make the special allocation that was needed, and I am very pleased to say that our federal colleagues were not far behind and they added to our war chest of \$8 million. That has given us a number of good things. It sent a very strong message to our tourism industry that this government supports them in the hard times and that is what they wanted to hear.

Further than that, it has also sent a message to airlines and our tourism partners that we do have a very big wad of cash in our back pockets not only for marketing, I have to say—important as marketing is both domestically and internationally—but particularly for discussions with airlines. I have already had

a trip to Asia in company with senior leaders from our tourism industry. We visited Tokyo, Seoul, Hong Kong and Macau and we spoke with five different airlines to understand what their present situations are and to what extent they may be interested in increasing services to Queensland, either expanding their existing services or adding in new services.

In truth, the aviation industry globally is in strife and reeling from the fuel price rises, so there is a nervousness about increasing routes at this time but we were pleased to receive some invitations to put business cases to some of these airlines and continue our discussions. If we did not have that money in our back pocket, then it is likely that those invitations would not have occurred. They occurred because of the Qantas Jetstar changes which have rocked two sections of our industry, particularly that based around domestic and international tourism to the Great Barrier Reef.

It is important, however, that we also keep the demand high and that we make the most of the dreadful temperatures they have in the states of New South Wales and Victoria at the moment. How dreadful for them to be cold. We are inviting them through our marketing campaigns to be very warm in Queensland.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, I just refer you to non-government question No. 4 where you admitted that the base funding remained relatively unchanged with tourism. I know after visiting the Torres Strait recently that the community is crying out for extra resources and attention from the government, especially in the area of tourism. I believe there were seven cruise liners that stopped in that destination in the last two years and the community was unable to maximise the opportunity to provide goods and services to those tourists. In the 2007-08 MPS on page 2-3, an initiative under 'Developing and marketing a Queensland style visitor experience' stated, 'finalised the draft Cape York and Torres Strait Tourism Action Plan to realise the tourism potential of Cape York'. I note in this year's review of the performance that the Cape York and Torres Strait Tourism Action Plan is not mentioned. Why not?

Ms BOYLE: I do not know why it is not because it is alive and very well and I am pleased to have the chance to update everybody on where we are up to, seeing I met with the reference group in developing the draft plan just earlier this week. Thank you, I must say to the honourable member, for putting on the record that the base budget for Tourism Queensland did increase, albeit modestly. I do accept your words and we find some agreement in stating that.

The Cape York and Torres Strait Tourism Action Plan has been renamed as an action plan because when I came to the portfolio I was disappointed, as a regional member from far-north Queensland, at the speed that it had not gathered at the time. I was very nervous that it would become a matter for longwinded talkfests about strategies rather than really being an action plan in a practical way to get product on the market. So I have taken a particular interest in it I think because I have more familiarity than some other honourable members might have with Cape York and the Torres Strait and a greater sense of connection to it.

For that reason, we have revamped the plan as an action plan and in there made sure that there are very specific targets that must be achieved over the period of the funding. It is now in a draft form. We have got together a reference group that particularly takes into account the traditional owners from different areas of the cape as well as the leaders from major tourism organisations and business organisations in the wide-ranging communities right across the huge area that is the cape and the Torres Strait to have them look at the plan and make sure we have it right before it goes out then for public release. I am hopeful that that is a matter of weeks away, certainly not months.

Within that plan, the sort of thing you will see is action on creating bush camps. We know that there are lots of tourists, particularly international tourists, who get as far as Cairns and would love to experience real Indigenous culture whether it is somewhere in a community in the cape or on one of the amazing islands of the Torres Strait group. For them, they need facilities. While there are some resorts in the Torres Strait, there are not many through the cape and in fact the experience that can be best got up and running is bush camping in a community with representatives of the traditional owners and with others from the community who can show them the culture and the experience of Cape York.

So I am pleased to tell you that when we are able to release the plan you will see in there some really practical targets for getting issues sorted out in the cape and the Torres Strait within a short period of time. I am proud too to say for the tourism businesses up there that they have not been wasting time. In fact three of them have made it into the Qantas Holidays international sales booklet this year.

CHAIR: I am mindful that the member for Burnett's preambles to his questions are bordering on statements. I would ask that under standing order 180 you ask the questions and do not turn them into a speech.

Mr MESSENGER: Thank you very much, Chair. Minister, just back to the action plan and specifically the concept of a cultural village in the Torres Strait islands, one of the messages that came through loud and clear for me when I visited the community and spoke with community leaders like Mayor Pedro Stephens was that they very much wanted to push the idea of a cultural village. What are your thoughts on a cultural village? Would the state government be likely to fund a cultural village in the Torres Strait islands?

Ms BOYLE: That is really a very good question. I have not spoken to Mayor Pedro Stephens about it so I have to admit to you that you have more knowledge of his concept than I do at this stage. I am not in a position, therefore, to make any specific statements about supporting how such a concept may come into being, other than to put on the record that it is a great idea.

The Gab Titui Cultural Centre on Thursday Island has been award winning. I have been in other states of Australia and heard Indigenous people speak with great respect about the development of the cultural centre on Thursday Island and how they aspire to do similarly. How we can build on Gab Titui and make sure there is more of an Indigenous experience, particularly of Torres Strait culture on Thursday Island, is a discussion that I will be pleased to have.

In the meantime, I will let you know of some other aspects of the Cape York and Torres Strait Tourism Action Plan that we are working on. One that is much less glamorous—but I have to say it is the main problem that is brought to me, particularly about Cape York tourism—is the serious levels of problems we have with rubbish by tourists and others who go through the areas and discard disposable diapers. They almost throw them out the windows of their cars. We have therefore been working with the councils, local government, Main Roads and the RACQ on how we can get better facilities there that will give people fewer excuses to rubbish the cape—how dare they—and similarly make sure there are toilets at strategic points. For people from Melbourne in particular, it is a huge achievement to get to Cairns and then hire themselves a four-wheel drive and drive to the tip of the cape, but they have no excuse for doing that and discarding their rubbish along the way.

One of the other projects that we have been particularly working on is with Poruma Island Resort. They are looking forward now to the completion of their seven-metre sports fishing boat which is being built by Stinger Marine. When they receive delivery of that, it will enable the resort to complete a prearranged sports fishing guide training course for six to eight local people who will then be able to hire themselves out to resort guests for lure and fly fishing activities.

We are really mindful in the broader Department of Tourism, Regional Development and Industry that this is not just about tourism; this is about Indigenous business opportunities. In many of the remote areas and communities in the cape and in the Torres Strait, there is not much business to be had. There are not many jobs on offer, not in the private sector, so tourism provides an opportunity to take Indigenous business in the cape and the Torres Strait to a new level.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The next round of questions will be from government members. I call the member for Brisbane Central.

Ms GRACE: Minister, we have heard a bit about the budget this morning and there has been some negative media attention with regard to Tourism Queensland's budget. How much of this is based on misinformation? Will you please clarify to the committee the various components that make up the Tourism Queensland budget?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. As much as we have talked about this already this morning and the dry answer that this will be, it is an opportunity for me to put the actual figures on the record. Tourism Queensland's budget has not been cut this year. Budget figures clearly show that the Queensland government's base funding for Tourism Queensland has actually increased by \$230,000 in 2008-09. In 2007-08 Tourism Queensland's base funding was \$41.645 million. In 2008-09 Tourism Queensland's base funding is \$41.878 million. This increase to Tourism Queensland's base funding combined with the recently announced \$4 million Queensland tourism assistance package clearly shows that a cut to Tourism Queensland's funding could not be further from the truth.

In addition to the increased base funding, Tourism Queensland will receive approximately \$11.3 million in additional special purpose funding to take the total Queensland government contribution for tourism to a record \$53 million. The special purpose funding includes Queensland Tourism assistance package, \$4 million; convention and incentives, \$1.875 million; Queensland Tourism Strategy, \$3 million; and Community Futures Taskforce projects, \$0.2 million. Tourism Queensland's budget includes other sources of income, for example, Australian Outback Tours' licensed income and industry contributions to cooperative marketing campaigns. These other sources of income take the total funding available to Tourism Queensland to an estimated \$68.1 million for 2008-09.

Tourism Queensland's total expenses are split into the following categories: \$4.1 million for the regional tourism organisations, \$1.875 million for convention and incentives, \$37.7 million for marketing and \$2.1 million for development. Employee expenses are specified as follows: marketing and development, \$10.6 million and business and operations, \$4.3 million. There is a general allocation of \$7.5 million for operations. The marketing spend is broken into domestic, \$21.4 million and international, \$16.3 million. The operational spend is broken into accommodation, rates and outlays at \$2.2 million; computer costs at \$1.6 million; depreciation and amortisation at \$1.1 million, postage, phone and office expenses, \$0.5 million; travel expenses, \$0.2 million; and other, \$1.9 million.

Mrs REILLY: After that comprehensive list of figures, I am particularly going to draw your attention back to the \$4 million rescue package and ask if you can give us an update of how that money is being spent specifically.

Ms BOYLE: It is a very important matter, as you would expect, for the tourism industry around the state. They were comforted to hear, as I have said, of the \$4 million, but how exactly that is to be spent and how we are working out those plans is important to them. There is no doubt that the Queensland tourism industry has had a difficult year with some adverse weather events followed by the disastrous flight cuts which have been announced. I am pleased, however, that following the savage cuts announced by Qantas and Jetstar, the Premier immediately announced a \$4 million assistance package for the industry. Our package will be complemented by an additional \$4 million from the federal government. I must say it is a great pleasure after years in the desert, you might be say, to be able to now work with a federal government which understands Queensland's needs after 12 years of neglect by the Howard government. The package will cover a range of measures including airline attraction and marketing, and parts of it are already being rolled out.

Specific marketing campaigns will include a major domestic whole-of-state marketing campaign with particular emphasis on the regions most affected by recent downturns, namely, tropical north Queensland, the Whitsundays and the gold and sunshine coasts. However, all Queensland regions will be supported in this campaign. While it is most obvious that the harmful effects of the announcements are in Cairns with its international focus and in the Whitsundays with its connections to Sydney, it is important to realise that the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast have been having a very bad year, too, and are affected as well and therefore need support through these campaigns.

We will also include a domestic campaign specifically aimed at providing additional support for tropical north Queensland with an emphasis on families and couples and a domestic drive campaign aimed at both intra and interstate visitors to encourage more visitors to explore more diverse regions of Queensland. We are asking the question of Queenslanders, 'How about checking out some of the wonderful places in your own state in your holiday periods this year?' We will also have a significant United Kingdom/Europe campaign with major wholesalers aimed at turning around the recent slide in UK visitor figures to tropical north Queensland and other regions in Queensland. Tourists from the United Kingdom are multistop visitors and do not necessarily need to fly directly into a destination from overseas.

There will be a major international campaign supporting the islands of the Great Barrier Reef with particular emphasis on support for the Whitsundays region. May I let you know in case you do not already that our domestic advertising is very important at a time when the dollar value is so high.

Ms GRACE: Aviation has been a major growth area of the Queensland economy for a number of years now and I note that the state government's *Aviation sector action plan* was released earlier this year. Will the minister please outline the importance of aviation to the Queensland economy and how the actions outlined in this action plan will secure the future of Queensland's aviation industry?

Ms BOYLE: Do you know that there is speculation sometimes by the private sector as to whether governments can actually influence the growth of industry, whether that is a matter entirely for the private sector and for interest rates and the value of the dollar? Aviation in Queensland is a great example of how a government, deliberately and strategically and with money, can lead an industry to grow to a new and much more sustainable level, offering a huge opportunity for jobs for the future. To that extent, I am pleased to take the opportunity to pay credit to Peter Beattie and those who were particularly active in the aviation sector plans in the early years of the Beattie government, although we are, of course, in the Bligh government years following through.

Aviation provides quality employment in research, aircraft maintenance organisations and airlines. The industry now directly provides over 16,000 jobs and is scheduled to move closer to 20,000 in the next five years. The *Aviation sector action plan* flags action to support the growth of the industry in five areas: connecting industry with ideas, boosting incentives for productivity, developing a skilled workforce, building markets for smart products and promoting an innovative business culture.

Major aerospace projects underway in Queensland include Boeing is providing modification and through-life support to 737 airborne early warning and control aircraft at RAAF base Amberley; Airbus and Qantas Defence Services are modifying A330 air-to-air refuelling aircraft at Eagle Farm; Australian Aerospace is assembling 18 Tiger Armed Reconnaissance Helicopters and 42 MRH 90 multirole helicopters for Defence; and a node of the CRC for Advanced Composite Structures with a focus on aerospace applications has been attracted to south-east Queensland to complement the planned Australian Airspace manufacturing facility. These are words that very many Queenslanders would barely understand.

Who would have thought that Queensland would become a leader in the aerospace industry? What a long way we have come from the National Party days in Queensland and how well is the Bligh government preparing for a life after rocks and crops? Important as rocks and crops are—and I do not minimise the huge benefit those industries have brought and are still bringing to Queensland—they are not a security for our young Queenslanders of today. It is through working with companies like Boeing, like Qantas, like Raytheon Aerospace that we provide for future jobs in knowledge based industries for young Queenslanders.

CHAIR: We have seen some high-profile examples of difficulties facing Australian manufacturing in the media recently, such as Fisher and Paykel. I know your department has a number of initiatives to help Queensland firms with issues such as supply chain improvements and export development. Can you advise what is planned for the next 12 months to assist manufacturing firms that are doing it tough?

Ms BOYLE: It is a hard time for manufacturing, no doubt as much as it is for tourism because of the value of the Australian dollar. Lots of people do not realise that manufacturing is nonetheless very big business for Queensland. That is why it is important that our government is there helping them to build the industry. Manufacturing makes a \$15 billion annual contribution to the state's economy. It employs over 192,000 Queenslanders with almost one-third of manufacturing activities occurring in regional areas. So it is big business for Queensland's regions.

There are powerful forces at play internationally in manufacturing. The good news is that the resources boom has brought huge new demand for manufacturing suppliers and has helped drive consistent employment growth in the Queensland industry. The bad news is that other factors are hitting some firms hard. Skilled labour shortages, wage levels and the strength of the Australian dollar, which has gone up 71 per cent against the US currency in the last five years, are combining to make our manufacturers less competitive. All this is in the context of the rapid rise of the massive low-cost manufacturing economies including China and India.

We are delivering a range of targeted programs to help address these pressures head on and to continue to build the state's manufacturing base. The *Advanced manufacturing sector action plan* recognises the tough environment in which manufacturers are operating. The plan provides new strategies and practices to access new markets and sustain long-term competitiveness. Technology diffusion programs through QMI Solutions will continue to engage manufacturers with world's best systems and technologies and deliver specific on-site projects targeting productive efficiency and value adding. I am pleased to let members know that QMI Solutions has been so successful that other states of Australia—and including the federal government—have come to Queensland to study why it is so effective and to borrow lessons from the leadership it has provided in Queensland.

The \$2 million statewide Advanced Manufacturing Advisory Service will provide assistance to firms through our regional centres. The new \$1.2 million QMI service for north Queensland will assist companies from Mackay to Cairns and west to Mount Isa. We will also continue to tackle workforce issues through skills strategies, Queensland's unique Create It Make It Live It careers campaign and high performance workplace programs. Facilitation of supply consortiums and access to global supply chains will be a major focus. The department's Mentoring for Export program will also help develop and support companies seeking to secure new overseas business. We will not go it alone, working closely with the Commonwealth on initiatives like Enterprise Connect to deliver manufacturing a sustainable competitive advantage well into the future. May I particularly thank Andrew Dettmer, who was the leader of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, for his continued guidance and support in the interests of growing manufacturing jobs in the state of Queensland.

Mrs SCOTT: We all know that the regions of Queensland are vital to the growth and development of the state. Can you give the committee an outline of the key priorities in the Regional Development portfolio for the next year?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. It is a very important question to the regions of Queensland. In answer I am pleased to let honourable members know that we are working with the high-growth regions of Queensland as we have not done as a government in the last decade, and that that is being very well received. As members of the committee do know, the Bligh government is firmly focused on delivering real and sustainable outcomes right across Queensland's diverse regions.

Following the creation of the Regional Development portfolio by the Premier in October last year, our first commitment has been to develop regional development strategies that are specific to, unique to and appropriate to each of the high-growth regions outside south-east Queensland. These strategies do a number of things: first, attracting migrants into the regions. We can in the regions assist south-east Queensland by sharing in the migration growth into Queensland so that not all of those who come to Queensland from over the border—from New South Wales and Victoria—are so exhausted by the trip that they drop their bags and settle in south-east Queensland but instead that we can share Queensland with them by attracting them also to the regions.

We are therefore also working with the regions on managing and planning for growth in the regions. There are many in each of the regions of Queensland who are there because of the lifestyle. While they see the opportunities for their children in a growing region, at the same time they want to be sure that their governments, at all levels, will protect the lifestyle that is the key drawcard to the regions in the first place. That is why planning for growth wisely is essential.

We are making sure that we are working on integrating social and physical infrastructure—that is, that these are not separate discussions or separate responsibilities under different portfolios in government but that there is an integrated picture of the infrastructure needs and of future projects for

each of the regions. We are working with the regions on the particular opportunities they have for prosperity, for industry growth, for economic development, for diversification of their economic development over the years to come and that piggyback the particular opportunities that there are in each region.

There are two particular priorities for the rest of this year. The first is to implement the high growth regions development strategies. The second is to build economic resilience through strengthening key industries in the regions. To advance the regional strategies we will be preparing promotional material and implementing an aggressive marketing campaign to promote the high growth regions as migration and investment destinations. We will be working through the centres of enterprise on various regional development strategies to attract new business players to each of the regions.

Mrs SCOTT: Following on from the broad scope of regional development you have just outlined, I understand that your department has identified priority sectors for industry development in each of Queensland's key regions. Can you tell us which key sectors your department is targeting in the various regions?

Ms BOYLE: I am very pleased to do so. For those of us who come from regional Queensland, one of the things that annoys us is that over the years governments of all persuasions have treated the regions as though they are the regions and they are all the same. Of course our regions are hugely different when you think about it. We have Mount Isa and the minerals province in the north-west. Heavens, how different is that to Townsville with its industrial and government centres. How different is that to Cairns with its tourism industry and its Wet Tropics and Great Barrier Reef. It is similarly the case for Mackay, the Whitsundays, Gladstone, Rocky, the Fraser Coast, Bundaberg and Burnett.

What we are doing through our centres of enterprise is particularly highlighting the opportunities that are unique to each region in terms of economic development. I wish I could claim credit for this brilliance of policy but I have to say it is work that was started by my predecessor, John Mickel, and the department that had already recognised the importance of regionally based economic development strategies before I got to the portfolio.

Can I give you some examples. In far-north Queensland, based around Cairns, the particular opportunity areas are tropical expertise, aviation and marine. Whereas in Townsville and the north-west it is tropical expertise, particularly based around science, and mining and value-added mineral processing. In Mackay and the Whitsundays the marine industry provides huge opportunities as do mining services and technologies. Around Fitzroy and the central west we are concentrating on manufacturing, engineering and industrial services that support mining, resources and agribusiness. In the Wide Bay-Burnett region there are huge opportunities through general aviation and unmanned aerial systems and transport equipment manufacturing which already has provided some significant contributions to the economy but can be extended in the years to come. The unmanned aerial vehicles conference that will be held outside of Bundaberg and around Kingaroy as this year goes on will be a great example of the industry growth in aviation.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The next round of questions will be from non-government members. I call the member for Burnett.

Mr MESSENGER: I refer you to the Capital Statement at page 135. The financial system upgrade, Finance One release 11, which has a total estimated cost of \$221,000 was an initiative in the Capital Statement of 2007-08 where you budgeted to spend the full amount of \$221,000. This year's Capital Statement indicates that you have only spent \$20,000 of the promised \$221,000 or approximately 9.04 per cent of the financial system upgrade. Why has this computer upgrade been delayed? Has this delay affected the service delivery and output of your employees in Queensland and also the international offices during one of the worst downturns in world tourism?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for that question; it is a good question. It is a Tourism Queensland project. I might introduce Anthony Hayes, the CEO of Tourism Queensland, and ask him to make some remarks in response.

Mr Hayes: Thank you for the question. It is part of a wider discussion. We obviously have had a number of changes at Tourism Queensland over the last 12 to 18 months. As part of the changes—a new management team, including myself, new chairman et cetera—we have done a full review of our operating procedures. One of the decisions we made as a result of that was to look very carefully at all of our operating programs and what had been budgeted to make sure that we were comfortable with the direction we were going.

The Finance One system is still very much on the cards to be implemented. However, there are two things to note. Firstly, we wanted to implement what we are calling internally the REEF system, which is a records document system. We are also making sure that the technology for Finance One is going to be appropriate and that we can roll it out worldwide.

What we have traditionally done, with technology being what it was, is have a Finance One type system for the Brisbane office, but we do have 14 offices around the world and they were not necessarily attached to the same system. What we are trying to do in the future as we become a more

global organisation, as we increase our focus on our global operations, is make sure that we are implementing new technology and it is done throughout all the offices. It has not happened yet but we are in the process of doing that.

Mr MESSENGER: Just a point of clarification. What does the system actually do? Are you still able to communicate properly with the international offices? When do you hope to have this system up and running. I see that you are going to spend \$201,000 this year. Given that you have already broken the promise in previous years to spend that money, what is your action plan now?

Ms BOYLE: I will let Mr Hayes answer the question but I do have to say that it is a bit naughty of the honourable member to use that language and to call it a broken promise. There is no business that you could point to anywhere in Australia, government or private sector, that is as big as the business done by my department and Tourism Queensland that does not have a \$200,000 project slip by a bit in time. That is hardly a broken promise. Yes, it is very reasonable to ask why the project is not coming in on time and whether business can be done quite adequately when the project has been delayed but I do put on the record that it is hardly a broken promise.

Mr Hayes: We do take our financial management very seriously, I can assure you of that. We do have Finance One in place now, and it has been in place for a number of years. What we are actually talking about is an upgrade to the system which is obviously dating as technology does do. It is merely a matter of improving the process.

At the moment some of our international offices have access to Finance One and some do not. Where they do not have access to Finance One there are other procedures put in place—whether that is manual procedures or other localised procedures—that make sure that we are keeping a very close eye on expenditure because that is an essential part of the role. The upgrade to the Finance One system that is coming is simply to make the procedures more effective and more efficient into the future so that we can do without some of the cumbersome systems we are using at the moment because they are quite dated.

Mr MESSENGER: My reference for this question is the Capital Statement 2008-09 at page 135. The total estimated cost for the enterprise wide contact management system and modernisation of the Famil system was \$250,000. Last financial year your department spent \$50,000 and budgeted to spend the final \$200,000 by 30 June 2008. However, your budget figure shows that instead of spending \$200,000 you spent \$168,000 in total for two financial years. In other words, last year you only spent \$108,000 of the promised \$200,000 leaving \$82,000 to be spent this financial year. Can you explain why your department underspent by 54 per cent of last year's budgeted capital? Has this underspend harmed your department's ability to deliver its services?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. It is clear that you have really drilled down to the detail of the figures. That is a Tourism Queensland matter that you are referring to. I will ask Anthony Hayes, the CEO of Tourism Queensland, to address your question.

Mr Hayes: Thank you for the question. It is in fact part of the REEF system upgrade, which I mentioned before, which we have just introduced. It is our records document system. It was something we had to do as part of standard government practice throughout government in Queensland. We have now introduced that system.

It is really about making sure that that system was in place. I do not know how to answer it in a more detailed way, other than to say it was a timing issue rather than anything else. The new system complies specifically with state archives and all government requirements.

Mr MESSENGER: As a point of clarification, it says in the 2007-08 Capital Statement that it is provided for the implementation of an enterprise wide contact management system for Tourism Queensland to provide one point of update for contacts, efficient events, subscription management, visitor information centres and modernisation of the Famil system. Once again, I would just ask you to clarify what services you cannot provide based on the fact that this upgrade has not happened and that you have underspent by \$82,000?

Mr Hayes: The answer is none. We can certainly provide all of the appropriate information it is just done via different systems at the moment. An essential part of our international business is the Famil side of the business. That is bringing in international media or international wholesalers, showing them what Queensland has to offer as a destination with the understanding that when they go home they promote Queensland either through travel trade or through the media.

We have a system in place which has been in place for decades. It is an essential part of our business. It is something we do every day. The process from here is to use new available technologies to improve the efficiency so that we are doing things in a more effective way rather than just simply managing things either manually or via dated technology that reduces our effectiveness. This will be an improvement in our efficiency.

Mr MESSENGER: Reference for this question is the SDS at page 3-187 and the Capital Statement at page 135. I would assume that you and your government are very keen to foster and encourage ecotourism. With the Great Barrier Reef in our backyard I would assume many potential

tourists are looking for an eco experience on or near the reef. I draw your attention to the 5.85 million unique visitors to the Tourism Queensland web site, some of whom I would presume are looking for a unique ecotourism experience. Can you tell this committee how much ecotourism is earning for our state and whether you think the construction of a state government funded sewerage ocean outfall on a beach on the southern end of the Great Barrier Reef at Agnes Water would harm local businesses that rely on ecotourism?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question, which is a good one. In a general sense, as the honourable member was talking I was getting flashbacks to when he and I both were in the environment portfolio. I was in fact local government and planning and environment minister and Mr Messenger was the opposition spokesperson for the environment. He took then a particular interest in the quality of outfalls onto the Great Barrier Reef and I paid him compliments then, quite appropriately, as I do now. If our Great Barrier Reef is to be truly sustainable, the message very clearly to all local governments the length of the Great Barrier Reef is that their outfalls have to be of very high-quality liquid that will not damage the reef and will not add to the run-off that is in our rivers and our creeks such as agricultural chemicals and other run-off that could in any way exacerbate the difficulty that the reef is under given climate change.

I do not know of the particular plans at Agnes Water, so I cannot comment on that specifically other than to say that I support the honourable member and all of those who are prepared to speak up about protecting our Great Barrier Reef. Ecotourism is indeed our key drawcard, particularly for north Queensland related tourism. It is the Great Barrier Reef first and foremost that brings international visitors to Queensland. It stands with the other huge Australian icons of the Opera House and Uluru. That is how important it is for tourism. We have huge pressures, though, with awareness around the globe and especially across Europe, where some of our competition are even mischievously suggesting that it would not be environmentally friendly to travel on long-haul aircraft to destinations such as those in Queensland. It is very important, therefore, that we give international visitors to Queensland the security—the confidence—when they visit that, far from contributing to harming our environment in any way, they are actually benefiting the environment and they are part of not only eco-friendly but also highly accredited ecotourism.

Already over 200 members of the tourism industry have not waited for governments—state or federal—to emphasise the importance of becoming eco-friendly and have been accredited and are members of appropriate organisations. I am pleased to inform the honourable member that only last week at the national meeting of tourism ministers one of the topics on the agenda was national eco-accreditation. It is essential that we have that eco-accreditation, and it is Queensland that is taking the lead. I take the opportunity, therefore, to call on all honourable members, not simply Mr Messenger and me, to be taking that message to tourism businesses in all electorates right across Queensland, particularly those focused on tourism.

Mr MESSENGER: Mr Chair, I seek a little bit of latitude just to clarify what is happening. There is a proposal to put a sewage ocean outfall at a pristine beach at Agnes Water. Naturally enough, the community is very concerned about that proposal because that water does connect to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and it is the gateway to the reef. There are turtles, dugongs and soft corals.

Ms BOYLE: I just clarify in response—maybe I was not clear enough in my answer—that it is what comes out of that outfall that matters and not that there is an outfall. Sometimes the water can be treated to such a standard that you could drink it, in which case it is hardly going to do any damage to the Great Barrier Reef. My point is that it is the quality of the discharge from local government sewage outfalls that should be the concern for us right along the coast.

Mr MESSENGER: Thank you, Minister. Minister, does the government intend to reduce the number of regional tourist organisations or RTOs?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much. It is a very big question and one causing some anxiety and uncertainty in the industry. Other members may not be aware as clearly as the opposition spokesperson is that under the Queensland Tourism Strategy there has been a review underway for some time called the Queensland tourism network review. That was conducted through a consultancy led by Stafford consulting, and the report from Stafford consulting has been received by Tourism Queensland and has been since workshopped with representatives of all of the regional tourism organisations. While I have seen a copy of the report and met with the regional tourism organisations as a group and some of them individually since, I have made it absolutely plain that I want the industry to lead the structural changes that are necessary for the future and therefore that I will make no decisions or form any firm opinions until the industry in a united fashion has reported to me on its recommendations in response to the Stafford tourism network review report.

I will in a moment ask the CEO of Tourism Queensland to update members on where we are with the RTOs and their reviews, but I need to put on record my present understanding—that is, that we need stronger regions, much as we needed stronger regional local governments. It is very fine to play on the parochialism of every town in Queensland, but the hard facts are that every town in Queensland is not what draws interstate or international tourists here. Rather, there needs to be some bigger bodies that

have stronger representation that can benefit from putting together the overheads and the operational expenses to market a region and to draw people to the region and then you can worry about the parochialism, as it were, of whether they spend more time in Proserpine or at Airlie Beach or at Eungella or wherever it might be. Therefore, I hope that the tourism network review, as the RTOs bring it to me, will demonstrate less of that community-by-community parochialism and a stronger regional push that will help us draw tourists from the other states and other countries. Would you like to begin to address that question, Mr Hayes?

Mr Hayes: Certainly, Minister. The Stafford report is a very interesting report. He had individual discussions with over 300 stakeholders or leaders of the tourism industry, and the one key piece of feedback that was heard over and over again was that the network needs to work more effectively together. Whether that is Tourism Queensland, the department, regional tourism organisations or local tourism organisations, we have to find a way to remove any friction and to work as an efficient team. Ultimately, the key is whatever comes out of the Stafford report.

Ms BOYLE: Chair, this is really an important question. I wonder if we might have extra time.

Mr MESSENGER: Yes, please. Thank you, Minister.

Mr Hayes: As I said, 300 stakeholders were invited to provide feedback and 55 submissions were actually received. On top of that, Alby Stafford and his team actually looked at 17 global case studies to see how tourism networks are formed in other parts of the world. The idea is really to find a solution that will take Queensland above everybody else, to take us into a position of clear leadership not only versus the other states of Australia but versus everyone else in this hemisphere and to make us a leader throughout the world. The key message, as I said before, in the report is that we have to work more effectively together. He presented a number of options—some of them very radical, some of them minor tweaking around the edges—but all of them are absolutely fascinating in terms of how we find a solution that gets us all together as a team so that we are spending our money in an effective way and so that we share a clear strategic direction and we are all heading in the same direction.

One of the key recommendations he did make in the report was that there were too many regional tourism organisations and that some of them struggle financially to survive and, as a result, they spend a lot of time focusing on finance rather than on the marketing and product development type work that they need to focus on.

The process from here is that the report was released. The minister instructed us to then go out and discuss it in depth with all of the key players throughout the Queensland industry. That included the Queensland Tourism Industry Council and regional tourism organisations, and the department has played a key role in this well. From here, further submissions or further responses have now been provided to the department and a subcommittee has now been formed. That subcommittee will meet for the first time next Monday to consider all of the feedback following the release of the report. From there the minister has requested that we the industry come back to her with a formal response and formal advice on how we the industry as a combined team believe we should be addressing the future.

Mr MESSENGER: Thank you.

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

Mrs REILLY: Minister, innovation has been at the forefront of the government for a number of years. In my own area on the Gold Coast your department has contributed \$500,000 to the recently opened Gold Coast Innovation Centre. Could you please outline the benefits that this centre will bring for the local community?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. It is a good question. Speaking of parochialism, I have to say that it is alive and well in the honourable member, who lobbies hard and well for her own electorate. Thank you for that question and for your support of our efforts to diversify the economy on the Gold Coast. I know that you are aware of the great advances being made in this area on the Gold Coast, but I am pleased to be able to give the rest of the committee an overview of what is happening in the innovation area on the Gold Coast.

As many of you will know, a key component of the new Smart State strategy Queensland Smart Future 2008-2012 is the increased emphasis on the application and commercialisation of innovative ideas. Through the Statewide Technology Incubation Strategy, my department provides significant support and encouragement to high-technology companies to innovate and thereby achieve a competitive advantage. A feasibility study was conducted in the Gold Coast region to determine the viability of an incubator and a proposal developed.

A key component of the proposal was that councils, universities and regional groups match the Queensland government's contribution to the establishment and ongoing operation of the incubator. The Gold Coast consortium's application to establish the Gold Coast Innovation Centre was successful, and the Griffith University and the Gold Coast City Council matched the Queensland government's financial contribution, and I thank them for recognising how important innovation is to the future of their local

economy. In April this year the centre was officially opened. While it is only early days, I am confident that the centre will quickly assist local companies to commercialise the innovative ideas they are coming up with.

To date the centre has employed a chief executive officer, established policy protocols and performance measures, and secured five client companies and four advisory panel members. The diverse technologies being developed through the incubator include resident clients such as GrassAds Pty Ltd, which has developed innovative robotic sign-writing technology for writing on grass, particularly on sporting fields for example. Another of the resident clients is RelevanceNow Pty Ltd, which has created personalities on MyCyberTwin.com. Another is a virtual client called Allotz.com, which has developed smart travel allotment technology for tourism businesses.

The innovation centre will provide services, resources and mentoring to nurture the business acumen of technology based early-stage companies to enable them to take the next step or secure funding and capital investment. The innovation centre will build linkages and develop relationships between client companies, the university, business community and investors to benefit the region's economy through commercialisation, job creation and capital investment.

Mrs REILLY: Thank you. I will come back to you one day about the virtual personalities bit.

CHAIR: Minister, we are all aware that Queensland is facing a skills and labour shortage. I also know that you have been advocating a number of changes such as to visas to help address this problem, particularly in Queensland's regions. Can you tell the committee what is planned to help address the difficulties Queensland businesses are facing in attracting and retaining staff?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question, which is a very important one for regional Queensland. How can we grow economies and businesses if there are not the people with the skills, if there are simply not the people available for labour? There is no doubt that attracting and retaining talented staff is one of the key issues raised with me by businesses as I travel around Queensland. The issue, however, is not simple to address. We need to come at it from a variety of angles.

One way in which we can assist business is through visa reform, and I am pleased to report on two major wins for Queensland as a result of my and others' advocacy for changes to the visa system. On 30 April 2008 the Commonwealth government announced a new visa for crews of superyachts, providing a significant boost to tourism in Cairns, Mackay, the Whitsundays, Brisbane and the Gold Coast. Superyachts are big business for Queensland in cruising Queensland waters and also, of course, in stopping in the various regional ports the length of the Barrier Reef and further down past Brisbane and to the Gold Coast. They are huge business in maintenance and provisioning. They are huge business potentially in refits and in the building of them in the years to come. They have a problem, however, with visas for their crews. In May this year we successfully negotiated with the Commonwealth to gain concession around the working holiday-maker visas, particularly for strawberry growers. There was a huge win for strawberry growers in the Caboolture region who had been struggling to attract workers and could have gone out of business if we were not successful.

We are also talking with the federal government about other visa reform to ease labour shortages in agricultural, tourism and hospitality industries. The Commonwealth government is considering the introduction of a Pacific Islander low-skilled visa. I compliment the tablelands fruit and vegetable growers organisation, which has come out in support of that initiative—in fact, in their local newspaper just today. I must say how pleasing it is to have a federal government working for Queensland rather than against it in terms of these kinds of changes.

In addition to visa reform, to help businesses attract and retain staff in 2008-09 my department will continue to sponsor eligible migrants under Queensland's Skilled Migration Program. We will continue the Work Live Play marketing campaign to highlight the state as an attractive destination for skilled and business migrants and we will continue to work to capture an increasing share of the 190,300 migrants who are expected to arrive in Australia in 2008-09 through practical measures contained in the Queensland skilled and business migration strategy.

The department will also continue to collaborate with the Department of Education, Training and the Arts to develop skills formation strategies for priority sectors.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms GRACE: A series of workshops have been held across Queensland as part of the Department of Tourism, Regional Development and Industry's Science on Saturday program. Would you inform the committee of the details of this program and what it expects to achieve?

Ms BOYLE: As a person who lisps, I definitely should not say this next thing that I am about to say, and that is that in truth in Queensland, science has not been very sexy in these last years. That is part of why we have this Science on Saturday program running. For the future, knowledge based industries rely on a variety of qualifications in science. They have not been careers that have been as appealing to our graduates of Queensland high schools as we wish. In fact, it seems that early in high school interest has been lost in science.

So we have developed this Science on Saturday, a hands-on science program, for seven- to 14-year-olds that aims to raise awareness and encourage a lifelong interest in science. It commenced in 2004 and is developed and delivered by CSIRO education on behalf of my department. It is particularly valuable for children in regional Queensland who may not have the opportunity to visit a museum or science centre on a regular basis.

In the 2008 program, children are exploring the science behind being water wise, behind energy use, working with DNA, forensic investigation and healthy humans. Additionally, the program's apprentice scientist activity is a chance to learn more about being a scientist. The Science on Saturday program is delivered in 24 locations across the state each year. It runs in each of those locations for six Saturdays. In 2007-08, I am pleased to say there were more than 4,500 attendances. The program was so popular that over two-thirds of the children attended more than one session. In 2007-08, children from Townsville, Mount Isa, Charleville, Longreach, Toowoomba, Ingham, Cairns, Cleveland, Roma, Rockhampton, Warwick, Dalby, Brisbane, Maroochydore, Hervey Bay, Cloncurry, Beaudesert, Gatton, Caloundra and Gympie took part in this program. I am pleased to say many parents also attended with their children. Both parents and children have consistently praised the program for its educational value, fun and quality of presenters. One parent said, 'These sessions are wonderful. It's given parents a chance to learn as well. For this to occur alongside our children is just great. It has sparked an interest for both me and my kids. Thank you very much for doing these.'

This year, Science on Saturday will be held in 12 locations right across Queensland during school terms three and four. I encourage members, where they get the chance, to get along to a session in the area. You might not only enjoy yourselves but also even learn a thing or two.

Mrs REILLY: If only we had the time, Minister. I am going to ask you about an industry that is not particularly prevalent in the land-locked hills of Mudgeeraba but is a key economic driver on the Gold Coast, and that is the boat building industry. Like a lot of manufacturing areas, we have seen the boat building and marine industry suffering a little bit on the Gold Coast. So I wonder if you can outline what the department is doing to assist this vital industry?

Ms BOYLE: The marine industry generally is a huge sector for the future of Queensland. I have to pay tribute to the Gold Coast. It recognised that much sooner than did some other regions of Queensland.

Mrs REILLY: Of course.

Ms BOYLE: They are, therefore, well down the track in terms of boat building and various other marine related industries. No doubt, we already have world-class boat builders. They are true Aussie manufacturers but, no doubt also, they have been having a bit of a rough time of late. The marine industry, however, remains a key sector for our economic future, presently contributing \$2.6 billion a year to our economy. It directly employs almost 14,000 people and produces two-thirds of all recreational boats exported from Australia, valued at \$190 million in 2005-06.

On 19 March 2008 the marine sector action plan was launched. This plan aims to support industry development by promoting productivity improvement through innovation and technology diffusion. The recent formation of the marine industry reference group, which I chair, allows for industry leaders and innovators to provide crucial industry input to effectively target and maximise the benefit of industry development initiatives. We have also recently partnered with the Commonwealth government to organise the first marine innovation conference, which was held on the Gold Coast on 20 May 2008. This conference attracted an international line-up of marine buyers, manufacturers, operators and executives. It provided a unique opportunity for delegates to explore the latest innovative technologies, product designs, strategies and environmentally friendly products and services that are available to the marine industry.

The department continues to promote the uptake of leading-edge technology and services through programs offered by organisations, including QMI Solutions and industry suppliers, as improving productivity is central to our continued competitiveness. In the investments sphere, the department has recently been successful in facilitating the attraction of High Modulus Australia to south-east Queensland. This company is a high-tech composite supplier to the marine industry. The company's unique production application enables boat builders to reduce time, labour and waste during the lamination process, saving manufacturers around the world up to 40 per cent in boat building costs. This kind of innovation is precisely what the government's targeted support for the marine sector is aiming to achieve. The strength of the Australian dollar means it will remain tight for our manufacturers for a while to come. But our focus on doing things smarter is paying off and will pay off in the years to come.

Mrs REILLY: Thank you. It is really a very impressive industry, if you have had the opportunity to tour some of the factories that are building boats there that I could not afford even if I sold my house. That brings me to my next question, which is about the high-yielding superyacht industry specifically. Earlier you mentioned visas, but are there other things that are being done to specifically target the superyacht sector of the industry?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. I would like to tell you a bit more about our superyacht initiatives, as this is an area that has the potential to reap huge rewards for all of Queensland's coast. The Queensland superyachts strategy was launched in March 2008 to help drive the growth of Queensland's emerging superyacht industry. It is a first for Australia. Under the superyacht strategy, over the next five years we aim to see the private and charter superyacht industry grow to employ around 1,000 Queenslanders and generate about half a billion dollar turnover each year. The strategy is designed to make Queensland the Caribbean of the Southern Hemisphere.

Ms GRACE: It already is.

Ms BOYLE: This is not a joke. Mr Chair, I ask you to discipline members of the committee. This is a very real possibility.

Ms GRACE: Better than the Caribbean.

Ms BOYLE: Through increased marketing of the Queensland superyacht internationally, through attracting new manufacturing refit and maintenance businesses while increasing superyacht visitation, through working with industry and the Commonwealth to address regulatory issues—and, as I have already said today, we have had some success in that regard—and through developing in partnership with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Environmental Protection Agency a targeted marketing tool. This will clearly identify superyacht attraction, cruising and access nodes to inform the superyacht industry, which includes captains, brokers, owners and agents, on where superyachts can access the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The strategy will also see government facilitating the development of world-class marine infrastructure. We are working closely with partners the length of the Queensland coast, with sector suppliers, investors and the federal government to make superyacht big business for the state's economy and regional communities.

The beauty of attracting these types of vessels is that you do not need a lot of them to have a major impact. A few dozen major vessels coming into Queensland each year can create hundreds of jobs in areas such as servicing and refit. So we are going all out to grow this important opportunity.

There has been recent publicity given to some of the yacht races that have been and are being held in Queensland waters this year. This also is big business for regional communities. I am pleased to pay credit particularly to the management of Hamilton Island who are planning a huge international yacht race in Queensland waters starting next year and for the years to come. It is an opportunity all the way from the northern end of the Barrier Reef to the border of New South Wales for our marine industry.

Mrs REILLY: Thank you.

CHAIR: I look forward to some of those initiatives being shared with my beautiful part of the world of Cleveland and Stradbroke Island, which is the gateway to the southern Moreton Bay. So I was very pleased to hear some of the things you brought up in those answers. On another matter, you recently travelled overseas to talk to airlines about potential new services for Queensland. Can you advise the committee of any outcomes of those discussions?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. It is probably the question of greatest importance of all to the tourism industry, particularly that section based around international tourism. I need to preface my remarks with the very sobering information for members that in the last six months, through IATA, the international airline organisation, we have heard of some 25 airlines that have either been bankrupted or have closed their doors. That is how very serious the global aviation crisis is. That is associated primarily and obviously with the price of oil but, behind that, too, has been the huge downward pressure on airline tickets due to the rise of low-cost carriers. Between those factors, we have found a very difficult industry for aviation indeed.

The trip gave me a greater understanding of the tough issues facing the airline industry world wide, in particular, those that will face it over the next few years. All were optimistic about the long-term future, but it is this next several years that is uncertain. The current fuel situation and the slowdown in the world economy means that the tourism industry world wide is facing significant challenges. Some of the executives said to me that the challenge for many airlines over the next 12 months will not be to make a profit but simply to survive.

Queensland arguably faces greater challenges than other Australian states, because we rely so heavily on international tourism to some of our key designations. Nonetheless, my discussions whilst overseas did provide some optimism. In Japan, we had a number of major meetings with Japanese wholesalers and these were very positive indeed. They all confirmed their ongoing commitment to Queensland. In Japan, tourism wholesalers are very important indeed. They were amazed by the decision by Jetstar to reduce flights and they reminded us of the demand of over 100,000 people from western Japan who are planning to come to Queensland, and in particular to Cairns and the Barrier Reef. Similarly, we had good meetings in Korea, with Korea Air and Cathay Pacific, and in Hong Kong and Macau with airlines, particularly Cathay Pacific and Viva Macau, who are keen to talk further about the opportunities for leisure tourism visitors, particularly to north Queensland.

It is likely, however, that the benefits from these meetings will take some further months or even into next year before they will be apparent. I will return to Asia in September to continue discussions with these and other airlines and in particular to visit China, where we have some very big promotions for Queensland tourism planned. We will continue these negotiations and we will remain positive. It is not a matter of one simple meeting but rather a persistent and determined dialogue with the various airlines to increase our opportunities and route access to Queensland.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. I look forward to seeing those benefits over the coming months. It is now 1.20 pm. The committee will now adjourn for lunch. The hearing will resume at 2.20 pm promptly.

Proceedings suspended from 1.20 pm to 2.20 pm

CHAIR: The Estimates Committee D hearing is now resumed. The question before the committee is that the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of the Minister for Tourism, Regional Development and Industry be agreed to. I would like to take the opportunity to remind people, if they have used their phones during the lunchtime, to ensure that their mobiles are turned off. I now call the member for Burnett.

Mr MESSENGER: I refer to page 3-186 of the SDS. The latest news from Qantas today is that the aviation industry is facing another major crisis. Qantas will cut 1,500 jobs worldwide, freeze executive pay and retire 10 per cent of its 228-strong fleet. With the impending sale of Cairns and Mackay airports, will an increase in user charges by the new private operators increase the cost of airfares and provide yet another barrier to tourists thinking of coming to Queensland? Do you have any strategies to deal with that?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much. That really is an excellent question. Over the years, particularly at Cairns International Airport, the Cairns Port Authority's landing fees had been, relative to other airports, very expensive. That had been a concern raised by airlines flying into Cairns. I note that, if you look back at the history, through the nineties, when the landing charges were so high, the airlines were coming. What the airlines tell me now—and this is a question that I have addressed with some of those that I have met with recently—is that the landing charges and the user charges are a very minor part of their equation at the moment. Whereas when Jetstar commenced operations in Queensland some 15 per cent of an airline ticket represented the cost of fuel, now they say that over 40 per cent of the cost of an airline ticket on Jetstar is the fuel component. That clearly is the preoccupation at the moment.

Nonetheless, user charges to Cairns airport and other regional airports around Australia are not fairly distributed, in my opinion or in the opinion of very many in the industry and other tourism ministers from other states, I have to say. That is why at the recent ministerial council on tourism we agreed unanimously to write to the federal minister for aviation policy—that is, Anthony Albanese—and in the aviation policy review that is underway to ask him to address the inequity of user charges particularly at regional international airports across Australia. That has big implications for Queensland when Cairns and Gold Coast are two of the key regional international airports. Darwin is also in that category, so it is very important also to tourism in the Northern Territory.

At the moment the system of user charges that is imposed by the federal government gives a great advantage to Sydney and Melbourne and the big airports with huge passenger throughput. We are hopeful that the aviation white paper that is out for consultation at the moment will lead to some changes in user charges. I do not know that there is evidence that a new owner of the Cairns airport will necessarily add to those user charges, even though it is likely that there will be a rationalisation of charges at that airport and for Mackay, as there has been when privatisation has occurred at other airports. The important thing that Cairns is keeping a focus on is that when privatisation has occurred at other airports there has been an increase in business. That is the bottom line. Private owners of airports have an ability to engage in incentives to airlines in a much more flexible fashion than government owned ports corporations, and that is part of the reason for the government's decision to sell both Mackay and Cairns airports.

Mr MESSENGER: Given you have disclosed that information, what price do you expect to get for those airports, if that is something that you have talked about? Given the extent of the crisis which has just emerged again today, is there any way that you would be looking at increasing the budget or, say, the \$4 million that you have pledged to the industry?

Ms BOYLE: Let us deal with the first issue first. I have had few and only cursory conversations in the course of business with some who may or may not have—I do not know for sure—put in an expression of interest for either or both of the Cairns and Mackay airports. In the discussions various figures have been mentioned but none of these have been in the context of, 'This is how much we are likely to bid.' Further, the Treasurer has been impeccable in his management of this and the probity through independent experts managing the process. He has declined, to me and in general to others and the public at large, to put any figures on the likely amount that Cairns or Mackay will attract—partly because we do not want to pick a figure that might turn out to be too low and in any way talk it down.

I am pleased to say that aviation experts and those in the industry have said to us that the present difficulty associated with Qantas and Jetstar for particularly Cairns airport is unlikely to impact on the interest in or the sale price for Cairns International Airport, that those who would be interested in purchasing it are looking at the long-term opportunities and not at the short-term glitch that is the very real problem facing us right now. I spoke, in fact, with the Treasurer yesterday and he again declined to mention any numbers or amounts but said to me that in due course, when it does become public, I and others in Cairns and Mackay will be pleased to know that the number of bids and the status of the companies and consortia bidding for these airports is very high. I have forgotten the second part of your question. Could I be reminded, Mr Chair?

Mr MESSENGER: Because of the existing crisis and the emerging crisis that has been announced today by Qantas, is there a likelihood of a greater injection of funds into the industry?

Ms BOYLE: We think it is unlikely. The indication is that the long-term opportunities for these airports are so good—opportunities over the next 20 years, not over the next one or two years. It is far from any thought in the government's mind that we will need to top up funding but rather that, with the additional funds that we have, particularly targeting Cairns and the Whitsundays, we will be able to piggyback the new operator, who surely will come with all kinds of plans on the table. The Treasurer has also reassured those two communities that that is part of how the decision will be made as to who will be the purchaser of those two airports: not just on price but also on the plans that they lay out for how they will increase and grow business to those airports and for the contributions they plan to the broader regional economies.

Mr MESSENGER: We talked about the Stafford report around the viability of regional tourism organisations and whether or not you were going to reduce the number. I was wondering if the minister firstly could give an undertaking to table that report so that we could see what was in the report for ourselves.

Ms BOYLE: Let me just check that, publicly so. I think that report is already on the net.

Mr Hayes: Yes, it is.

Ms BOYLE: In fact, I am pleased to say that it is available on the net, and in a moment the CEO can tell you the exact web address to get a copy of it. Because we are suggesting structural changes to the tourism industry and because, of course, when you suggest change to the industry there is some nervousness in some quarters, I have been at pains to make sure that this process is really transparent and that everybody truly has the ability to participate in the review and the proposed recommendations. That is why I have been keen to make sure it is available, that there are lots of opportunities not just for single submissions but for discussion amongst players—so that, for example, a regional tourism organisation that may be nervous about its future can hear what other regional tourism organisations are similarly saying and, hopefully, form part of a college of RTOs making the decision for the future. I wonder if you would like to address that issue, particularly the availability of information, further, Mr Hayes.

Mr Hayes: The information is certainly available at the Tourism Queensland web site. I would be happy to provide a copy if that is of use. I think one of the important aspects of the way this has been handled is that if it were to be seen to be the government dictating to the tourism industry that 'this is what things are going to look like', that would not have been a very effective way to do it. The strategy has been very much about letting the report be digested over the course of a month or so by all key parties and asking for additional feedback. A number of public submissions have come in as part of that process. What we are trying to do is find a solution as a team, rather than the government, Tourism Queensland or the department saying, 'This is what the new structure will look like and this is how many RTOs there will be.' It really is a matter of working the process through with the RTOs. It is a matter of working it through with local tourism organisations and industry bodies to make sure that we are all in agreement and that the final structure is something that has been supported throughout the industry and is not coming from the top down but is actually coming from the bottom up.

Mr MESSENGER: Just for clarification, what about staff cuts?

Ms BOYLE: That really is a new question, I think.

CHAIR: That is a new question.

Ms BOYLE: We will take that question, but I might add a little bit more to the answer to the previous question to say that our main trouble in Queensland, in a sense, is an embarrassment of riches. Many other states do not have much to market. New South Wales has Sydney and Victoria has Melbourne. How easy would that be? In Queensland we have so many places to go, so many things to see, so many regions—all the regions from the cape and the Torres Strait, right down the coast to the Gold Coast, west through the Darling Downs and into outback Queensland. Trying to market Queensland means, if anything, that we have to be careful that we are not marketing 20 or 30 different destinations in a confusing mess. How we for international purposes, therefore, get the headline destinations out there that are part of Queensland is a very important question. Then how we feed them through those headline destinations—the best-known international hot spots, you might say, such as the

Gold Coast, which is known worldwide, such as the Whitsundays, Cairns, the Great Barrier Reef—out to all the other regions and then the subregions is really a wonderfully difficult problem, if you know what I mean. I wonder if you would like to further address that second question, Mr Hayes.

Mr Hayes: The Stafford report again did not specify reductions in staff. What it referred to is efficiencies in the way all of the different organisations throughout the tourism network are working together. For example, finding opportunities for a more workable relationship between Tourism Queensland and the larger regional tourism organisations is a different discussion from how Tourism Queensland works with a smaller developing regional tourism organisation. I think the key to it is to find the appropriate structure, to find the appropriate process and then to have a think about staff numbers.

There was certainly nothing in there that suggested there should be less. In fact, from memory, it actually suggested that there should be more people involved in the process but that there were too many layers in the process. What we are talking about is how we find a structure that encourages local council to engage more effectively with tourism, how we find a structure that allows for local tourism organisations throughout the state—and there are over 100 of them—to feel more a part of the decision-making process because they are the ones right on the ground day to day. How do they work more effectively with Tourism Queensland when we are providing the leadership, in terms of the creative leadership, whether that is marketing or product development? It is about how we work more effectively across-the-board.

Ms BOYLE: The other thing I would like to say is that one of the things I as a regional member am keen to see is more people from Tourism Queensland actually in the regions. There has been some frustration with a fly-in, fly-out model, so the new model that is being discussed may well have Tourism Queensland staff but based in the regions.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, in relation to your reply to the other question where you were talking about marketing of Queensland—I am sure you have had this discussion many a time with people from northern Queensland, Cairns and Townsville; I certainly have—but they would like me to say to you that we are marketing a state, not just a city and I ask: what percentage of your resources are dedicated to the areas outside of the south-east corner?

Ms BOYLE: That is a very good question and I do not know the immediate answer in that form. I am aware of the figures region by region but I have not added them together to compare them to south-east Queensland. I will put Mr Hayes on the spot in a moment in terms of that. It depends firstly how you define south-east Queensland. If you include the Gold Coast, that will give Brisbane a big bump up. But the truth is that it is not Brisbane that gets the biggest marketing. In fact, it is the Barrier Reef and therefore the coast—the islands on the Barrier Reef, Cairns and the Gold Coast—that would get the combined biggest bang in terms of international marketing. Brisbane is growing as a destination internationally, but it is still mostly a business city and not the primary drawcard to Queensland for international tourists. Very many of those who arrive in Brisbane promptly move on, particularly to the Gold Coast.

One of the issues that we need to continue dialogue with the regional tourism organisations about is that growing tourism is about growing the tourism experience in your region first and foremost. Marketing and advertising dollars miss the point if you have not got something really special to offer as a set of experiences when they get there. It is a hard message for some of the regions—the region you come from and the region the honourable member sitting next to you comes from. A lot of the money that is spent in your region needs to be spent on growing tourism product, on developing it rather than simply advertising the names of the places.

So when you are having a look at Tourism Queensland's budget and how they spend their dollars in destination marketing, it is very important at the same time that you look at how they spend their dollars in terms of growing destinations, in terms of growing tourism product, and helping the newer and growing regions, such as that based around Wide Bay-Burnett and such as that based around Townsville. It is the headline destinations that are called mature markets—Cairns and the Gold Coast—that do get the lion's share of international marketing because they are the names that are the door openers to international tourism.

Mr Hayes: Interestingly enough, we actually consider Brisbane to be an emerging destination rather than one that is out there leading, which is ironic in some ways because Brisbane obviously generates an enormous number of passengers through the airport for business reasons and visiting friends and relatives, but as a leisure destination we believe it has only just begun. Certainly in our discussions with the regional tourism organisation for Brisbane they constantly encourage us to put more focus on Brisbane because they feel that focus is very much on the regions. If I may, a good percentage of our budget is provided to—

Ms BOYLE: Could we have a bit more time?

Mr MESSENGER: Sure.

Mr Hayes: A good percentage of our budget is provided to supporting regional tourism organisations because that is an important part of the process. In fact, we are taking that a step further in the coming 12 months. We will be for the first time signing new MOUs with each of the regional

tourism organisations. They will be referred to as partnership Queensland agreements. For the first time we will be entering into a very formal, almost contractual, relationship with each of the RTOs so they have a clear commitment from us regarding what we will do for them over the course of the next 12 months, and in return we will be asking them for a clear commitment as to what they will be doing in partnership with us over the next 12 months.

The agreements look to outline a clear set of goals, which will include marketing and development—the obvious ones—but also strategy and research, communication and PR activity, trademarks and logos, grants and budget allocations et cetera. Current Queensland government funding for RTOs includes \$3.1 million per annum in base funding to support the RTOs, and that is used to build and sustain tourism industry throughout the different regions. The amount of \$1.875 million per annum is allocated to the six regional tourism organisations with convention bureaux, because we also support the convention and incentive industry via the Tourism Queensland budget.

The amount of \$1 million per annum is allocated to assist the regional tourism organisations in implementing initiatives contained in the Queensland Tourism Strategy and the destination management plans. These are contestable grants for \$1 million, where each of the RTOs actually get to present a proposal and the grants are then provided subject to the best proposals receiving the best money et cetera. And \$2.91 million is allocated to assist in the employment of 10 regionally based destination management officers, and those people are specifically designed to help develop new product in the regions.

Mr MESSENGER: Thank you, Mr Hayes. Minister, with reference to SDS page 3-186 regarding licensing agreements between Tourism Queensland and the Australian Outback Travel Group, AOT, and Sunlover, has Sunlover been sold? If so, how much did you get for it?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. I will ask the director-general to address it because I am very conscious that the potential sale should take place with the utmost probity. It is not a matter for politicians' intervention and therefore I have not taken any direct role in this at all. Director-General, are you able to assist with the question?

Mr McCarthy: Australian Outback Travel, the AOT Group, licensed the business commonly known as Sunlover in July 2005. That licence arrangement is still effective and it is returning some \$3 million a year to Tourism Queensland, as I understand it. There have been discussions in recent months between Sunlover and the government. For the government I have been taking the lead in those discussions. The principal of Australian Outback Travel has indicated an interest in purchasing the licence. However, at this stage those discussions are still being carried out.

We have made it very clear that under no circumstances would we be interested in relinquishing ownership of that franchise unless there were demonstrable and clear benefits to Queensland and unless there are significant undertakings on behalf of any potential purchaser that the business would be retained in Queensland and that the efforts that have been carried out by that organisation will be maintained. I do not have any indication at this stage as to whether those discussions will result in the purchase of Sunlover or whether in fact the licence will just continue to run out over the next couple of years.

CHAIR: Thank you. The next round of questions will be from government members. I call the member for Woodridge.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, we all realise that we are in a highly competitive business environment and attracting investment from interstate and overseas often provides a way to boost local economies. Can you advise what Invest Queensland is doing to attract investment into the state, particularly into our major regional centres?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. Invest Queensland is actively focused on supporting investment to regional centres particularly aligned to the centre of enterprise initiative and priority sectors which we have talked about earlier today. In aviation and defence, Invest Queensland has a proactive strategy targeting aviation training, maintenance, repair and overhaul operations as well as emerging technologies such as unmanned aerial vehicles, UAVs so-called, and defence related business.

During 2007-08 Invest Queensland organised so-called 'Project Bankot', an interstate investment attraction roadshow. This involved our regional centres travelling to Bankstown and Jandakot airports to conduct a trade show for the local general aviation industry. Many leads were generated and are actively being pursued. The Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Challenge on 22 and 23 September will showcase Kingaroy and the aviation capability of the Wide Bay region. That is another fine example of regional Queensland benefiting from Invest Queensland's activities. This challenge is a Queensland government partnership with Boeing Australia, QUT and CSIRO. The event will attract aerospace companies from Australia and overseas and provide us with the opportunity to target investment opportunities in this emerging sector.

Meantime, in the manufacturing sector we are proactively targeting industrial biotechnology projects that use sugar cane to produce both alternative fuels and petrochemical replacements. In the advanced manufacturing and major projects fields we have put a special focus on companies that

centre around the mining and construction booms in central regional Queensland. Targeted companies range from clean tech operations, such as solar and new approaches to convert coal to gas and liquid fuels, through to large-scale mineral and metal processing, as well as associated commercial R&D functions. In 2008-09 Invest Queensland will undertake a proactive strategy to target US based companies. The market research project will focus on major regional industrial sites in central and northern Queensland and seek to raise awareness of these assets in the US marketplace.

In the services sector, some examples include Invest Queensland which has a proactive strategy targeting mining services and training—again building on our regional strengths in this area. In 2007-08 Invest Queensland facilitated the establishment of the Australian Association of Angel Investors—the peak industry association for private angel investors—and we attracted its head office to Brisbane. We are working closely with this association of angel investors in Cairns and in Toowoomba.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, the Smart Therapies Institute received a commitment of more than \$100 million from the Bligh government. Please outline what role this institute will play in advancing biomedical research in Queensland?

Ms BOYLE: It is a great privilege to be the minister for industry at a time when biotechnology is just exploding in this state and to have the additional privilege of meeting with some of our smart therapies people and seeing the leading-edge international work that is being undertaken.

The government's \$3.4 billion investment in research and development since 1988 has resulted in 36 new research institutes and close to 60,000 new jobs being created in science, engineering, technology and health throughout Queensland. The Smart Therapies Institute, also known as the Translational Research Institute, is one of a number of major health and medical research institutes being funded by this government's continued investment in health and medical research.

This initiative is expected to leverage significant additional funding from other sources such as philanthropic organisations. The Queensland government has welcomed the commitment of \$100 million by the Commonwealth government to the Smart Therapies Institute. This institute is to be built on the Princess Alexandra Hospital site adjacent to the Pharmacy Australia Centre of Excellence. The institute will house approximately 600 researchers from a wide cross-section of health and medical research areas.

Research to be undertaken at the institute will focus on several of the most significant and prevalent diseases that impact on the lives of Queenslanders and people elsewhere including cervical and breast cancer, obesity and diabetes. It will also undertake research and development in kidney disease, malaria, HIV, osteoporosis, arthritis and bone and metabolic disorders. The Smart Therapies Institute's primary role is to make new medical developments directly available for the treatment of patients in the adjacent hospital facilities.

This institute will be an Australian first and one of only a few worldwide where scientists specialising in translational research—that is, taking scientific breakthroughs from bench to bedside—will be quickly able to test and apply the latest medical discoveries and therapies to patients' illnesses to improve their chances of recovery. The institute will initially house researchers from a range of organisations including the University of Queensland's Diamantina Institute for Cancer, Immunology and Metabolic Medicine, the Mater Medical Research Institute, the Queensland University of Technology's Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation and of course Princess Alexandra Hospital researchers. The institute will also attract some of the world's best biomedical researchers to work alongside Queensland's top scientists including Professor Ian Frazer, who developed the world's first cervical cancer vaccine, to lead the way in discovering new therapies to treat disease.

Ms GRACE: Minister, I have heard you talk about nanotechnology and the possibilities that it represents for Queensland. I am interested—and I am sure some of the students in the gallery might be interested as well—in you giving us some idea of how nanotechnology is being used in Queensland.

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. I am excited by nanotechnology because, in truth, when I became the minister I did not know what it was and I had to go and find out. I can admit that because I think I am not alone amongst Queenslanders in not having very much knowledge—at least I did not have it some months ago—about what is nanotechnology. It is one of my favourite areas now of the great scientific work being done in Queensland. It offers huge opportunities for the future and is already being used, I discovered, in a wide range of products, from sunscreens and cosmetics to computer hard drives and golf balls.

The Department of Tourism, Regional Development and Industry has provided \$20 million for the establishment of the Australian Institute for Bioengineering and Nanotechnology at the University of Queensland. Since 2006 another \$2.3 million has been awarded to projects involving the application of nanotechnology. Research achievements in Queensland include the nanopatch, which is a device smaller than your fingernail which when fully developed could be used to administer vaccines simply by being applied to the skin. Agriculture will benefit from the development of nanovaccines able to be delivered in a single dose either as a nasal spray or as a drop in an animal's feed.

Nanotechnology is being used by several innovative Queensland companies. G James Glass produces nanocoated glass which lets through the sun's light but not its heat, reducing the need for air conditioning. The Very Small Particle Co. at Wacol produces more effective catalysts for using in catalytic converters, lowering emissions from cars. Boat-building companies use nanotechnology through sprays and coatings, using silver nanoparticles to protect boat hulls from pests.

Because of the potential value nanotechnology can provide to enhance the competitiveness of Queensland firms across a wide range of industries and regions, my department has commissioned a series of workshops to better inform businesspeople of the opportunities that can be embraced by taking up this new form of very, very, very small particle technology. To date, workshops have been held in Brisbane, Rockhampton and on the Gold Coast and future workshops are planned for 2008-09. If any of the members of the committee are interested, I would be pleased to arrange for you to go out and see some of this technology in action. I am pleased to announce that as part of Science in Parliament this year our key leading scientists in nanotechnology will be, as it were, showcasing their work—though may I remind you that nanotechnology is about very, very, very small particles and is therefore in its essence impossible to see, though its good outcomes are very welcome and easily seen.

Ms GRACE: Thank you, Minister. I think I know what nanotechnology is now. Minister, how will the new Business and Industry Transformation Incentives scheme assist small to medium enterprises operating in Queensland's priority sectors?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for that question. I am pleased to clarify for members what we have done with the new scheme. I think some may have thought we had cancelled the previous scheme that was in place but we have not. We have reworked it so it is better targeted and offers greater financial assistance to business. The Business and Industry Transformation Incentives scheme, or BITI scheme, was launched in October last year and is squarely aimed at small to medium enterprises in Queensland's priority industry sectors and it will benefit them in a number of ways. The scheme better focuses financial assistance offered by the government to target industry sectors that genuinely have the potential to expand and strengthen the Queensland economy. We are keen to support projects that will have a significant and enduring impact not only on the individual business but also on the industry and the region. Larger financial incentives are available than those under the former Queensland Industry Development Scheme. Up to \$250,000 is now available on a dollar-for-dollar basis, enabling us to support projects capable of making much more significant impacts than some of the small grants of the past.

The BITI scheme also offers improved client service. The introduction of a rounds based system means our clients have clear process time frames to work to and will receive a quicker decision as to the outcome of their application. As you can imagine, in our consultation with small and medium enterprises around Queensland, this builds on feedback that they gave us that our schemes were not as timely, that the process of application was too complex and took too long and that there was not sufficient emphasis on larger amounts of grants available for truly major initiatives that would transform the business to a new level. We now have clearer guidelines, simpler documentation and streamlined processes. These are major focuses of the new BITI scheme and reflect, of course, the government's commitment to the continuous improvement of financial incentive products for business and industry.

Business and Industry Transformation Incentives will continue to build an excellent reputation as a scheme that represents genuine collaboration between business and government in bringing about projects that will be instrumental in transforming our priority industries. One other element that is new in the BITI scheme that was not so much emphasised under the old QIDS program is the opportunity for businesses to work together. That is indeed a way of the future where, rather than simply assisting individual businesses to grow by partnering and through collaboration and through assistance from government grants such as available under the BITI scheme, the businesses will be better able to meet the innovation and productivity challenges of the future.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, I know that the ICT sector is also an important contributor to our state's economy, creating thousands of well-paying jobs for Queenslanders. Will you advise the committee what your department is doing to strengthen the future of this important sector?

Ms BOYLE: Queensland's ICT industry is an important, diverse and dynamic industry and, while it has already grown substantially in recent years, we believe it can continue to grow and develop further in the years ahead. The Queensland government has gained a reputation for its front-foot approach to developing the Queensland information and communication technology industry but there is more work to be done. As some members may be aware, the Queensland government committed \$18 million in 2004 to a four-year industry development strategy with significant positive results. The latest survey of the ICT industry reveals 5,600 employing businesses in this sector, 77,000 jobs, estimated sales of over \$23 billion and approximately \$1.3 billion in export sales.

Further, to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to the industry, the government is progressing a new four-year ICT Industry Development Strategy to commence in early 2009 after the current one expires in December this year. This new ICT Industry Development Strategy will complement the visions and goals of the Smart State 3 strategy. It will, however, move on and take the industry to the next stage.

It will help Queensland ICT firms capture the opportunities, both locally and internationally, arising from climate change by providing ICT solutions aimed at promoting energy efficiency and minimising emissions in existing businesses.

Other initiatives will focus on the key challenges of growing ICT exports, ensuring an adequate supply of suitably skilled ICT workers and assisting the industry's continued development throughout regional Queensland. I connect directly with industry through my ICT Ministerial Advisory Group, which provides me with objective industry input into a range of ICT policy issues as well as emerging opportunities. With the new strategy in place and the support of all the industry stakeholders, Queensland's ICT sectors will continue to grow and play a critical role in ensuring Queensland's economy prospers and remains internationally competitive.

I am pleased to inform honourable members that one of the difficult bits of the forward strategy on which we are working closely with the departments of education, training and employment is in fact interesting young Queenslanders, particularly in high school years, in the opportunities for the ICT industry. Unfortunately, the pattern in our high schools has shown that in early high school too many of our young people lose interest in ICT and concentrate more on the direct subjects of their interest rather than the possibilities of ICT as an enabler to the full range of industries. If they drop out of ICT courses too early, then the opportunities of an ICT career may be lost to them and we are addressing this problem.

Mrs REILLY: That is very important because I understand there are a great range of career opportunities in ICT and a great lack of people with the right and available skills in the field. You have talked about some of the comparative advantages and unique opportunities that Queensland has in another area of expertise—that is, tropical expertise. You have touched on that a bit today, but can you elaborate further and tell us what fits under the banner of 'tropical expertise' and how you are helping Queensland businesses and research institutions to capitalise on the opportunities that this sector presents?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. It is a very important question, particularly for the northern half of the state which is, of course, situated in the tropics. 'Tropical expertise' refers to businesses and research institutions developing and adapting products, services and research to meet the unique conditions of tropical environments. Queensland has strong wet and dry tropical expertise in the areas of health, environmental management, primary industries and tropical living and this expertise is particularly found in Townsville and the Cairns region.

The Queensland government is working with industry and researchers to position the state as a world leader and hub for tropical expertise. This will enable us to capitalise on the growth of tropical developing economies like India and parts of China in order to grow the state's exports. I remind honourable members that if you have a look at countries based in the tropics then it is easy to see the huge population explosions in these countries yet at the same time see the sophistication of our education and knowledge based industries and therefore see the opportunity for our experts to work not only in the tropics of Australia but also in the tropics internationally.

Over the last decade, our government has committed \$40 million through the Smart State research facilities funds and innovation funds to build Queensland's tropical research expertise in north Queensland in particular, and I will give some examples. There was \$14 million for the Australian Tropical Science and Innovation Precinct at James Cook University which will be a dedicated precinct with the aim of co-locating a number of complementary organisations to become the tropical research and development headquarters for Queensland and Australia. The precinct will co-locate a number of complementary organisations, including CSIRO and the Australian Institute of Marine Science. Another example is \$7.8 million towards the Australian Tropical Forest Institute at James Cook University based on the Cairns campus. This will create a centre of excellence in tropical landscape research, knowledge brokering and management.

CHAIR: Thank you. The next round of questions will be from non-government members and I call the member for Burnett.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, I refer you to the sale or the possible or impending sale of Sunlover that the director-general talked about previously. Minister, can you describe the process by which the potential buyers were identified? Was it an open tendering process or has your department been talking about a possible sale with a select group of companies? How many companies or individuals have indicated an interest in buying Sunlover?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. I will ask the director-general to respond.

Mr McCarthy: I will give just a little bit of history. The Sunlover agreement was negotiated between the then Tourism Queensland and the company in 2005. That agreement provides for an ongoing licensed payment to Tourism Queensland and also certain obligations on behalf of Tourism Queensland in terms of the use of services and the like. This doesn't preclude an offer for the company to purchase Sunlover at any point during that period of time. In the event that the licence agreement continues until the end of the period, the company also has the right to purchase the company in entirety. What we are doing right now is basically administering that contract.

In specific answer to your question, the licence agreement is between a company and Tourism Queensland. Any purchase now would have to be on the basis as provided for in that licence agreement and that is that the company that currently has the licence agreement has the sole right at this stage to purchase the company outright. So it is not a matter of, if you like, searching the marketplace for alternative purchasers because that is not provided for in the terms of the legally binding arrangement that is there. The issue now is to ensure that in the event that it is sold, then the benefits that accrue to the Queensland tourism industry and Tourism Queensland in particular—in fact, in excess of that—would be achieved in the event that the licence agreement was allowed to run its full course.

At the end of the licence agreement there are certain obligations on both Tourism Queensland and also the company. In the event that the company satisfies the terms of the agreement and throughout the life of that agreement—and at this stage there is little reason to suggest that that will not take place—they have the right to purchase that outright at a figure that is already incorporated into the agreement. Alternatively, in the event that they choose not to take that up and have conformed, then Tourism Queensland has the opportunity to take it back as well. Just to summarise, basically what we are doing is negotiating this arrangement within the context of a legally binding contract as it exists now.

Mr MESSENGER: I will just follow on with this. Basically, you are telling me that there is an option purchase plan in place at the moment, it is a legally binding contract, and you have in that option purchase plan a figure or a price—and I would like you, if you are able, to tell this committee that figure. Some people have been mentioning \$3 million. Is \$3 million—

CHAIR: I just ask if the honourable member would direct the question through the minister.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, can you tell us whether the option purchase plan is in place and what the figure on that option purchase plan is if the existing business operator decides to exercise their right?

Ms BOYLE: Director-general?

Mr McCarthy: It is a bit complicated in the sense that the licence agreement basically results in a \$3 million per annum payment to Tourism Queensland currently and that will run until the licence agreement terminates. There is no figure for the purchase of the company within the period of the licence agreement included in the contract. But obviously you are going to have a minimum amount that would have been accrued to Tourism Queensland for it to even have been of any interest at this stage.

Similarly, at the end of the licence period, the company also has the option to extend that for a further period or to purchase the company at a price that is incorporated into the contract at that point. That is where we are at now in the sense that with approximately two years to run on the contract we would be looking at at least the purchase price that is incorporated into the contract at the end of the period plus any benefit that we would be achieving in that period of time plus any additional amounts that would indicate to us that at this stage it is worthwhile selling the licence.

Mr MESSENGER: Just a point of clarification, Minister: who decides the price?

Ms BOYLE: I imagine in the end that the government would have to sign off on it and that therefore we would have to give approval to it. That means that, should the director-general and Tourism Queensland be of the view that a potential deal could be done, then that is the point at which I assume it would come to me and others in the government for consideration.

Mr McCarthy: The negotiating parameters have already been established by CBRC and the arrangements would be that we have a small group of departments—our own Treasury and the Premier's department—who are, if you like, overseeing the process. In the event that we get close or we get to some point of finality, then it would be ultimately signed off and agreed to by the Cabinet Budget Review Committee on the basis of the recommendations that we put forward. That is the normal disposal process that government would follow in terms of any activity.

Ms BOYLE: Might I put on the record that I am sure the Treasurer and the Premier for that matter agree with me when I say to you that we are not going to be selling Queensland Tourism short by any stretch of the imagination—not in the sale of Cairns Airport or Mackay Airport and not in the sale of the Sunlover arrangement either.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, a substantial amount of your total capital expenditure—and I am referring to SDS 3-187—\$133.9 million out of a total of \$138.7 million, is reserved for the construction of the ecoscience precinct at Boggo Road and the Health and Food Sciences Precinct at Coopers Plains. It is taking up 96.61 per cent of the total projected capital outlay of \$138.7 million, leaving \$4.8 million for other capital works within your department. Given that four other state departments and one Commonwealth organisation—CSIRO—are involved in the projects, have any of these departments and also the federal government contributed to the total capital cost of these precincts? If so, how much?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. This is an important project but your question also implies—and quite correctly—the complications of the project with so many parties involved. Director-general, would you address the particular participation of those different organisations?

Mr McCarthy: The ecosciences project within Boggo Road has obviously been in its planning stage for some time. We had originally planned on having some significant expenditure in the previous financial year. However, the planning approvals particularly associated with the material change of use application for the Boggo Road Urban Village and also with the planning for the new busway, which is incorporated in that process, led to—I am advised—some six months of slippage on that project. However, we are now pretty much back on track. In fact, the Department of Public Works in the near future will call for expressions of interest on that project.

Specifically in terms of your question, the agencies that will be relocating there are largely state agencies. They will be the Departments of Natural Resources and Water, Primary Industries and Fisheries, Mines and Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency which I am sure you are also aware is located currently in facilities around the Brisbane area—some at Yeerongpilly and some also at Indooroopilly. The other organisation is CSIRO, which is also at this stage based both at Cannon Hill and also at Indooroopilly, and it has committed \$87.9 million to the project. Effectively, it will buy their stake in the project in terms of the area that they need in the building to fulfil their requirements.

In terms of the other departments—the total project is \$377.9 million and other departments will be similarly contributing to that project, principally from the sale of existing facilities. So, for example, the DPI facility at Yeerongpilly will be sold at some stage, as will the facilities at Indooroopilly. I have just been given a brief note saying that the Department of Public Works probably will be in a position to confirm the successful tenderer on the Boggo Road site at some stage today. I do not have it yet.

Mr MESSENGER: Thank you. Minister, once again I refer to SDS 3-187. Minister, according to your performance statement there are 51 estimated actual QT strategy initiatives and obviously those strategies target a range of different markets. Would you be able to detail those markets? Specifically, could you state whether any of those strategies are targeted at seniors? If so, could you detail the general discounts that are available to senior tourists in Queensland? Will you also consider widening the level of discounts to match those available to older tourists who come from other countries? Will you support the opposition in our efforts to improve the Seniors Card discounts and attract more overseas senior visitors by offering more discounts?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for that question. I am not aware of the opposition's proposal in that respect and I would be pleased to look at it. You and I might have another area in common here. I am very keen to expand what might be called the broader category of seniors tourism to Queensland. Seniors, however, Tourism Queensland is realising, are a diverse group of generations now starting with the baby boomers, the older ones of whom are coming into retirement years and can be regarded as seniors, all the way through to the well-known grey nomads and plenty of groups in between. They are not all the same groups. They have different amounts of money and time available and different levels of interest as well as different kinds of experiences that they are seeking. Of course, then we have some differences according to the part of the world from which they originate.

One of the particular issues that I have taken up with the federal government and about which I have not yet had a warm and eager embrace is the change to holiday visa arrangements. Presently, holiday visas are only allowed for the young. I think this is discriminatory, unreasonable and excludes a lot of potential tourists—older people from around the world. If working holiday visas were available to all age groups I am sure more seniors would come to our state. They would certainly have a holiday here, but they would work a bit and stay longer while they are here. Might I ask you, Mr Hayes, to particularly address any of the aspects of our marketing from the point of view of seniors?

Mr Hayes: If I may say for a moment, Mr Chairman, I would like to apologise. I have not introduced myself at all during the process. It shows I am the new boy on the block. My apologies for that. The seniors market will become an increasingly important market, both domestically and internationally. Already on the international scene we spend a significant amount of time and effort chasing the senior market. Particularly out of the longer haul markets—the UK, Europe and USA in particular—there is a general perception that a trip to Australia is almost a life-threatening occurrence. Therefore, if you are going to make the effort to go all the way to Australia you must stay for a very long time. This is quite frustrating.

The reality is that there are really only two key segments of those long-haul markets who have the sort of time available, and that is young kids who have just finished school or university before they settle down into a career or couples and elderly people who are retiring who have plenty of time to travel. As the world population ages, seniors are becoming increasingly important as a number. But it is also important that we do not just focus on the demographics; we must also focus on psychographics to make sure we are talking to the right kind of seniors who will enjoy a Queensland experience.

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, I refer you to SDS 3-167 where it states that your department has a lead role to play in accelerating further growth opportunities in business. Small business in Queensland obviously is a major employer. Given that the federal government—the Rudd government—has recently axed the Small Business Field Officer Program and offered nothing as a replacement, a situation you are obviously not very happy with, can the minister advise what you are now doing to support small and start-up enterprises and whether you have spoken with your federal counterpart about this? What

opposition and representation did you put to the federal government to stop this reckless policy initiative? Given that the current SBFOs provide the only free general small business assistance available in far-north Queensland, what additional measures will the Queensland government administer to replace this vital service?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. It is an important one for those who are now missing a service that they have previously enjoyed and found very productive. Some of the people associated with that federally sponsored scheme from the broader area outside the urban area of Cairns, the broader area of far-north Queensland—up around the gulf, for example—came to see me and alerted me to the federal government's likely dumping of that scheme in the budget. I of course took up the cause on their behalf and expressed my clear view to the federal government that it should continue. That has not been their determination.

The suggestion has then come from those operators that, 'Well, if the feds will not fund it anymore maybe the state should.' Our budget is in place and we have not allowed for picking up a federal scheme that they have defunded, and probably we will not do that. Part of the reason we will not do that is that we already have lots of assistance for small business in place and we are rolling out more of it each day. We are not a default position for a federal government policy and program that has been changed.

The sorts of work that we do with small business is direct and focused on them as a sector. It is also in recognition that that is where some governments of the past have missed the critical difference kind of actions that a government can fund or support that will really get small businesses up and running and make them viable. That is to recognise that small business is not a homogenous group. Just because they are small it does not necessarily give them things in common. Working with small business in their industry sectors is more effective than simply working with them as a conglomerate that crosses industries like aviation and marine and services such as hairdressing and trades such as automotive. The differences between many of those groups means that our way of dealing with them through 15 identified industry sectors is more effective.

We have particularly taken a strong role in terms of information services and training opportunities. This particularly targets new businesses—that is, those businesses getting up and running—and offers them a way of setting up their businesses so that they can hopefully trade for financial success rather than, as too many have in the past, trade briefly and be forced to close.

For example, we have a business web site with a wealth of information and interactive tools. We have 10-minute interactive sessions that make it really attractive for the business operators. Because they are small businesses the owners often have very limited time because they are working the businesses. There are many other training sessions, subjects, smart skills on line, telephone licensing arrangements, pilot programs et cetera.

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

Mrs SCOTT: I must say how much I am enjoying having a little glimpse into the diversity of Queensland industry. I think it is fantastic. We are going to go to creative industries. What contribution do creative industries make to Queensland? What are you doing to grow this important sector?

Ms BOYLE: Lots of people thought when the previous Beattie government established the Creative Industries Precinct that we were really just talking about a pile of artists who cannot make much money. While it certainly includes the arts and the money that can be made from arts and culture related industries, the creative industries are a much bigger industry than simply arts and culture. It includes such things as fashion design which is big business. It includes things such as games software development in the ICT industry, particularly games for recreation and leisure. There are many others as well, including architecture, designing, publishing, writing, photography and music.

The World Bank has identified creative industries as one of the top five fastest growing sectors across the world. Of course we are going to take advantage of that kind of growth in terms of opportunities for Queenslanders. In Queensland already the creative industries sector contributes—wait for this—\$3.4 billion a year to the Queensland economy with exports valued at \$1.1 billion annually. Queensland's creative businesses have grown at an annual rate of eight per cent between 2001 and 2006. That is faster by comparison than any other state in Australia.

There are already over 26,000 creative businesses in this state. The creative industry sector adds \$1.96 billion to the value of the services and manufacturing sectors annually. The growth of the creative industry sector is important to the continued prosperity and diversity of the Queensland economy. That is why the government invested \$4.4 million through the Creativity is Big Business Strategy between July 2004 and June 2008.

From this investment my department has returned \$78 million in direct economic outcomes for Queensland's creative businesses. These outcomes include licensing arrangements, commissions and sales for Queensland's architects, designers, publishers, writers, photographers and musicians. These outcomes have fulfilled the government's election commitment to increase the economic viability of Queensland's creative industries.

Due to the great success of our programs in this fast-growing sector, the government will dedicate through the Smart State 3 Strategy \$3 million to support creative industries. This funding will go to the Designing Queensland initiative. That is hugely exciting and something about which I encourage all honourable members to be fully informed as the years go on. The department has been allocated \$1.1 million and Arts Queensland will receive the remaining \$1.9 million to implementing Designing Queensland. Rod Welford and I as the appropriate ministers will be working in partnership to make sure this is effective.

CHAIR: There are a number of well-known companies your department has attracted to the state such as Virgin and Boeing. I was wondering whether you could give the committee an idea of some of the lesser known but equally important companies that you have managed to attract to Queensland?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. Holding the Tourism portfolio, which grabs a lot of attention and glamour, sometimes it is hard to get the message out about some companies that are doing hugely important business but which may not be immediately so glamorous in terms of telling their story. There are a host of success stories in aviation and in defence.

An example is Insitu Pacific. A global leader in unmanned airborne vehicles, Insitu is behind the military ScanEagle which has been developed in partnership with Boeing and used by the Australian Defence Force. Insitu is an American company and has recently announced that its first overseas subsidiary will be set up here in Queensland.

Another example is Flight Training Queensland. FTG is a subsidiary of Young Brothers Aviation, a global aviation company with aviation interests in Europe, the USA and Asia and long-term relationships with airlines such as Qantas, Cathay Pacific, Dragonair, China Airlines, Emirates, JAL Express, Vietnam Airlines and Air China. FTG owns an airline pilot training college in Adelaide which has been successfully operating since 1982. The group plans to duplicate its operations in Maryborough, Queensland, in the heart of what is becoming a major regional aviation hub for the state.

In the manufacturing sector some examples are Transpacific Industries. Transpacific is Australia's leading provider of integrated total waste management solutions, specialising in solid, liquid and hazardous waste. In September 2007 Transpacific opened its new Bundaberg facility bringing 136 new jobs to the region.

An example from the financial services sector is Castle Harlan Australian Mezzanine Partners known as CHAMP. In 2007-08 CHAMP was attracted to open an office in Queensland. CHAMP is a respected venture capital and private equity firm with offices in New York and Sydney and manages a billion-dollar fund investing in start-up companies through to large family businesses. CHAMP's first investment in 2008 was a reported \$320 million investment in Golding Contractors Pty Ltd, an engineering contracting firm servicing the mining sector, enabling the founder to retire and the company to have capital for future expansion plans.

There are also a range of important companies that have moved their head offices to Queensland. In the last 12 months alone the list includes Sandvik Mining and Construction, Harmony Gold Mining Co. Ltd, and Vale—formerly called CVRD which had been based in Brazil. They have established their global coal head office in Brisbane. Another example is Komatsu which has moved its Australian mining head office from Sydney to Brisbane, the Beacon IT Group and Scott Wilson engineering.

Mrs REILLY: That is very exciting to hear. Adverse weather events in Queensland earlier this year had a negative effect on many businesses. Can you advise what the department has done or is doing to help these businesses get back on track?

Ms BOYLE: 'Adverse weather events'—it does not sound like that is so damaging, but it was hugely damaging for businesses. Gold Coast tourism businesses took a hit in their peak season because of a lack of visitors as a consequence of even the Gold Coast's beaches not being so spectacularly attractive in the weather. But particularly around Mackay and the coast along there with the flooding and inundation events small business took a very bad hit indeed.

These unexpected disaster events took the business community by surprise. As well as the impacts from water inundation and road and rail closures there was damage to premises and stock, loss of income, increasing debt levels, market decline and potential or actual loss of labour force. Our department provided one-on-one consultation sessions with professional experts for eligible business owners and operators directly impacted by those events. A number of businesses were assisted to manage their way through the immediate crisis and develop recovery plans to improve their long-term viability. So we worked with those businesses to get them out of crisis, the hole that they were in. We were always mindful of their long-term viability and making sure that they were going to be better placed in future years.

The business owners have advised the department that they experienced immediate, positive results as a result of this free access to experts. The expertise complemented government financial assistance under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements. This was administered by the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority.

Officers of my department referred 30 small businesses in Emerald, 13 in Charleville and 40 in Mackay to QRAA as applicants for assistance. This highlights the diverse nature of the assistance we provide to business. When things are tough there is this type of expert assistance right through to major grants to take advantage of new opportunities.

Furthermore, now that immediate crisis is over our assistance has continued. We will go on working with business and industry to make sure that they build the kind of viability they need for the future. As minister, the events did however confront me with a problem that I believe is Queensland-wide. Many small businesses do not have risk mitigation plans. They do not know what they will do if adverse weather events or other disasters hit. Many of them have not got money in the kitty or plans for getting through the hard times. So I am pleased to announce that my department is considering more widely how we can provide small business in Queensland with the kind of training needed in planning for risk management in future events.

Ms GRACE: Another important area I am interested in is food. Could the minister provide an overview of how her portfolio has assisted in growing existing and developing new opportunities for potential food processing operations in Queensland?

Ms BOYLE: There are huge opportunities for Queenslanders in food processing and huge benefits for Queenslanders through the export of such products interstate and overseas. A lot of people would not be aware just how important the food processing industry is not just within Queensland but as an export sector.

In fact, next month I plan to launch the Queensland Processed Food Sector Action Plan which was developed in conjunction with industry and outlines a number of initiatives to develop Queensland as a processed food hub. The plan includes a skills formation strategy and development of a marine aquaculture policy to support the sector's growth and sustainability by establishing a consistent whole-of-government policy for aquaculture planning in Queensland. It will assist industry to improve competitiveness, develop brands, further value-add, improve packaging and labelling and seek new markets through a range of seminars, workshops, trade shows, case studies and advice.

It will develop industry networks in key food processing regions such as the Darling Downs and in Cairns and north Queensland, with a big focus on the Atherton Tableland. It will particularly assist a lot of growers and industries in Wide Bay-Burnett and in the Burdekin. We will produce an industry-specific eco-efficiency tool kit. This will help food companies reduce water and electricity usage and waste production as well as market themselves as truly green businesses. The tool kit will contain such things as case studies of companies that have made savings and fact sheets that will give practical examples on how to reduce waste. Also, the Queensland Food Industry Advisory Council was formed in 2007 and reports to me and to the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries. Quarterly meetings and subgroups address key issues such as skills and training, market intelligence, quality assurance and regional development opportunities.

Another important area of our work in this is to work with industry to attract international conferences to Queensland. Sponsorships have been provided for forthcoming events such as the 2008 Australasian Aquaculture Conference, the Food Innovation: Emerging Science, Technologies and Applications Conference 2008, Beef Australia 2009 and 2009 Australian Institute of Food Science and Technology Conference. By bringing experts from around Australia and the world together in these world-class events, Queensland producers get the opportunity to pick up new and innovative ideas and also to showcase the world-class food processing that we already undertake in the state of Queensland.

Ms GRACE: Smells good!

Ms BOYLE: Some samples would have assisted the committee, I dare say.

CHAIR: If samples would have assisted the last question, I hope they assist this one. Minister, I want to talk to you about the wine industry which is close to all of our hearts and stomachs. In reference to the Wine Industry Development Strategy, could you highlight some of the key actions taken this year under this strategy and inform the committee of the growth of the wine industry?

Ms BOYLE: I am pleased to do so. I could not with a straight face tell you it is an arduous job being the minister for wine industry development.

CHAIR: But somebody has got to do it!

Ms BOYLE: I have been pleased to take up that position and I have to pay compliments to the opposition, because it has worked closely with the government. This is a matter on which we have been very much jointly agreed. In fact, the opposition spokesperson has had photos taken of where he has been personally squashing the grapes, such a strong supporter is he of the industry. I must confess that wine industry development has done well to date, but there is more work still to be done. There are now 194 wine producers and wine merchants operating across Queensland's 10 wine regions, spreading from the southern Granite Belt to northern Queensland's fruit wine industry. Since the release of the government's wine strategy in 2004 when there were 145 wine producers in the state, the wine industry has grown by 33 per cent, making Queensland the fastest growing wine state in Australia. The total

vineyard area under cultivation is more than 1,500 hectares which produced approximately 4,500 tonnes of wine grapes during the 2007 vintage. This is extraordinary when compared to the 600 tonnes produced in 1999. Industry expansion and wine quality improvements have resulted in Queensland wines appearing more commonly in restaurants and bottle shops locally, nationally and internationally.

During the past year the department has successfully implemented a range of development actions, including conducting the 2007 Wine Industry Business Development Conference which focused on improving wine industry profitability and operational improvements throughout the supply chain; progressing the Wine Industry Amendment Bill 2007 which supports innovation and growth in the Queensland wine industry, and I do again thank the opposition for its support of this bill; an industry export trade mission to Korea and Japan in October 2007 that has seen an increase in business to Korea and Japan for our wine producers and a further trade mission only recently to Queensland; and revising the wine map of Queensland in April 2008 to include food manufacturers to provide comprehensive information about the state's complementary food and wine businesses. Might I say that that is one of the new directions that we are emphasising this year and will in the years to come, and that is the connection between our food businesses and our wine businesses and the opportunities in tourism for food and wine jointly. Particularly here in Brisbane and for the south-east of Queensland, the opportunities for a weekend in Brisbane and then in the surrounding areas are tremendous and likely to grow significantly in the years ahead.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. In the same vein, a three-month Queensland wine promotion commenced during Queensland Week last month. What was this promotion about and how will it benefit the Queensland wine industry?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you. The three-month promotion was a joint initiative of the Queensland Hotels Association, a huge supporter of the industry, and the Queensland Wine Industry Association and my department, the purpose of which of course was to raise the profile of Queensland wine. The promotion commenced during Queensland Week on Monday, 2 June. During Queensland Week patrons of 20 hotel restaurants across Queensland were provided with a complimentary glass of Queensland wine when they purchased a lunchtime meal. This promotion provided an ideal opportunity for Queenslanders to try some of the state's best wine at their favourite local hotel or bistro.

Throughout the three-month promotion a range of other promotional activities have also been organised, including winemaker dinners, wine tastings in participating hotel bottle shops, and a competition to win a trip for two on Queensland Rail's Traveltrain to Cairns. Queensland has a growing list of award-winning wines. In fact, it is great to see many of them are now available at our leading hotels and restaurants as a result of this promotion. The evolution of Queensland's wine industry over the past decade is worth showcasing during Queensland Week, as this is the time to showcase our people, places and achievements as well as the great diversity our state has to offer. The Queensland Hotels Association is to be congratulated on its initiative to highlight Queensland wines in many of its hotel restaurants across Queensland during this promotion, and I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for its partnership in the program.

It is still so, unfortunately, that there are some Queenslanders and others elsewhere I am sure who have some doubt as to whether Queensland wines can make the grade. That is a prejudice of the past, maybe for some even an experience from when the industry was still in a fledgling stage and where they were not impressed. I say to all Queenslanders that it is time to put aside that prejudice from the past and give Queensland wines a fair go. I would say to them that you will be hugely surprised by the diversity and the excellence—the award-winning excellence—of so many Queensland wines. By growers, wholesalers, retailers and the government working together in these partnerships, we have an important avenue to grow the industry and that industry is going from strength to strength right across the state of Queensland. I will take a moment to recognise the importance, too, of the fruit wine industry. Fruit wines may not be so widely appreciated by Australians but are particularly appreciated by many of our international visitors and taken home to their countries as gifts.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister, for that very comprehensive answer. I call the member for Burnett.

Mr MESSENGER: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Just commenting on the fruit wine industry, Minister, the lychee port from Cairns got me through last winter! Minister, I am very concerned—and I do not want to sound nitpicky—that a significant proportion of your department's capital expenditure in the Capital Statement on page 135 is not, firstly, allocated to a specific statistical division and, secondly, it is loosely and broadly categorised. For example, you have computer equipment and various budgets worth \$78,000, other acquisitions of property and plant worth \$517,000 and other various capital grants worth \$342,000, and of course we have the Queensland ethanol conversion program there. It is quite sloppy bookmaking which hinders, I believe, public scrutiny and lowers basic standards of parliamentary accountability. Are you able to provide details of government expenditure of over \$1.3 million of equipment and initiatives? When you take out the two big spends, that \$1.3 million accounts for the majority of the capital expenditure of the budget.

Ms BOYLE: That is a very heavy accusation indeed. Director-General, would you like to address the breakdown of the department's budget, particularly in terms of some of those figures that were mentioned in the question by the honourable member?

Mr McCarthy: We have already discussed, I believe, the Ecosciences Precinct at Boggo Road which is obviously the largest capital item mentioned in the financial statements. I believe I have also explained the fact that some of that expenditure had been delayed by about six months in terms of the planning approvals that were required to get that project underway. The other capital items that are largely mentioned there are actually involved in the ethanol conversion program which was a program whereby we subsidised fuel distributors and retailers for the cost of introducing blending facilities in the case of distributors and also in terms of storage and the costs associated with setting up retail outlets for E10. Typically with regard to a lot of these programs, to get the momentum and to get the money out the door takes a little time. So what we have seen is an establishment of that program and I anticipate that over the next few months we will be expending quite a lot of activity in terms of money paid on that.

In terms of the other capital grants, they are largely tied up with two schemes. One is an Indigenous Business Development Grant Scheme which is a scheme that is specifically tailored towards the provision of grants to Indigenous businesses, particularly within Indigenous communities, and there have been some delays in terms of getting those contracts underway. They principally apply to three projects. One is in Hope Vale which is the provision of funding for the purchase of a butchery and shop fit-out. One is a kitchen construction for the Echidna Magic Cafe. The other one is for an upgrade of a budget lodge which is in the Umagico area.

Ms BOYLE: May we have further time please?

Mr MESSENGER: Yes.

Mr McCarthy: The final one is to do with a Regional Business Development Scheme which is the purchasing and commissioning of a four kilowatt laser cutter which has taken a little bit of time to, firstly, get delivered and, secondly, to have it established and set up properly. In terms of computer equipment and other plant and equipment, they are basically the accumulation of a number of small capital purchases. Frankly, to itemise each of those things given that we are not big capital users—they mainly refer to individual personal computers themselves and some upgrade of our computer equipment—would be difficult and probably not terribly useful.

Mr MESSENGER: Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. The time allocated for the consideration of the estimates for the Minister for Tourism, Regional Development and Industry has expired. I thank the minister and the portfolio officers for their attendance. 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. The next portfolio to be examined relates to the Minister for Communities, Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Seniors and Youth. The hearing will resume at 4.00 pm.

Ms BOYLE: May I make a short closing remark to thank all of those associated with estimates. It has been conducted with great style and precision today. Thank you to all members of the committee. I want to give my recognition particularly to the opposition spokesperson, who has clearly done his job and presented us with a couple of difficult questions. My thanks to the department not only for its information but its very beneficial work which I have been pleased to showcase today.

Mrs STUCKEY: Minister, I want to thank you and your staff on behalf of non-government members and also want to thank opposition staffer James Larson.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Proceedings suspended from 3.49 pm to 4.01 pm

**ESTIMATES COMMITTEE D—COMMUNITIES, DISABILITY SERVICES,
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PARTNERSHIPS,
MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS, SENIORS AND YOUTH**

In Attendance

Hon. LH Nelson-Carr, Minister for Communities, Disability Services, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Multicultural Affairs, Seniors and Youth

Mr L Norris, Senior Policy Adviser

Department of Communities

Ms L Apelt, Director-General

Ms S van Schagen, Assistant Director-General, Corporate Performance and Portfolio Services

Ms R Brown, General Manager, Strategic Resource Management, Corporate Performance and Portfolio Services

Disability Services Queensland

Ms L Apelt, Director-General

Ms S van Schagen, Assistant Director-General, Corporate Performance and Portfolio Services

Ms R Brown, General Manager, Strategic Resource Management, Corporate Performance and Portfolio Services

CHAIR: The hearings of Estimates Committee D are now resumed. I welcome the Minister for Communities, Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Seniors and Youth, the 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 time limits. An extension of time will be given with the consent of the questioner. The standing orders require that at least half the time is allocated to non-government members. I ask departmental witnesses to identify themselves before they answer a question so that Hansard may 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 that regard, I remind members of the public that in accordance with standing order 206 strangers—that is, the public—may be admitted or excluded from the hearing at the pleasure of the committee. I also remind members, witnesses and members of the public that no food or drink is permitted to be consumed in the Legislative Council chamber. I ask that all mobile phones and pagers be switched off.

I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Communities, Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Seniors and Youth to be open for examination. The committee will begin by examining estimates for the Department of Communities. The question before the chair is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, would you like to make a brief introductory statement or do you wish to go direct to questioning? If you wish to make a statement, I remind you that the statement must be limited to five minutes under the standing orders.

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you and, yes, I would like to make a statement and good afternoon everyone. First of all, I would like to take the opportunity to recognise all members of the committee and to thank them for their time today. I am really proud of the work being undertaken by the diverse portfolio that I will not reel off again as you have been given it twice. The ministry has the longest title in the government and it comes with a great deal of responsibility to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable people in our society are met.

The Bligh government's commitment to human services was again evident in this year's Department of Communities budget, with an increase of \$84 million, or 14 per cent. DSQ's budget has also increased by \$152.8 million—again over 14 per cent—proving our commitment to meeting the growing needs of our community. Much of this funding is about enhancing services and delivering the best possible outcomes for those who need it the most, and this includes the work being undertaken by DSQ following the introduction of the Investing in Positive Futures initiative, which is world's best practice and attracting international attention.

For example, the new centre of excellence being established in Ipswich at a cost of \$15 million over four years will provide research and training to ultimately give people with severe disabilities and challenging behaviours a much better quality of life. These reforms complement the Growing Stronger initiative—a commitment of \$52 million over four years—and will result in a fairer, more sustainable specialist disability services system that can deliver responsive quality services in a transparent manner and ensure that funding is used effectively.

Another important area of the portfolio is juvenile justice. To help minimise the number of young people coming into contact with the system, the Department of Communities is committed to intervening early. We are injecting \$4.1 million over four years to implement the Young Offender Community Response Service and Bail Support Service in far-north Queensland. This service targets high-risk young people and their families to address the causes of crime and reduce the risk of young people entering the youth justice system.

We are also injecting an extra \$11.4 million in capital funding to acquire land and undertake master planning to expand youth detention bed capacity. The business case is strongly focused on extending Cleveland in Townsville and is looking at a best practice model of care for the new 48-bed capacity. It is recognised that early support for vulnerable people, including children and youth, is highly effective in preventing or reducing the level and nature of more intrusive interventions at later stages. Prevention and early intervention services are an essential part of the Department of Communities' core business aimed at assisting Queensland children and families. An example is the Best Start \$54 million election commitment, which includes an extensive initiative to co-locate early childhood education and care on all new school sites, expanding the delivery of the parenting program, a reading to children program, and health and wellbeing programs.

On top of that, Queensland is leading the way with our Early Years Strategy. Our four new Early Years centres will have a strong focus on reducing stress, providing parenting advice and a range of resources for parents with growing children and, importantly, offering an outlet for friendship. The new centres will be based at Nerang and Caboolture, Browns Plains and Cairns by 2010 at a cost \$32 million over four years. An amount of \$6.42 million is allocated in this year's budget.

Today, I am pleased to announce an expansion into north Queensland of the highly successful treatment program for young people found guilty of sexual offences. Delivered by the Griffith Youth Forensic Service out of Griffith University, this specialist program had 133 referrals between January 2004 and September 2007. Increasing its funding from \$505,368 to \$725,368 this year will allow services to be expanded into north Queensland. Looking to the next horizon and planning for the future of Queensland, I am pleased to also announce the statewide rollout of our new Carer Business Discount Card. This new service, which will provide average discounts of between five per cent and 10 per cent, will be accessed by some 87,000 eligible carers.

Finally, I would also like to introduce the staff at the table. With me is my director-general, Linda Apelt; Sandra van Schagen, the Assistant Director-General; Ruth Brown, General Manager, Strategic Resource Management; and Lee Norris, my Senior Policy Adviser. Thank you very much.

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

Mrs MENKENS: Thank you, and may I wish you all a good afternoon and evening, as I think it is going to become. I refer to page 1-239 of the Service Delivery Statement, which states that \$2.4 million recurring plus \$4.5 million capital is committed to meet the legislative requirements, including workplace health and safety standards, in the department's community assets. Will the minister detail what this work includes, which buildings the funding will apply to and why the assets were allowed to be in breach of legislative requirements?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you for the question and for your interest in the government's investment into capital works programs. In 2008-09 the Department of Communities' total capital budget is \$113 million. This investment will provide the infrastructure that is much needed to support the delivery of a range of community based services through the development, replacement or the upgrade of property, plant and equipment; the development, enhancement or replacement of information technology systems; and the provision of capital grants to the non-government sector.

Under the property, plant and equipment program, the department will manage the development and completion of major capital projects, with a total budgeted investment of \$85 million. Of this, \$75 million relates specifically to the development, enhancement or replacement of property. This work includes a significant construction program that will provide new and upgraded premises to support the Early Years Strategy. It will also support the juvenile justice and youth strategies, the multitenant centre initiative and the neighbourhood centre program. The provision of new and upgraded facilities to support the delivery of services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians is also included, as is the provision of new and refurbished office accommodation to support the delivery of services for the community. The delivery of this specialised infrastructure is complex and time consuming and requires detailed planning from the outset to ensure that the finished product will both meet client and service delivery needs.

Some of the challenges that the department faces when undertaking these types of specialised development include finding and acquiring the appropriate land; getting the necessary planning and development approvals; developing the detailed design specifications and construction documentation; tendering for and securing the builders who are skilled in developing these types of specialised buildings, particularly in a tight construction market; and also completing construction phases within scheduled time frames while responding to lengthy unfavourable weather conditions—which we certainly have in Queensland—building and supply delays and a lack of available skilled labour. While the Department of Communities has encountered these difficulties in a number of projects, the department has also successfully completed and delivered a number of key projects.

The key focus of the expenditure mentioned relates specifically to the two youth detention centres and to the Children's Court. Maintenance of properties is cyclical. Modern health and safety standards have to be adhered to and are obviously essential.

Mrs MENKENS: I refer to page 1-240 of the Service Delivery Statement. A highlight of 2007-08 is listed as the implementation of the department's redress scheme to acknowledge the impact of abuse of children in state institutions. Will the minister provide an itemised breakdown of how much has been expended through this scheme and when the second part of these payments will be made?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you for the question. I have to say that I am extremely proud of the redress scheme and I know that you are particularly interested in this yourself. We established this to provide those ex gratia payments to people who had experienced abuse or neglect as children in Queensland institutions, which was investigated and instigated by the Forde inquiry. The inquiry encompassed 159 institutions, including orphanages and family group homes. There were industrial schools and detention centres which operated between 1911 and 1999.

In response to concerns from Indigenous Queenslanders about the possible exclusion of dormitories on Aboriginal settlements, the government has approved the dormitories, which were part of an industrial school listed in the terms of reference of the Forde inquiry. They are eligible institutions for the purposes of the redress scheme. So this means that former child residents of dormitories on the settlements of Cherbourg, Barambah, Palm Island, Taroom, Woorabinda, Deebing Creek, Purga, Yarrabah and Mapoon are eligible to apply. More than 6,655 applications were received by 30 June of this year and of these approximately 53 per cent were from people who identify as Indigenous, including those who indicate placement in a dormitory. More than 1,280 offers of a level one payment of \$7,000 have been made to eligible applicants. In addition, nine payments of up to \$5,000 in funeral assistance have been made to family members of eligible applicants who passed away before accepting a payment offer.

In response to community requests, the scheme's closing date for applications has been extended by three months to 30 September of this year. To minimise the impact of the new closing date on existing applicants, I can say that from mid August 2008 processing and assessment of level one and level two applications will occur simultaneously. A panel of experts will be established—and I have just signed off on those this week—in late July to establish criteria for the assessment of applications for those level two payments. The level two payment will be up to \$33,000 and, of course, payment will vary depending on the severity of harm that has been suffered by the applicants. It is not expected that all level one applicants who apply for level two will receive payment, but based on current figures it is estimated that more than 4,000 people will seek consideration for level two. To manage this large volume of work assessments will be undertaken progressively as completed level one applications are processed.

Mrs MENKENS: I refer to page 1-247 of the SDS which deals with compliance and licensing of child-care centres. Would the minister outline whether a child-care centre is compliant if it charges its usual fees for child care on a public holiday despite the fact that the child is not physically in attendance on that day? If so, what is the justification for this, as no other service is allowed to charge for services not provided?

Ms NELSON-CARR: What I usually do with questions is to write down as much as I can because when I start answering them—and I am good at this with you, Rob, too—I forget where I started. Compliance and licensing of child-care centres is something that I am very, very interested in. I think you are really asking for an opinion of law which I obviously cannot give you.

Mrs MENKENS: The question is that children are charged on days that they are not there. If it is a public holiday they are still charged for it even though they are not able to go there and often parents would actually like to have them there.

Ms NELSON-CARR: We licence them and we obviously register them and they have to comply with the regulations and the rules, but payment actually comes under Commonwealth legislation. I am unable to comment further on that.

Mrs MENKENS: Thank you, minister. Also on child-care compliance, 1-247 of the Service Delivery Statement deals with the compliance. Will the minister provide a list of all child-care centres that have been given compliance notices for breaches in the last three years, especially in light of the fact that the confidentiality provisions of the Child Care Act 2002 division 3 section 167 apply not to child-care centres but to confidential information about individuals?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you for the question. You would know that this is subject to a review of the act at the moment. If you have any problems with the act as it stands it is probably a good idea to get your submission in. I take licensing and regulating of child-care centres very seriously. Now that we have more families than ever working we really do have to continue to ensure that parents have peace of mind when they are dropping their children off at day care. Now that I have entered into the grandparenting regime I really am part of that as well.

We have allocated \$2.4 million to enhance the capacity of the sector to meet those licensing standards. I will make sure that those compliance activities and monitoring are carried out effectively. We have employed 67.1 full-time equivalent authorised child-care resource officers throughout the state and as at June there were 2,489 licensed child-care services throughout Queensland. I know that the vast majority of these services do provide quality care for our children. The department's compliance monitoring is very extensive and very comprehensive.

The focus of the visits to monitor the child-care services against the standards specified reveal a very high level of compliance. They show that the current monitoring and compliance regime is working very well. We did take some very strong legal advice on this, but there are obviously much stronger measures available for serious breaches. For instance, the department can issue a licensee with a notice to suspend or revoke their licence if there is a risk of harm to the children or if the building or the facilities are no longer suitable for the provision of child care. In such cases section 49 of the act requires the licensee of the centre to inform the parents of the suspension or the revocation and to display a notice at the child-care centre. I think that is the critical point. In 2007-08 it was necessary to issue one suspension notice under the provisions of the Child Care Act. The confidentiality provisions in the Child Care Act 2002 prohibit the intentional disclosure of information about a person's affairs, which is what you are talking about. When I say we took legal advice on this, what they have told us so far is that it is contrary to the assertion in the question so the confidentiality provisions apply to individuals and corporations.

Mrs MENKENS: In respect of compliance, is a child-care centre that is charging on a public holiday complying?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Because we do not determine the wages that are set by child-care centre licensees, we do not determine that. We licence and we regulate.

Mrs MENKENS: I suppose it is the charges rather than the wages, is it not?

Ms NELSON-CARR: That is not our core business. We want to keep these child-care centres safe for children, that is the bottom line, and to make sure that the rules are not being broken.

Mrs MENKENS: Still on child care to a certain extent, in your response to question on notice No. 2, you have discussed expenditure on the purchase of former preschool sites and a specific one at Ayr. What are your plans for this centre at Ayr that you have purchased, what are the timelines and what is the proposed delivery outcome?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you for the question. Obviously you have got a great deal of interest in this particular site.

Mrs MENKENS: Absolutely.

Ms NELSON-CARR: As have I, although it is much closer to home for you. That particular site in Ayr will be turned into an Early Years Centre, which is something that is in its infancy and we are very proud of. Early Years is the new way of really looking at and dealing with early intervention and prevention. This centre in Ayr will be something that will really look after littlies and their families. The initiative for early childhood education and care services which I am talking about is exactly that: it is about giving children and families a really good start. We are calling it the Best Start initiative. I am pleased to give you a bit of an update on the opportunity provided by the purchase of preschool sites across the state. The Best Start election commitment, which is \$20 million, includes \$14.3 million to refurbish six former preschools. Five of the six former preschools were purchased during 2006-07, with the sixth site purchased in February of this year. That has cost \$2.6 million. In 2007-08 \$1.7 million was expended on the purchase of the Ayr site as well as an additional two preschool sites for use by the Creche and Kindergarten Association at Rockhampton and Mackay. The ones in Mackay and Rockhampton have commenced. Planning and consultation for refurbishment of the Nanango, Beaudesert, Beenleigh, Toowoomba North, and Ayr sites has started. Funds of \$10.52 million for refurbishment of the remaining sites will probably be expended by 2008 to 2010. The Ayr Early Years Centre is, as I said, in the design and development phase and scheduled completion should be at the end of 2009.

Mrs MENKENS: On that same issue, would an Early Years Centre mirror similar child-care centres that are already there? Will it be run by the government or will it be different to the current child-care model?

Ms NELSON-CARR: It will be very different in that we will be looking at the whole child not just the education of the child. Early Years is about, as I said, early intervention and prevention. It is so that we can get in nice and early when children are little and young so that we can guide both the child and their parent, carer or guardian through those early years to prevent some of the difficulties that might arise later. The Creche and Kindergarten Association has expressed an interest in this and the community will be consulted on the future model, whatever that might be, for operation. I think that probably answers your question.

Mrs MENKENS: Thank you, minister. In relation to capital works, can the minister list all minor and other capital works, as per page 33 of the capital statement, that were budgeted for in the 2007-08 year but have not been undertaken or completed, with the decrease in spending from \$4.679 million to \$83,000 and \$200,000 to \$109,000 respectively? Has this affected the workplace health and safety of the facilities?

Ms NELSON-CARR: I guess the short answer is yes and no. The Australian economy, as you would know, is operating at full capacity with very historically low unemployment and skills and labour shortages. I think Townsville, Ayr and all of our regional areas are suffering under those shortages. It is particularly the case throughout Queensland where we are experiencing such unprecedented growth. It is inevitable that some projects will run behind schedule and there will be a range of unavoidable factors. Some of those include the resolution of service planning, the scope of the works, environmental considerations, more recently wet weather in other parts of Queensland and land acquisition issues. I think what we have to realise is that this is very specialised infrastructure. It would be pretty naive to think that the delivery of that sort of facility, that sort of structure, will be easy and that it will be completed in one year. It is just not. Every one of them is complex and very time consuming and it will require detailed planning and monitoring right from the outset. But we have had results and they are being achieved as we speak. In 2007-08 the department's focus on early childhood education in care centres completed two major refurbishments of former preschools. Do you want me to continue answering?

Mrs MENKENS: Yes.

Ms NELSON-CARR: There was one in Walkerston and one in Rockhampton. There was a substantially completed refurbishment of another former preschool in Mackay. In addition, design works commenced on other properties in Nanango, Beenleigh and Toowoomba North and, of course, the one that was purchased in Ayr. Whilst they require this extended and extensive planning and flexibility, they are a very vital element in the Early Years strategy. I will say though in relation to the last part of your question that health and safety is not being compromised. The minor capital works that you speak about are really only about minor repairs and upgrades. I do not think I need to explain any further.

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

Ms GRACE: Good afternoon, Minister, and others present this afternoon. Minister, page 1-238 of the Department of Communities Service Delivery Statement lists prevention and early intervention as one of the department's key strategic issues. Can you outline for the committee what the department is doing in this area?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you very much for your question. It is imperative to say that the Bligh government does recognise the longer term economic and social benefits of investing in prevention and early intervention, which I have just been talking about, and I am very happy to outline some of those initiatives in this area. We did a lot of consultation in 2006-07 which was about developing an Early Years strategy for Queensland. The findings of this consultation are guiding the development of a very comprehensive and integrated Early Years service system.

The system itself prioritises early intervention across the key areas of health, early education and care and family support in a bid to give parents and carers the help they need during the all important early years, and that is from birth to eight years of age. As I mentioned in my opening statement, the Department of Communities is investing \$32 million to establish the Early Years centres. These are basically a one-stop shop providing early education and care, family support and health services in disadvantaged locations in Queensland.

The government has also invested \$54 million under the Best Start election commitment for prevention and early intervention programs. That Best Start initiative also includes co-locating education and care on or near school sites, expanding the delivery of parenting programs, a new Reading to Children program, and new health and wellbeing programs. Also, the COAG early childhood reform agenda will result in significant investment in prevention and early intervention services for Queensland children, particularly for Indigenous children from birth to three years. This agenda will result in

significant improvements in health, childhood development and educational outcomes for those Indigenous children. As the minister responsible for youth justice, my department is also implementing a number of strategies to minimise the risk of offending behaviour recurring.

Two therapeutic programs were purchased and implemented for young offenders called Aggression Replacement Therapy, ART, and Changing Habits and Reaching Targets, CHART. These programs were implemented statewide during 2007-08 and they are aimed at reducing the risk factors that contribute to the risk of offending behaviour. The department has also funded \$590,000 to establish the Young Offender Community Response Service in far-north Queensland and to expand the successful Brisbane Bail Support Service. The service in Cairns has a specific focus on delivering culturally competent services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their families to address the causes of crime. The Bligh government will continue to support prevention and early intervention services as a high priority to ensure that that appropriate support I am talking about is provided to Queensland children, young families and parents.

CHAIR: In the Department of Communities Service Delivery Statement under the heading '2007-08 Achievements', you mention that the department assisted communities to recover from the impact of flooding and equine influenza. Can you outline the role your agency plays in community recovery events and examples of how the team provides valuable services to people in times of crisis?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you very much for the question. I have to say that the staff of communities are well and truly on the front line when it comes to responding to these disasters that affect Queenslanders. Already this year the department has demonstrated time and time again its commitment and ability to mobilise teams at very short notice and can continue that service for a sustained length of time.

During this year's floods in Emerald, Charleville and Mackay the department staff worked hand in hand with organisations like Lifeline, the Australian Red Cross and St Vincent de Paul. They established one-stop shops. They distributed financial assistance. They gave emotional support. They even doorknocked to see firsthand how Queenslanders were getting extra help if they needed it, even in the beginning when they did not want to speak about it at all. So grants of up to \$160 per person and \$740 per family were made available to assist people who experienced that immediate financial hardship as a result of the floods.

Means tested financial assistance was also paid to Queenslanders to offset the cost of repairing or replacing their uninsured essential household items that were damaged by floodwaters. As at 30 June 2008, the department had provided \$6.44 million in personal hardship assistance to Queenslanders who were impacted by floods. I believe that the flood recovery effort made a significant difference in helping communities to get back on their feet. The department works really closely with other government agencies and non-government organisations such as I have said—Lifeline, the Australian Red Cross and St Vincent de Paul—to ensure individuals receive practical, financial, emotional and psychological support, which they really need to recover from such very difficult times.

In terms of the equine influenza outbreak, the Department of Communities established four one-stop shops at Morgan Park, Drayton, Hamilton and the Gold Coast to provide affected individuals access to personal support and financial assistance. The department supported 3,776 people between September 2007 and February 2008 and provided emergency assistance payments and personal support and counselling services for those suffering hardship as a result of that influenza outbreak.

Very frequently the Department of Communities staff go unnoticed and unrecognised despite the work that they do. Of course a more recent example is the land subsidence at Collingwood Park. To date departmental staff have visited more than 149 households affected by that subsidence, and a recovery centre and a hotline have been established to provide information and refer those affected to our partners for counselling and other assistance. So I am very proud of their efforts and to say that almost 300 staff have registered their interest to participate.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I think you do have a right to be very proud of the staff for the efforts they contribute in those types of events.

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, I refer to page 1-239 of the Service Delivery Statement in relation to better outcomes for Indigenous Queenslanders, particularly children and young people. Can you advise the status of the Indigenous Queenslanders Foundation, and what the role of this foundation will be in providing educational opportunities for young people?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you very much for the question. I can say that I am making it a priority to ensure that children and young people in Indigenous communities have the same opportunities as those in the rest of the state because clearly they do not have and continue not to have the same opportunities. The Indigenous Queenslanders Foundation was announced in mid-March of this year, and that is what its intention is—to fulfil that purpose. The foundation will be a public one that provides a secure and independent funding source for scholarship and bursaries for up to 140

Indigenous students every year. It will start with in the order of \$32 million in funding. That will include \$11.135 million from the former Aboriginal Welfare Fund and \$21.630 million from the remaining unspent funds from the Indigenous Wages and Savings Reparations Scheme.

I believe the foundation will give Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and families much better educational choices and better life opportunities. A board of advisers comprising Indigenous and non-Indigenous experts will be established to advise the foundation. Applications for the board of advisers did close on Monday, 2 June this year, and there were 38 real quality expressions of interest received from young people as well as people with significant legal, financial, corporate and also philanthropic expertise who are leaders in Queensland education sectors, so that was really pleasing. The foundation board will work with those philanthropic, private and educational sectors to contribute towards the costs of education, tuition, training and all related expenses. They will also work to build the capacity of other organisations to offer scholarships and other educational and vocational support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders.

The Indigenous Queenslanders Foundation is intended as a permanent but very positive legacy for the future. It will seek to attract other donations and other bequests and investments so that those funds can be increased for investment and for distribution to Indigenous Queenslanders so that it can be life-sustaining and self-sustaining. Funding for a project manager for six months to establish the foundation will be allocated from the interests that are accrued from that foundation's funds. Once established, the foundation will be supported by a secretariat. Costs for the secretariat during 2008-09 will be around \$520,000, which includes the set-up costs. Secretariat costs will also be funded out of the foundation's income, and I firmly believe that the new scholarships funds present real and significant opportunities for the youngest generation of our Indigenous Queenslanders.

Mrs REILLY: Minister, I refer to page 1-238 of the Department of Communities Service Delivery Statement, which identifies investment in effective prevention and early intervention services for domestic and family violence as a key service delivery priority. Can you detail for us how the government supports both victims and perpetrators of domestic violence and where people can go for help?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you very much for the question. This one is very dear to my heart, and your organisation on the Gold Coast is pretty much second to none. But, as you know, the effects of domestic and family violence are very far-reaching and they can and do have impacts right across generations, so I really am pleased you asked me. The Bligh government is committed to reducing the incidence of domestic and family violence in Queensland. However, as you know, the issue is complex and responsibility for action is not the sole responsibility of one agency. So ensuring the right intervention at the right time is crucial and it can only be achieved by a very well-coordinated system. The Department of Communities is working with other government agencies to develop a whole-of-government strategy that will enable that coordination of responses that I speak about.

In 2007-08 the Department of Communities spent \$14.2 million on domestic and family violence prevention and intervention, and these funds were allocated to a range of services which included regional, domestic and family violence services, counselling and court support, and support for children who witness domestic and family violence. We have the very successful fax back programs, which are obviously the referral mechanisms between local community programs and the Queensland Police Service. We have Indigenous counselling and healing services, men's perpetrator programs, which I am pleased to attest to their success, and research and community education. Of this funding \$1 million was allocated to the dvconnect statewide telephone referral counselling and support service. In addition, \$15.2 million was provided to 53 organisations under the SAAP program, which is the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, throughout Queensland to assist women and children escaping domestic and family violence.

I also affirm the Queensland government's commitment to ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities enjoy that same quality of life as other Queenslanders. In order to achieve that objective, family violence counselling services are being established in Cherbourg, Cooktown and Thursday Island. Earlier this year I was really pleased to launch Which Way—You Choose, which is a Queensland government and AFL Kickstart initiative to encourage healthy relationships among young people in 27 Indigenous communities. That is all about prevention and early intervention, which is the key area of work for us.

Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Month each May provides an opportunity for government and community services to promote the message that domestic and family violence is never acceptable. We have allocated \$65,000 to 22 organisations to run activities, projects and events, and we had a media campaign developed for the month which was aimed at challenging attitudes that perpetuate violence in relationships.

Mrs REILLY: Thank you, Minister. I was very recently discussing a new partnership service on the Gold Coast that you might be aware of and perhaps at some point I will invite you to come and have a look at that. It is with the Animal Welfare League, which protects and looks after women who do not want to leave their pets at home when they escape violence. It is something that we often do not think

about. But women sometimes do not leave situations because they are afraid of retaliation against their dog or cat and they actually need somewhere safe to put them, so the Animal Welfare League provide this partnership service.

Ms NELSON-CARR: I would be happy to come down. I could understand that. Women are nurturers. They look after the helpless and those that are vulnerable and that includes animals.

Mrs REILLY: That is right. On a different note, I want to turn to page 1-239 of the Service Delivery Statements which is about the department's intentions to raise the profile of multiculturalism in Queensland. How does the department ensure that multiculturalism is promoted and celebrated around the state, particularly in regional areas?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you for the question. Queensland is a really dynamic and very diverse community with lots of cultures—including your different culture—lots of different languages and lots of religions. The Queensland government's multicultural policy commits to building a cohesive, united, harmonious state that accepts, respects and celebrates cultural diversity. We do this by pursuing a range of strategies that impact both on government agencies and on the community to ensure the values and benefits of multiculturalism are promoted throughout Queensland.

We have programs such as the Local Area Multicultural Partnership program, which is known as LAMP by everybody, which provides a sustainable approach to improving community relations and celebrating diversity at that local level. LAMP, which is in its 10th year of funding by the state government, does this by supporting 14 local councils and the Local Government Association of Queensland to ensure that every part of their core business is accessible and inclusive. This is also in service delivery, human resources, planning, community development and governance. Similarly, the Multicultural Community Worker Program, which is a partnership between the Queensland government and community organisations, assists in linking people from ethnic communities to services and also undertakes advocacy and promotes multiculturalism.

Multicultural Affairs Queensland administers the annual \$3.4 million Multicultural Assistance Program, part of which supports by way of grants the multicultural festivals and programs throughout Queensland. Some examples of those include the Mount Isa Multicultural Festival, the Townsville Cultural Fest, the Paniyiri Greek Festival in Brisbane, the Australian-Italian Festival in Ingham, which I went to earlier this year, the Central Queensland Multicultural Festival and the Woodford Folk Festival. In 2008, 44 regional organisations have been funded under this program for projects, festivals and events that promote an understanding of multiculturalism and so reduce prejudice and foster community participation.

We have also invested \$700,000 in the Premier's Multicultural Photographic Awards, and the highly successful Queensland Multicultural Festival, now in its fifth year, attracts more than 45,000 people each time it is held. The Premier's Multicultural Photographic Awards are an opportunity for professional and amateur photographers to demonstrate through artistic use of the camera lens what multiculturalism means to them. Last year, more than 3,250 members of the public voted for their favourite photograph in the people's choice award.

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

Mr MESSENGER: Minister, I refer you to page 1-241 of the SDS. I know that you are aware of the gap in life outcomes and opportunities which faces Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders. I also draw your attention to a HIV crisis which is now affecting the people of PNG's western provinces and consequently now threatens the people of the Torres Strait Islands and further threatens to widen the gap in life outcomes. As you are aware, many people of the PNG western provinces regularly travel five kilometres by small boat for medical treatment, to trade and also to socialise with the people on the outer islands of the Torres Strait. Minister, are you aware of the serious concerns that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and professional healthcare workers have regarding the HIV threat to their community? Can you detail the programs you have in place now to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders fight HIV?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you for the question. First of all, am I aware of the problems that Papua New Guinea faces with regard to HIV? Of course I am. It is one of those terrible, terrible things that has occurred throughout the world—firstly in Africa and the Western world and now spreading throughout our side of the world. So, yes, I am aware of your serious concerns and obviously I am concerned as well, but I think this is a matter for the Minister for Health as far as the programs to look after these people go.

We do not have any real health programs as such in my department. We are the Department of Communities incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships so, whilst I believe in partnerships, which is very much the way this government is working—we get much more effective outcomes by working in partnership with other government departments—a specific HIV prevention program or a HIV program specific to PNG is not part of my core business.

I do know that COAG is also very aware of this significant problem and is putting together a national strategy for closing the gap that you talk about in health outcomes. We do know that, even if we were to put HIV aside, the gap in relation to health outcomes between the rest of Queensland and the rest of Australia compared to Indigenous Australians is very significant. The government nationally and of course all of the states that have large Indigenous populations really need to work strategically and collaboratively to close that very significant gap. I would like to know that those young people and babies living in Townsville, where we have a very large percentage of Indigenous people, will have the same advantages that my own children and grandchildren have. Unfortunately, that is not the case. As far as HIV-specific answers are concerned, I direct you to the health minister.

Mr MESSENGER: Thank you. Minister, my reference is to the Capital Statement at pages 33 and 31. In the 2007-08 Capital Statement, on page 29, your government said that it would spend \$1,107,000 on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander diversionary centres and fit-outs. According to page 33 of the Capital Statement of 2008-09, the expenditure to date is only \$114,000, which means that your department in the last year has underspent by a massive \$993,000 and has failed to deliver 90 per cent of the promised capital expenditure on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander diversionary centres and fit-outs. Will you detail for this committee the aspects of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander diversionary centres and fit-outs that are behind schedule, and will you honour your promise to foster strong communities where all people are safe, valued and empowered?

Ms NELSON-CARR: I was hoping that one of you would ask this question. Obviously, it is critical if we are going to address this very serious problem of alcoholism and alcohol related incidents in Indigenous communities, and I am pleased that you are interested in this very serious problem. In July 2006, 11 diversionary services were transferred to my department—the Department of Communities—and work has progressed on these particular facilities to enhance and support them. Diversion services form part of a service response to the royal commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody and they divert Indigenous Queenslanders from the criminal justice system and link people to the appropriate support, which is what the diversionary program is all about.

The Department of Communities developed new funding agreements with diversionary services, and the department also increased funding to these services to the tune of \$2.7 million. In addition, the department worked with the services to plan sector development activities. These activities, which will commence during 2008-09, will improve the capacity that you are talking about, which is providing quality, consistent and sustainable services.

Total funding of \$5.7 million was provided to diversionary services in 2007-08 and that was for five diversionary centres, seven cell visitor services and one community patrol. Diversionary centres, which are an alternative to police custody, provide a safe place for intoxicated people to sober up, and of course cell visitors provide support to Indigenous people who are in police custody. Their primary focus is to reduce the incidence of suicide or self-harm. As far as community patrols go, they provide outreach, transport and referral services to intoxicated and homeless people who are in public places. They actually play a very key role in linking people to services, they provide information about the services for people who are on the streets and they find out what is happening on the streets that are identified as hot spots.

In 2008-09, the Department of Communities will establish a new diversionary centre on Palm Island and this service will be auspiced by the Palm Island Community Co. The service will ensure the people of Palm Island have a safe place in which to sober up and access support and referral services. The fit-outs of those diversionary centres which you speak about are targeting air-conditioning systems. They are about upgrading those air-conditioning systems and they are due for completion next month—in August of this year.

Mrs MENKENS: The reference is SDS starting at page 1-238. There are many more regulations in terms of compliance being placed on community groups. Will the minister detail all the imposts on community organisations—including areas such as multicultural organisations, seniors groups et cetera—in terms of compliance for holding public events and the effect this is having on the viability of some of those organisations?

Ms NELSON-CARR: I would have to agree with you that regulations can appear to be cumbersome and often they can appear to be burdensome, but even community groups have to comply with regulations. We are about the safety and quality of those facilities and services. Because we are talking about the distribution of public moneys—taxpayers' dollars—we have to be absolutely certain of their viability; we have to be absolutely sure that they are going to provide whatever it might be, including quality services.

We do not aim to close any of these services down or anything like that. We are streamlining compliance so that people have time in which to come on line. The new laws were developed as part of the Strengthening Non-Government Organisations strategy, and really all of these organisations have to learn to work together to have this shared objective—that is, to build Queensland communities and provide those services so that the community can access them.

Mrs MENKENS: It is a huge cost on those small organisations.

Ms NELSON-CARR: Yes, it is, but when it comes to the safety of those people who are going to use them we have to really consider that in its entirety. You would realise that the community has an expectation about the quality, safety and accountability of services that are provided with public funds. It is just an expectation. The new act meets these expectations and also helps to safeguard clients' rights by equipping the department with options to investigate and remedy some of those serious concerns.

The Department of Communities and that non-profit community services sector, which is represented by the Community Services Futures Forum, are jointly leading the development at the moment of what we are calling a compact, which is an agreement that will describe the unique nature of the relationship between the government and the not-for-profit human services sector. They will set out common visions, common goals, principles and commitments that will guide how that sector has to work.

CHAIR: The committee will now have a short break.

Proceedings suspended from 4.59 pm to 5.12 pm

CHAIR: The hearing of Estimates Committee D is now resumed. The question before the committee is that the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Communities, Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Seniors and Youth be agreed to.

Mrs MENKENS: I refer to the Capital Statement pages 33 and 34 and I also refer to a comment that the minister made earlier where she said it is naive to think delivery will be in one year. A budget is in one year. It is for one year. Could I ask what the total underspend is for this budget? Why budget for the year if it is 'naive' to expect the projects to be finished?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you for the question. I would have to say that that was said, with all due respect, but in any capital infrastructure there is always going to be underspends because of all of those factors of which I have spoken this morning.

Mrs MENKENS: But you have underspent \$32.634 million out of \$50 million.

Ms NELSON-CARR: It is not unusual. We are talking about Queensland's most vulnerable members of our society, and those individuals require very flexible services and less than standardised structures. If we are going to have to defer, it is quite usual. But the action deferrals of both an operating and a capital nature with Queensland Treasury prior to producing the financial tables for the department's budget have been included in the Service Delivery Statements.

I will just read you some of the figures here. The department's operating budget was \$596.91 million. Operating deferrals from 2007-08 to 2008-09 and the outyears totalled \$44.998 million of which \$41.624 million was deferred to 2008-09. An amount of \$3.374 million was deferred to 2009-10 and the majority of the department's operating deferrals have arisen from within the grants program. The grants program for the Department of Communities in 2007-08 was \$262.91 million with \$29.95 million requiring deferral. The need to defer the grant funding, as I said, generally arises because of the necessity to have lead times that are required by non-government service providers. They have to recruit staff, they have to commence programs once funding has been approved—

Mrs MENKENS: They are all difficult areas.

Ms NELSON-CARR:—and deferred grant funds are paid once the programs commence, frequently in the early part of the following financial year.

The majority of the department's capital deferrals relate to major property construction programs. The total capital budget for the Department of Communities was \$92.29 million in 2007-08. Of this, \$78.2 million related to property, plant and equipment and \$14.05 million related to other capital, predominantly IT systems. So \$61.9 million in capital funding is required to defer in 2008-09 and outyears. That is for major capital projects. I will have to check *Hansard* as to the context that you are quoting. I think I actually referred to 'unavoidable delays'.

Mrs MENKENS: Thank you. I refer to page 1-243 of the Service Delivery Statements, which lists the decreases in staffing in the areas of communities and individuals, 319 in 2007-08 instead of the budgeted 438, and young people, 994 down from the budgeted 1,048. Can the minister detail why these staff numbers have decreased and why this year's budget allows for 321 and 1,012 full-time equivalents respectively?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you for the question. There is a very simple explanation for this. I might hand it over to the director-general who knows way more about staffing than I do. I think you will find that it is about moving many people into the one corporate area.

Ms Apelt: The decrease of 50 between the 2007-08 budget and the 2007-08 estimated actual primarily relates to staff transferring out of the department due to a machinery of government Blueprint for the Bush initiative. The decrease of 15 between the 2007-08 budget and the 2008-09 estimate primarily relates to machinery of government changes in the 2007-08 year offset by an increase in FTEs brought about by new staffing in the state budget processes. The increase of 35 between the 2007-08

estimated actual and the 2008-09 estimate relates to an increase of FTEs brought about by new funding in the state budget process. Other decreases in FTEs relate to the issue that the minister has alluded to, and that has been an accounting treatment of corporate support staff for the portfolio moving from one area of the portfolio to another.

Mrs MENKENS: That same page also lists an increase in staff working in the area of access to government services—343 full-time equivalents up from a budgeted 281 with a further increase this year to 313. Will the minister say why this is? Does this mean the department is employing more people to provide information on the services which are now to be provided by fewer people?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you once again. Smart Service Queensland, which is known as SSQ, has established what we are calling a front door to Queensland government information and services. It is a clear example of what we are doing as a government to provide cost efficiency services for government and ultimately for Queenslanders. SSQ is all about fast and easy access to government services and information. It allows people to transact multiple transactions during one single phone call or visit. With our rapid population growth in Queensland, emerging technologies and changing customer demands, SSQ has to adopt a flexible and multiple contact channel approach.

This is all about easy access to the Queensland government. You can do it through a telephone number; we have specialist health services like Quitline; we have an internet number; there are also over-the-counter programs. SSQ's success in achieving its objectives is about increasing the total number of services delivered through the contact centre. It handles more than five million client inquiries across a number of channels. The figure comprises over 2.5 million contact centre interactions, 2.3 million internet visits, 0.2 million counter transactions and 0.7 million concessions that have been provided. It has delivered 18 campaigns on behalf of—

Mrs MENKENS: The service people have diminished and the bureaucrats have increased.

CHAIR: I remind the member that the minister has a right to answer the question without interruption.

Ms NELSON-CARR: What I am trying to say is that this about front-line service delivery; it is not just information, as you described it in your question. Within the next five years we anticipate a significant increase in the number of transactions that will be handled by SSQ and the contact centres will receive a large proportion of those services.

CHAIR: The next round of questions will be from government members. Minister, I have run a number of youth forums down in the Redlands. The young people often state that they are unfairly targeted by the media, and I have to agree with them. In my own experience, I know of many young people who have a great deal to offer the government in the form of ideas and policy initiatives. I refer to page 1-241 of the Department of Communities' Service Delivery Statements which outlines the department's role in providing young people with leadership and development opportunities. What avenues are there for young Queenslanders to engage with the government? How are you ensuring their voice is heard in policy decision making?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you for your question. I am pleased to hear that you have a lot of time for young people. I certainly have met with some of those whom you represent in your area. We all know that young people have a lot to give and we want to tap into their ideas in particular because they are our future leaders. I would like to find out as many ways as possible to engage young people in government policy and decision making. Government policies, programs and services are more likely to meet the needs of young people when young people themselves are involved in that decision-making process.

The Queensland Youth Council provides just such an opportunity for really bright, enthusiastic and dedicated young people to get involved in this government decision making. The 20-member council provides me with a vital link to young people. It enables me to hear the concerns and views in their community or their communities. They have a clear regional and remote focus. I have assigned the council six priorities on which to work. They include youth homelessness, linking youth forums from a local level to a national level, youth violence, youth justice, school retention and safer schoolies. An amount of \$70,000 was allocated to the Queensland Youth Council in 2007-08. This covers meeting expenses, sitting fees and travel and accommodation expenses for members.

The Department of Communities also helps young decision makers and politicians of the future through Queensland youth parliament programs. In 2008 the department provided \$18,000 to deliver the program which brings together 89 young people—one from each of the 89 electorates in Queensland. This program is about learning about parliamentary processes and debating local and statewide policy and legislation and issues that are relevant to young people. I know we will see many of the young people from all of these initiatives some time in the future. I look forward very much to watching this space and meeting them once they have matured into fine older young people.

Ms GRACE: Page 1-240 of the Service Delivery Statements refers to \$0.58 million that was allocated for the Time for Grandparents program in 2007-08. Can you outline how this program assists Queenslanders providing full-time care for their grandchildren?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you for your question. The Bligh government understands the unique pressures that are faced by grandparents who are full-time carers for their grandchildren. One example of how we are helping Queensland grandparents is the \$580,000 Time for Grandparents program. The Time for Grandparents program is a statewide program for grandparents who are raising grandchildren outside the statutory care and protection system. This seems to be a growing body of people. As a grandparent myself I would have to say that this would really be one of the most difficult jobs that you could ever be involved in. What we are aiming to do is ease the stress that is experienced by grandparents raising children and reduce the risk of carer burnout.

The program has responded to 3,214 requests for information and referral services, and 383 grandfamilies across the state are actively engaged in the program. The program provides respite camps and recreational activities for grandparents and grandchildren in their care. It affords the children a chance to experience activities that would otherwise not be available to them due to the financial and physical barriers that are often faced by grandparent carers.

In 2007-08 the service made 714 referrals to recreational activities including school camps, sports and memberships to youth organisations such as the Police Citizens Youth Club, guides and scouts. Grandparents are also provided with links to support networks and services in their local communities.

Culturally appropriate Indigenous grandfamily or Namballie camps are designed to assist Indigenous grandfamilies to reconnect with their culture through Indigenous games, storytelling, art, song and dance. They are particularly popular. In 2007-08 the program held 14 grandfamily camps attended by 133 grandparents and 162 grandchildren.

Access to information is vital to successful child rearing so we are committed to providing grandparents with information and advice on issues ranging from family law and financial support through to therapeutic techniques. That is why I was particularly pleased to have launched a publication to support grandparents making the transition to full-time carers developed as part of the program earlier this year.

In 2008-09 the government will continue to support grandparents by providing \$0.58 million in triennial funds to continue the Time for Grandparents program. In the 2008-09 period the program will also provide training to workers, volunteers and grandparents who are endeavouring to establish group support systems as part of a peer support program.

Mrs REILLY: I note that you have spoken a little bit about Smart Service Queensland as referred to on page 1-241 of the SDS. Could you further detail the services that are offered to help Queenslanders access government information?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you very much for the question. I am pleased you asked that because it gives me a chance to refer back to an earlier question. SSQ has been established to provide a smart service. It is not just an information service or bureaucracy, as was previously suggested. As I said before, it is the front door to services and it is a clear example of the government's commitment to providing high-quality and cost-efficient services for Queenslanders.

Queensland's rapid population growth, emerging technologies and changing customer demands require that SSQ maintains a flexible and multiple-contact approach. SSQ offers fast and easy access to government services and information and allows multiple transitions during a single contact via the telephone or through identifiable numbers for specialist services. Some examples of that are 13HEALTH and 13QUIT. Queenslanders can also access services through the internet or over the counter through the Queensland Government Agent Program, QGAP, which provides integrated government services through 68 service counters in locations like Birdsville, Camooweal, Cooktown and Weipa.

SSQ is committed to delivering quality customer service and conducts annual research to measure customer satisfaction. The research has revealed a customer satisfaction rating of 93 per cent for services delivered by SSQ. This is really fantastic given the total number of services delivered through this integrated contact centre. It has risen from 157 in 2006-07 to 181 in 2007-08. If you have not been down there, you need to have a look.

Staff also handled in excess of five million clients who were inquiring. That comprised over 2.5 million contact centre interactions. That is a lot of interactions. There were 2.3 million internet visits, 200,000 counter transactions and nearly 700,000 concessions provided. Staff at SSQ have delivered 18 campaigns on behalf of Queensland government agencies such as land valuations, annual re-evaluations, Quitline and the unspent Indigenous reparation funds.

SSQ is also the central provider of information and referral for Queenslanders in statewide emergency and disaster situations. Officers are able to quickly gear up in emergency situations to provide a contact point for information to the public. More recently it established the emergency information line for information on the Ipswich land subsidence issue within two hours.

SSQ is externally assessed. In the recent Australian Teleservices Association Awards it was a finalist in four categories including the contact centre of the year. It has over 120 full-time equivalent staff. To achieve its high-volume workload, SSQ's 2007-08 expenditure included \$41.2 million for

delivery and support of all available services. Our commitment to customer service, coupled with innovations in technologies, ensures that all Queenslanders can enjoy easy access to information and referral to ensure quality service provision.

CHAIR: I refer to page 1-238 of the Service Delivery Statements which refers to the increasing demand on community services. I note that volunteers provide a significant contribution to meeting this demand. Can you advise what strategies the department has to support and develop the volunteer sector?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you very much for that question. Like you, I know that volunteers contribute enormously to Queensland and perform a range of activities and provide support services which complement our government funded services. We are committed to supporting the development and sustainability of the volunteer sector through our policy which is called Valuing Volunteers: The Queensland Government Policy on Volunteering 2007-10 released in May 2007.

The policy provides strategies to support community organisations and government in responding to changing volunteer trends. The Office for Volunteering in the Department of Communities leads and facilitates whole-of-government implementation of the policy. In 2007 I approved a range of key projects from the policy action plan to be implemented by the Office of Volunteering. These projects include: the International Volunteer Day symposium held in Brisbane on 5 December 2007; development of Valuing Volunteers, an introduction to working with volunteers in government which has guidelines aimed at public sector employees planning or managing volunteer programs; implementation of a youth engagement strategy to assist government and non-government organisations to attract, recruit and retain people as volunteers; and the development of a number of fact sheets which are aimed at assisting volunteer organisations with issues that are very vital to them such as recruitment, retention and risk management. The Office for Volunteering also works with Volunteering Queensland to ensure that leadership and innovation on volunteering activities are supported in both government and non-government agencies.

In 2007-08 initiatives funded by the Department of Communities to support volunteering included: \$230,000 in annual funding for Volunteering Queensland as the key representative body for volunteering across the state to provide referral services, volunteer training and sector support; \$70,000 for an intergenerational volunteering project to engage both young and older people to develop volunteer recruitment and retention strategies to deliver a range of resources and enhance access to volunteering opportunities; \$22,500 to Volunteering Queensland in May 2008 for National Volunteer Week to support a volunteer breakfast attended by over 350 volunteers, two workshops for volunteer managers and associated promotional material—and if you have not met Di Morgan yet you must meet her as she is a legend; and \$30,000 for the Queensland Young Volunteer Awards 2008, with eight winners awarded prizes of \$2,000 each. In 2007-08 some 61,071 people were registered as volunteers on Volbase, which is the database supported by the Department of Communities. There is way more than I could tell you about volunteers; they are magic.

Ms GRACE: I am going to go to an issue that I have a great interest in. I refer to page 1-240 of the SDS and ask if you could outline any initiatives your agencies have in place to engage and support young Indigenous leaders throughout Queensland so that they can inspire others in the community.

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you very much for the question. It does not ever cease to amaze me how so many young people are taking up challenges in their communities and helping to make positive changes for the future, particularly in Indigenous communities. An example of this is the young men and women that I met recently at the Young Indigenous Leaders Forum and the advanced leaders forum.

These young people heard from really inspiring guest speakers and empowered each other with their experiences and ideas on how to continue their own personal development and to work together to generate local projects and create opportunities for other Indigenous people. I heard practical examples of young Indigenous Queenslanders taking up the challenge and starting their own businesses. A lot of them have begun programs and done some training.

Two young Indigenous leaders forums were held this year, in Brisbane and Cairns. The goal is to bring young Indigenous leaders from across the state together to build connections and to network with each other and to share their experiences and ideas from their local communities. They each have very different things to bring to these forums. They also develop their knowledge, skills and frameworks to enhance their leadership potential and knowledge of the business, community and government sectors.

The Young Indigenous Leadership Forum is a youth development program designed for 18- to 25-year-old Indigenous people across Queensland. Each forum brings together 20 young Indigenous people to learn about leadership. It is about developing their leadership skills, sharing experiences and networking with other young leaders and inspirational Indigenous people.

Under the Reconciliation Action Plan 2005-07 the government has made a three-year commitment to the Young Indigenous Leaders Forum. The department budgeted for an expenditure of \$50,000 per event. Each one over the past three years has been a great success. The most recent event was the Brisbane Young Indigenous Leaders Forum, which brought 20 people together. That was

in May 2008. Prior to this the inaugural advanced leadership program was held in Brisbane during April 2008. The program brought together 38 past participants from previous young Indigenous forums. I was able to attend this forum. These initiatives will continue to benefit Indigenous young people across Queensland by providing opportunities to enhance their learning, skills and knowledge about leadership.

Participants are able to learn from each other and share their ideas on projects of benefit to other Indigenous young people including those most at risk. I know that we will see a lot of these young people as leaders in the future. I would really like to congratulate them for taking part in these important programs. I do catch up with them when I least expect to in the communities that I visit throughout Queensland. They are fantastic.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, I would like to now direct you to the other end of the spectrum where we need to actually turn some young lives around. Would you please outline how the Queensland government has responded to volatile substance misuse across the state and how addressing this issue contributes to ending homelessness?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you very much for this question. As you know, there are very complex reasons why individuals engage in volatile substance misuse and I, along with my government, am very committed to supporting them, especially young people, to ensure their wellbeing and their safety. The department provides a number of responses to address this public intoxication issue, and that of course includes addressing volatile substance and misuse initiatives. The initiative we have targets young people using volatile substances in public places, many of whom are homeless and/or of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent which is very worrying. In 2004 \$8.8 million was allocated over four years to support new police powers that were introduced in selected locations in Queensland to counteract the misuse of volatile substances for young people, and the member for Burdekin and I have one up in our area.

To support these police powers, trial places of safety were implemented in Brisbane, Logan, Townsville, Cairns and Mount Isa. An additional \$4.5 million over three years was made available in 2006-07 under the Responding to Homelessness Strategy to enhance services and extend the service delivery model. Enhancements were made in Cairns, Townsville, Mount Isa, Brisbane and Logan and two additional services were established alongside the new police powers in Caboolture and Rockhampton. The extended service model administered by the Department of Communities was implemented in the seven locations at the beginning of this year. The model was a preventative approach and includes supervision of rest and recovery, case management, short- and long-term individual and family support, and brokerage and outreach services. Diversionary activities for young people may also be provided.

The organisations work closely with other providers to ensure that young people have access to a broad range of services to address their needs and that those services also work to educate retailers about their obligations in dealing with harmful substances responsibly. This work ensures that the Queensland government addresses volatile substance misuse through prevention and early intervention activities as well as providing immediate responses and support for our young people. Services have collected a range of information regarding the nature of volatile substance misuse in all locations since the commencement of that service provision. This anecdotal evidence suggests that there are a range of issues that contribute to young people misusing volatile substances, and of course some of those include homelessness, childhood sexual and physical abuse and neglect, isolation, marginalisation, disengagement from education and training and employment and so on. We have allocated \$4.35 million to the Alcohol and Other Substance Demand Reduction program.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The next round of questions will be from non-government members, and I call the member for Burdekin.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, on page 1-241 of the Service Delivery Statements 13 government campaigns are mentioned. Could the minister please provide a breakdown of these campaigns by overall costs, advertising costs, campaign message and target audiences for each campaign?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you for your question. I am really happy to report on these campaigns, and the use of Smart Service Queensland is paramount in this in delivering our key services and information to Queenslanders. In addition to increasing the number of services offered through the integrated contact centre—we have gone from 157 in 2006 to 181 in 2007-08—as you have said, we are engaged by a range of Queensland government agencies to support those campaigns. In many cases SSQ demonstrated its capabilities to rapidly respond to community needs through implementing service delivery solutions in very short time frames. Over the years SSQ has predominantly delivered campaigns utilising contact centre services. However, in 2007-08 more agencies are now utilising counter, SMS and online service channels.

The campaigns delivered to date have resulted in excess of 210,000 inquiries via the integrated contact centre, 854 responses via SMS and 1,107 online transactions. In 2007-08 SSQ responded to a number of disaster events. It acted as the central contact point for general calls about the outbreak of equine influenza in south-east Queensland. More complex inquiries were referred to and managed by

the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries. In addition, SSQ managed the equine influenza community recovery line to provide advice on services and financial support for people who were impacted by that disease outbreak. SSQ provided contact centre services to communities requiring assistance as part of the storm damage relief campaign as a result of the storms in October and November of last year. Then as floods caused widespread damage throughout Queensland in January and February 2008, SSQ provided a disaster recovery hotline and established phone lines and online and counter services to allow the public to donate to the disaster recovery. Because SSQ implements campaigns on behalf of other departments, the budgets are actually held by those departments.

Additionally, over the past four years SSQ has successfully run the land valuation annual revaluation campaigns on behalf of the Department of Natural Resources and Water to handle inquiries related to land valuation notices which are sent to property owners. Other campaigns delivered in 2007-08 are numerous, but I will just give you a couple in the remaining time. There was the unspent Indigenous reparations funds and reparations scheme in terms of the second round campaigns and the workplace health and safety occupational licensing campaign. I can give you more if you would like.

Mrs MENKENS: Thank you, Minister. On page 1-245 of the Service Delivery Statements the expenditure on pensioner and senior concessions on rates, electricity and electricity life support dropped from \$705,000 in 2006-07 to \$688,000 in 2007-08. Will the minister detail the reasons for this decrease, particularly in light of increasing costs having such a big impact on our pensioners and seniors?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you again for your question. I do not think there were any real reasons, but I will provide advice on the latest initiative to support Queensland seniors and other pensioners. As you know, we wanted to lessen the impact of those increased water prices in south-east Queensland on pensioners so we established the South East Queensland Pensioner Water Subsidy Scheme. That is going to be phased in over three years and will provide a maximum of \$40 per annum, rising to \$70 per annum in 2009-10 and to a maximum of \$100 in 2010-11 and subsequent years. That will be in addition to the current Pensioner Rate Subsidy Scheme which already includes water charges.

The government already provides a generous range of concessions to approximately 700,000 eligible pensioners—to seniors and to veterans—throughout Queensland on essential services such as local government rates, electricity and electricity life support, reticulated natural gas and public transport. The subsidy scheme provides a subsidy equivalent to 20 per cent, which is actually up to a maximum of \$180 per annum, of gross rates and charges levied by local governments. The scheme's budget for 2007-08 was \$44.3 million. The Electricity Rebate Scheme provides a maximum rebate of \$41.25 per quarter off the cost of an eligible person's domestic electricity supply. This amount increased from \$36.21 per quarter in 2007-08 to reflect the rise in electricity costs. The scheme's budget for 2007-08 was \$67.5 million.

Not one of the rebates were reduced or constricted in any way over the period that you referred to. It is really a matter of speculation as to why the figures dropped. During the full retail competition for electricity as people moved between schemes they found that some people were no longer eligible, so this therefore did not require the same budget. For the Electricity Life Support Concession Scheme, which assists people on low incomes who are seriously ill to meet those electricity costs of operating approved home based life support systems, the concession is \$84 per quarter for an oxygen concentrator and \$56.25 per quarter for a kidney dialysis machine, and those rebates were increased each quarter to reflect the rise in the electricity costs.

Mrs MENKENS: I refer to page 1-248 of the SDS regarding Multicultural Affairs. What did the Department of Communities spend on interpreter services and translations in the last year? Could you please provide separate amounts for the department and the separate individual allocated amounts expended by Disability Services, Seniors and Youth?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you for that question. In 2007-08, if we are talking about the cost of providing those interpreter services, the Department of Communities spent \$26,300 on translation and interpreter services for departmentally delivered services. That figure includes the cost of hiring interpreters for hearing impaired people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. This represents just a minimum amount that has been spent. As translation and interpreter costs may also be recorded as client related costs, it is not really possible to disaggregate this figure accurately to identify the amounts that were spent for specific client groups.

As you know, interpreter services were originally funded by the Commonwealth and the Commonwealth pulled out of that. I can say that a further \$36,300 was spent on translator and interpreter services, and that was both hearing impaired and languages other than English that were utilised by SAP funded services. It gets quite confusing, but in 2007-08 DSQ spent \$46,732 on translation and interpreter services for the departmentally delivered services. DSQ also allocated \$0.6 million for interpreting and translating assistance strategies. A non-government service will be funded to develop and deliver this strategy which will assist people with a disability who are interpreting or translating or who need that assistance to access non-government service providers for disability supports. The response also includes the provision of appropriate interpreting and translating services

for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and that includes South Sea Islanders, and for those with hearing and sight impairment. It is anticipated that this strategy will probably be operational by late this year. But, as I said, given that this was a Commonwealth investment that was rejected and neglected some time ago, finding those actual figures for you is a bit difficult.

Mrs MENKENS: Thank you, Minister. Page 1-239 of the Service Delivery Statements shows that \$2 million is allocated for supervision and diversionary services for people on youth justice orders. Can the minister detail what proportion will be spent on diversionary services and how it will be spent and the same for supervision within youth justice?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you for the question. I know that this is obviously of importance to you not only as a parent but as a future grandparent.

Mrs MENKENS: I hope so.

Ms NELSON-CARR: There is a youth detention centre in Townsville and it is one that we are both interested in. The whole object of this government's focus is on early intervention and prevention and of course rehabilitation. So every dollar that we spend in turning a youth offender away from a life of crime saves the taxpayer \$10 to \$20 down the line I guess, and that is why youth detention centres have a really strong and heavy rehabilitation focus as opposed to being just a place where you can just lock youth offenders up.

some of the strategies that the Queensland government has put in place to address the factors that lead to both the initial and continued participation in crime by young people I am sure you would be aware of, but the factors that contribute to offending and reoffending are very complex. They are very wide ranging, and those factors in the lives of young people who come into the youth justice system or who are at risk can include all sorts of things, including drug and alcohol use, poor mental and physical health, low levels of education and/or family dysfunction. So making significant inroads into crime requires not only strong penalties and sentences to deter young people from doing the wrong thing but also the availability of evidence based initiatives that tackle the causes of crime and prevent offending and reoffending.

In 2007-08 the government delivered funding to implement initiatives aimed to reduce reoffending by young people in contact with the youth justice system. In 2007-08 we allocated \$0.6 million to establish a Young Offender Community Response Service and the Bail Support Service in far-north Queensland. This service, which commenced in early 2008, is being run by the Abused Child Trust, which is now called ACT, and it will address the causes of offending by providing support and intervention services to young offenders and young people at risk of offending and to the families of the young people. It will also provide bail support for young people at risk of being remanded in custody—a very important part of this strategy—practical transitional support for young people exiting detention and returning to their communities and a specific focus on culturally competent services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

In addition, \$75,000 was allocated to the Youth Bail Accommodation Support Service in Brisbane, which is about helping young people in south-east Queensland to find and maintain suitable accommodation, which is really critical in outcomes.

CHAIR: The next round of questions will be from government members. Minister, carrying on with youth justice, I refer to page 1-239 of the Department of Communities Service Delivery Statements and I ask if you could outline any strategies in place for addressing the demand for services for young people in Queensland who have come into contact with or who are at risk of coming into contact with the justice system.

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you. That is a very timely question in relation to the last answer. We all know that Queensland is experiencing an unprecedented population growth. That, of course, means not only more adults but also more young people in this state. Without significant intervention, there is likely to be a proportionate increase in the number of young people who are at risk of involvement in the youth justice system.

As all committee members would be aware, the factors that contribute to offending and reoffending are, as I said in my previous answer, very complex and wide ranging. I think you can rest assured that most of these kids come from fairly dysfunctional families, there is a lot of drug and alcohol abuse, most of these kids have dropped out of school and have very limited education and they also in many instances have very poor physical and mental health. So it is up to us and we are determined to provide effective responses to youth crime. This determination has seen the Department of Communities undertake a wide range of activities to inform strategy planning well into the future.

We are having a look at and analysing youth offending trends. This would be of real interest to you, Mr Chairman, given your former occupation. We are forecasting to assess future demand on youth justice services and examining the latest evidence and research to determine the most effective and efficient responses to youth offending in Queensland. In 2007-08, the Department of Communities made very significant investments in initiatives aimed at reducing the demand for youth justice services. This includes the allocation of \$8.5 million to provide 2,177 youth justice conferences, which are

extremely popular and very successful, because 97 per cent had successful agreements reached. That is very, very significant. The success of the program is also evidenced by the fact that the Department of Communities has been asked to provide training and support for the Methodist Centre in Hong Kong to enable conferencing services to be introduced there.

I believe that making significant inroads into crime requires not only strong penalties and sentences to deter young people from doing the wrong thing but also the availability of evidence based initiatives. I think that is critical to tackle the causes of crime and to prevent offending and reoffending. In 2007-08, the government delivered funding to implement initiatives aimed to reduce reoffending by young people in contact with the youth justice system. This saw a substantial investment, including the establishment of the Young Offender Community Response Service and the Bail Support Service and increased funding to the Youth Bail Accommodation Support Service in Brisbane. They are just two of the initiatives as part of our government's strong commitment

CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms GRACE: I refer you to page 1-239 of the SDS and ask what initiatives the department has undertaken to address the high rate of homelessness in Queensland. This is an issue that is dear to my heart. As a member who represents an inner-city electorate of Brisbane that has a high percentage of homelessness I also ask: what services and support does your portfolio provide to those who are without accommodation?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you so much for this question. This is obviously very significant for government and definitely very significant for you and your electorate. We all know that there are a range of circumstances that Queenslanders find themselves in. They can be all ages. Some groups of people find themselves without a place to live or are forced to turn on to the street to escape violent situations at home. It could be for financial reasons, it could be as a result of mental health issues or because of substance misuse, which we have just been talking about.

Our Supported Accommodation Assistance Program—SAAP as it is known—is the primary national response to homelessness. It is jointly funded by the Commonwealth and each state and territory government. In Queensland, SAAP funding is provided to non-government organisations for services, including looking after refugees and providing shelters, information and support services. The services respond to the needs of young people, women and children who are pretty regularly escaping domestic violence. That also includes single men, single women and families.

In 2007-08, a total of \$67.5 million was provided to 227 SAAP agencies across Queensland for a range of accommodation and related support services. In addition, the department continues to very successfully implement commitments under the whole-of-government Responding to Homelessness initiative. So we have many new and enhanced services that are operating very effectively since that initiative commenced in 2005.

An amount of \$4.25 million has been spent over four years by the Department of Communities. We have 29 new services for people who are experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness. Those services are located in Cairns, Townsville, Mount Isa, the Sunshine Coast, Brisbane and the Gold Coast. I am pleased to report that our major achievements to date have included the implementation and successful operation of four homelessness service hubs. There are two hubs in Brisbane, one on the Gold Coast and one in Cairns. They use a one-stop shop approach to assist homeless people to access the appropriate accommodation and support that they need. I personally had the privilege of officially opening the Cairns homelessness hub in March this year. There is a fifth hub planned to commence from 1 July in Townsville. These service hubs have already assisted large numbers of people. They play a very significant role in coordinating services across the state.

In addition, 11 homelessness early intervention services across Queensland provide short-term case management support services to people who are at risk of becoming homeless to assist them to sustain independent accommodation. We also have the homeless persons information hotline, which is very successful. We have had approximately 28,000 phone calls that have been responded to since 2006.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, it is clear that the department has a high priority to improve service and infrastructure delivery in discrete Indigenous communities. Can you outline how the department is specifically supporting the Palm Island community?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you very much. This one, of course, is again very close to home for me and for the member for Burdekin. We sound like we hold hands all the time, but we do not; we just look after our communities. Palm Island is very close to both of our electorates. It is important to me as I am committed to helping to improve the range and quality of services for Palm Islanders. We have a number of very successful initiatives from the Department of Communities that we deliver that are aimed at addressing a lot of the dysfunction that is experienced in these communities.

Of particular note is the Palm Island Government Coordination Centre, which has been in place since 2005. It is a single point of contact for government services that are for the community. This is at a cost of approximately \$340,000 and it provides community engagement, service coordination and government liaison services across all state government agencies and also with the Commonwealth government.

Another important initiative has been the establishment of the Palm Island Community Co. in October of last year. This company is in partnership with the Queensland state government, the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council and the Palm Island community. This partnership is all about improving the range and quality of human services that are provided to the Palm Island community.

In November 2007, the former mayor of Palm Island and I formally launched the company on Palm Island. We introduced the board at a community celebration. In 2008-09 the Palm Island Community Co. will be in a position to deliver business services to non-government organisations and will commence delivering new human services with a focus on family support, disability services and community justice services.

The structure of the company provides strong governance accountability, and the board brings a considerable range of specialist and local expertise to the task of shaping the company's priorities and operations in the interests of the Palm Island community. This board has met monthly since November 2007. We have approved more than half a million dollars for start-up funding for the company from its establishment to June of 2009. We have also spent \$380,000 from the Department of Communities on the company's establishment and to support the company in its very early stages. It is destined to be a key player in attracting and delivering services to the Palm Island community from now on. We have a number of other initiatives being delivered by the Department of Communities—safe havens, family support hubs, diversion from custody services, the diversionary facility and, of course, the many alcohol reform services which amount to a sizeable amount of money.

Mrs REILLY: The importance of reading to children at an early age is widely known. As you can probably guess, I have read to my own children since they were born, which probably contributes to their wide vocabulary and verbosity. I do not know what else would! I refer you to page 1-240 of the Department of Communities Service Delivery Statements and ask if you could outline the purpose and benefits of the department's Reading to Children initiative.

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you for this question. I love this part of the portfolio and, like you, I am very committed to reading to children. In fact, I used to read to my babies in utero and my daughter has done the same thing. Needless to say, our children are avid readers. So we really believe—and so does the government—that reading to children is an essential part of being a parent or a carer. As a grandparent, I have to say that I love it. The Bligh government is all about supporting vulnerable families in Queensland and, in particular, helping them give children the very best possible start in life. I am very happy to report on this initiative that you speak about, which is designed to support children, families, seniors and grandparents. So the Reading to Children initiative is a component of the Department of Communities Best Start initiative. It is currently being rolled out right across Queensland.

Specifically, the Reading to Children program aims to improve access to early language and literacy activities for young children. A second key outcome of the project is the recruitment and retention of volunteers, in particular seniors, to read to children. The initiative provides \$2.3 million over four years for a pilot program. The program involves senior and grandparent volunteers reading to children in 15 locations across the state.

This year I was very pleased to announce that the Smith Family has been allocated \$2.1 million to conduct the program in 11 locations across the state. The Smith Family launched the program on the Sunshine Coast on 19 March this year and service delivery has now commenced in several locations. The Smith Family is working closely with communities to ensure the program is sustainable well beyond the pilot.

In 2007-08 the Smith Family was allocated \$60,000 for establishment funds in three locations to work with Indigenous stakeholders in these locations. This is expected to develop a culturally appropriate program for far-north Queensland as well as Cape York and the Torres Strait. The Carpentaria Shire Council has also been allocated \$0.42 million to deliver the Normanton Kids are Deadly Kids program. The program also enhances intergenerational relationships and the sharing of cultural knowledge.

I am really pleased that Queensland has pioneered targeting senior volunteers through this initiative. The Smith Family is involved in evaluating the program. It is interested in expanding this program nationally. So the Queensland government remains very committed to enhancing opportunities and experiences for children, families and communities. I believe the Reading to Children initiative demonstrates this commitment. I will not respond to the fact that your children are encouraged to take part in verbosity or why they might.

Mrs REILLY: Thank you. I think it is a great program.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. That brings the committee's examination of the estimates for the Department of Communities to a close. The committee will now adjourn for a very short break and then commence examination of the estimates for Disability Services Queensland. The hearing will resume at 6.15 pm.

Proceedings suspended from 6.10 pm to 6.17 pm

CHAIR: The Estimates Committee D hearing is now resumed. The committee will now examine estimates for Disability Services Queensland. I again 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 will be given with the consent of the questioner.

I ask the departmental witnesses to identify themselves before they answer a question so that Hansard may record that information into 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 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 remind members, witnesses and members of the public that no food or drink is permitted to be consumed in the legislative council chamber. I ask that all mobile phones and pagers be switched off. The question before the committee is that the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Communities, Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Seniors and Youth be agreed to.

I call the member for Burdekin.

Mrs MENKENS: With reference to 1-264 we are all aware of the increasing need for further disability services. From this budget could the minister outline how many more DSQ funded lifestyle packages will be made available and what further respite service packages will be made available?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you for the question. I will talk about the Adult Lifestyle Support Program first. It is only one of a range of programs that are provided by Disability Services Queensland to enable people to live more independently in the community. In 2007-08 there was \$81.3 million that supported 1,500 people through the program. In 2008-09 the allocation included an additional \$5 million to respond to the needs of adults with a disability living in the community. This program provides individualised support to adults with a disability to maintain the living arrangements of their choice, to build and strengthen those social relationships that are so necessary and to give them the support that they need while living in the community. It is very difficult to put an actual figure on that because each one is so different and requires a great deal of flexibility. To enhance access to departmental services such as the Adult Lifestyle Support Program we have implemented a strategy which is called Growing Stronger. This is all about a program of reforms. This makes it a little bit difficult to actually categorise it the way you would like.

The reforms under this initiative include the development of a standard and uniform assessment process for people who are seeking assistance through government funded support. Work is underway at the moment to deliver new and more consistent and equitable approaches to meet client needs assessment and to meet the service planning and prioritisation of access to services. DSQ will, in collaboration with experts and stakeholders, develop and pilot new assessment and prioritisation processes. This will include various assessment tools to allow trained professionals or multidisciplinary assessment teams to better understand the needs of eligible applicants. These tools will also introduce a level of uniformity in the needs assessment process. These reforms will ensure fairer and more transparent access to departmental programs such as the one that you mentioned, the Adult Lifestyle Support Program, and that would include also respite services. The Adult Lifestyle Support Program actually supports adults between the age of 18 and 65 with a disability who are defined under the Disability Services Act 2006. It contributes to funding and support to help meet those disability needs. I will quickly give you the respite figures: \$2.4 million in 2006-07 in equity and \$1.5 million recurrent was allocated for the construction and operation of two respite services in Toowoomba and North Brisbane. I can go further if you would like.

Mrs MENKENS: That is fine, thank you. I refer to pages 1-263 to 1265 of the Service Delivery Statement, the targeted response to challenging behaviour. Particularly in light of the disability legislation that was passed in the House this year, why is there such a disparity between the \$430,000 that was spent last year on capital works as part of the targeted response and the amount committed in the 2007-08 budget of \$5.838 million? What has been delayed by this nearly \$5.5 million underspend bearing in mind the importance of the legislation that has been passed recently?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you for your question. I am glad that you said that this was a very important initiative because it really is and I am very pleased to have been part of it in this new ministry. It is inevitable, of course, that some projects will run behind, which is what I was talking about in answer to one of your previous questions. Those reasons, of course, include planning, scope of works, environmental considerations and so on. In the area of disability services we are also dealing with those purpose-built facilities about which I spoke before. If you went to a real estate agent they might be able

to sell you office space, but not too many of them have accommodation with support facilities on their books. Local authority planning and zoning requirements often pose a real challenge. The other thing that really affects the building of these facilities is the not-in-my-back-yard attitude which can also pose a very serious problem. The overall budget for the capital works component in what we are calling the Investing in Positive Futures initiatives is \$24.27 million in equity funding and \$11.35 million in output funding over four years. I think that is the critical thing: it is over four years. The development of responsive accommodation options also reflects an important investment in achieving positive outcomes for adults with an intellectual disability and those severely challenging behaviours which are this group of people. The aim of these accommodation arrangements will be eventually to transition these people back into the community where appropriate.

The budget also has to allow for office accommodation and fitout costs for professional staff. In 2007-08 \$5.84 million in equity funding was allocated for the refurbishment of those existing villa dwellings at Wacol—they are to provide up to 24 beds—and for office fitouts for professional staff. The refurbished units will support people with an intellectual or cognitive disability who exhibit severely challenging behaviours and who require those purpose-designed environments in emergency crisis situations and/or for the purposes of targeted therapeutic intervention. Design specifications have been completed, contract documentation is very advanced and preliminary work, including asbestos removal, demolition and, where required, site clean-up works have already commenced.

Mrs MENKENS: I refer to 1-268 concerning staffing levels. Would the minister provide the number of forced redeployments of staff that have occurred in the last five years and also the number of staff who have resigned, retired or were sacked—the numbers for each—in the last five years, as well as the number of new incoming staff each year. So, an analysis of the staff figures?

Ms NELSON-CARR: You use the term 'sack'. That is something I would not like to say never happens but I could probably bet my bottom dollar that it rarely happens. I will ask the Director-General, Linda Apelt, to give you a more precise answer to that question of staff.

Ms Apelt: There have been no forced redeployments. However, I am happy to provide on notice a detailed breakdown under each of the categories that you have identified.

Mrs MENKENS: I would appreciate that, thank you. Also on staff, would it be possible to explain the decrease in staff in the accommodation services from 1,250 to 1,220 and in community services from 1,064 to 920 and outline what impact this would have on service delivery?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Service delivery being our number one priority is the last thing that we want to have impacted. Once again it is appropriate that the Director-General answer questions in relation to staff.

Ms Apelt: The decrease of 319 between the 2007-08 budget and the 2007-08 estimated actual results from expected delays in recruiting suitable staff for a number of programs, including the centre of excellence, the Carter reforms, the Growing Stronger initiative and also the transfer of a number of FTEs from corporate support to the Department of Communities. The decrease of 109 between the 2007-08 budget and 2008-09 estimate primarily relates to the transfer of FTEs for corporate support to the Department of Communities offset by the expected filling of the 2007-08 and 2008-09 positions for the centre of excellence as part of the Carter reforms and also the Growing Stronger initiative.

The increase of 210 between the 2007-08 estimated actual and the 2008-09 estimate primarily relates to the filling of the 2007-08 and 2008-09 positions for the centre of excellence, Carter and Growing Stronger. The variance in the estimated actuals and estimated targets within the statement do not have an adverse impact on service delivery. They are part of the normal variations that we would expect when it comes to filling new initiatives in particular and also the rearrangements in the corporate support arrangements, as I mentioned earlier, as a desirable accounting treatment.

Mrs MENKENS: Thank you, Linda. Minister, I refer to page 38 of the Capital Statement, which includes expenditure on accommodation at Wacol. Will the minister advise the total cost of each of the two houses at Brian Parker Place, Wacol, and the cost per Basil Stafford villa for this work?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you for your question. Obviously this is a very important part of the Carter reforms and I am pleased that you asked the question. This is a very positive step forward for Disability Services Queensland. It actually gives the Queensland government the opportunity to drive the regeneration of the site to a place for new approaches that will be about providing appropriate support for people with an intellectual or cognitive disability who also exhibit those challenging behaviours.

The redevelopment of the Wacol site is being undertaken on the basis of considered evidence about what constitutes a positive therapeutic environment and how best to support individuals in accordance with new legislation. This responds to Justice Carter's recommendations in his report. Providing an environment that is conducive to positive behavioural change is a really important element of the way we invest in positive futures. It enables DSQ to design and build targeted therapeutic environments that provide the appropriate balance between safeguarding the rights of individuals, upholding our duty of care towards those individuals, to staff and the broader community, and operating

in accordance with the legislative amendments. Any use of restrictive practices will need to be authorised through either the Guardianship and Administration Tribunal or an approved guardian for that adult.

The specific costs of the individual capital items in the question I think I will need to take on notice. But the refurbishment for each villa I think is around \$294,000 per bed, and there are two beds per villa, but I do not know the exact dollar allocation.

Mrs MENKENS: Thank you and I will appreciate getting that information on notice.

Ms NELSON-CARR: If we can get it before the end of this session, we will endeavour to do that.

Mrs MENKENS: Also in relation to the expenditure on the accommodation at Wacol, could you advise the processes of tendering that were undertaken by the department to ensure the best value for these high-expense projects?

Ms NELSON-CARR: I do not have details in front of me, but I imagine that it would be the normal tendering process that would be done through the Department of Public Works.

Mrs MENKENS: You are unable to provide any more information on it?

Ms NELSON-CARR: It is just a normal process that every department does through the Department of Public Works.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, the notes on page 1-268 mention delays in recruitment for the Investing in Positive Futures and Growing Stronger programs. Could the minister elaborate on the reasons for these delays and the impact the short staffing has had on service delivery?

Ms NELSON-CARR: I do not think that Growing Stronger and Investing in Positive Futures is any different to any other organisation, be it government or non-government, that is attempting to attract staff. We have the usual problems associated with recruiting anybody particularly in specialist fields. What I can say though is that last year and again this year we have had a local and an international recruitment strategy to attract practitioners and those people with expert skills to new positions, particularly for the Specialist Response Service. We have had a very successful attractions strategy, and it has generated a very high-calibre pool of applicants for the new positions. Selections are underway as we speak for the initial rounds of appointments. So it is happening and it has been successful.

The advertising that we used was based on research that was conducted on the attraction of candidates in other key markets. Over the four-year implementation period, DSQ will recruit between 60 and 70 specialist practitioners for regional teams. These teams will be based in Brisbane, Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, Ipswich, Rockhampton and Townsville. Outposted positions will also be available in Cairns, Mackay, Maryborough and Toowoomba.

The six Specialist Response Service teams will be supported by a mental health assessment and outreach team, and that will comprise nine mental health professionals. They will provide mental health and general medical expertise to clients of the Specialist Response Service and that will be done on a statewide basis. This collaborative practise approach will integrate disability and mental health service responses.

So there will be over 100 Specialist Response Service direct support staff, and they and their managers will be based at Wacol to support adults who reside in those emergency crisis and secure care arrangements. Those teams will also play a very significant role in supporting the transition of adults from Wacol to the community living arrangements which I spoke about before. By the end of 2008-09, that will be the second year of this initiative, and it is hoped that 135 positions will have been filled across all of those Specialist Response Service teams.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, I refer to page 1-264 regarding capital funding for disability services. Could the minister list all new capital funding announced this year as in works that were announced for the first time and are not continuations or reannouncements of previous fundings?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you for the question, member for Burdekin. As you know, capital infrastructure investment is very necessary if we are going to be able to implement the ranges of programs and services that we have. DSQ through its capital program will continue to provide a range of accommodation and new respite centres to support people with a disability. We also have a lot of refurbishment that we need to do to office accommodation and other facilities.

This year and into next year DSQ will be spending in its total capital budget \$71.66 million, and that is very significant when it comes to providing those infrastructure supports that you are talking about, whether it be upgrading property, plant and equipment or whether it is putting in new technology systems or whether it is providing capital grants to the non-government sector. I think I mentioned this before but, under the property, plant and equipment component of that capital works program, the department will manage the development and completion of capital projects with a total budgeted investment of \$44 million. That work includes a significant construction program for respite centres—the new innovative houses and the new refurbished, tailored accommodation. It will also include the provision of the new refurbished office accommodation that I was talking about to support that expanded service delivery.

The investment in this infrastructure is very much a part of delivering specialist disability services to those who require that supported accommodation or who may require tailored accommodation or respite services or emergency services. As I have said several times this afternoon, the delivery of these services is very complex and very time consuming and requires detailed planning from the outset to ensure that the finished product will meet the needs of both the client and the service deliverers.

I have spoken before about some of the challenges that we have faced to get these types of specialised developments, but it can be as simple as finding and acquiring the appropriate land. DSQ has encountered these difficulties in a number of projects, but the department has also successfully completed a number of key projects. They include Sinnamon Park Respite Centre, which was completed in 2007; the major refurbishment of the old Weir school, which you know about—the preschool in Townsville which is now AEIOU; the Ipswich Respite Centre, completed in June this year; the Loganlea innovative house, completed in May this year; and the new Caboolture area office, completed in May this year. While much of the expenditure relates to previous announcements, as with all major capital works, the work will happen in stages. Another one was the new Rockhampton area office, completed in June this year.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The next round of questions will be from government members. I call the member for Mudgeeraba.

Mrs REILLY: Minister, I refer to page 1-263 of the Disability Services SDS in relation to funding allocated to provide the best possible support and service to Queenslanders with a disability through a suite of new reforms. Minister, could you please outline the progress of the reforms in the disabilities sector and how these particular reforms will improve transparency and equity of access?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you for the question, and I am very pleased to be able to talk about Growing Stronger and its suite of initiatives, which really represent an investment in a much better disability service system. Over four years these initiatives amount to \$52 million to deliver a contemporary specialist disability service system, and Growing Stronger represents a new approach to disability services in Queensland. It will put in place a system to ensure that funding is used as effectively as possible to maximise benefits for Queenslanders with a disability.

These reforms started to take shape on 3 December last year when DSQ simplified access to disability services by introducing a single application form for specialist disability services. This is a major and wonderful breakthrough. It is a much more streamlined process and it means that applicants will no longer have to work out which DSQ programs they need to apply for. The new form is helping the department to better understand people's individual needs and to determine their eligibility as quickly as possible.

In 2008-09, DSQ will deliver a simpler and more easily understood set of programs and services. I think this is fantastic. This includes consolidating the range of programs and services now delivered or funded by DSQ and that go into four main programs, which include the individual, the family, community and high-support or complex needs. The department will provide better and more accessible information for clients by introducing the new DSQ online services and providing people with interactive tools to help them understand the range of solutions that are available. This application process will be streamlined further in 2008-09 through DSQ introducing online applications for assistance. This service will operate in tandem with the current paper based application form and include a tool to help people identify if they are eligible for specialist disability services.

Although the government will never be able to fully meet all of the needs of everyone with a disability, the Growing Stronger reforms will allow us to make better informed decisions on where to allocate that funding. It will allow us to continue to focus on early intervention to link people with the support before their needs become critical. It will enable a shift where possible from dependence on high-cost government funded intervention towards personal and family sustainability. So this is a one-stop shop that is going to make life so much easier for those requiring that support and those administering that support.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, this next issue is one I am only too familiar with—that is, the continuing growth in and complexity of demand for disability services. Can you please advise what prevention and early intervention initiatives are being undertaken to reduce the level of need for crisis intervention and ensure long-term outcomes for people with disabilities?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you for the question. I know how important this is for you from where you come from and your own personal interest. We do recognise that early support and intervention is highly effective in reducing the level and nature of much more intrusive interventions at later stages. Our commitment to prevention and early intervention is very evident in the Growing Stronger program of innovative reforms. The intent of these reforms is to make support available to people with a disability in a much more equitable and much less complicated manner. The government has also invested significant funding to increase those early intervention strategies for people with a disability and their families.

Since 2006-07, three non-government service providers have received \$2.76 million in recurrent funding to provide early intervention services to children aged zero to eight years with a physical disability and their families. The Early Intervention Initiative, which is now in its second year of operation, is making a significant difference for many families who previously were not receiving any services at all. Another initiative is the Autism Early Intervention Initiative, which assists children with autism who are under six years of age and of course their families as well. In 2007-08 the budget for the Autism Early Intervention Initiative was \$2 million. In rural and remote areas where disability services are difficult to access, the department has implemented the local area coordination model. This initiative invests in local communities by assisting individuals and families to build informal supports.

The Family Support Program is one of the department's most successful strategies for preventing family breakdown by providing those responsive supports and resources when families need them most. Since the introduction of the program in 1999, more than 1,500 families have been given support to maintain that strong family unit. Besides keeping families together, the benefits to the child with a disability growing up in their own family are absolutely immeasurable. In 2007-08, an additional \$4 million in recurrent funding was allocated to the Family Support Program enabling an extra 78 families to be supported. This allocation brought the total recurrent funding for the Family Support Program to \$39.5 million.

Disability Services Queensland also provides a prevention and early intervention service through Family and Early Childhood Services, called the FECS teams. In 2007-08, more than 1,000 children and families received those FECS services, which is an increase of more than 100 families since 2006-07. This year and next year, the Queensland government will invest \$15 million to improve service capacity in areas like accommodation support and respite and day services.

Ms GRACE: Minister, I refer to page 1-266 of the SDS regarding the formation of the new national disability services agreement. I am aware that there has been a start-stop approach to funding in the disabilities area, with difficult relations between differing governments of the past. Can you please advise the committee what returns you have delivered in overcoming this and how you are finding solutions to the need to continue funding for specialist disability services?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you for that question and your interest in this very significant policy area. I have really welcomed the opportunity to negotiate and collaborate with my colleagues around Australia on a new national agreement for disability services. I am very pleased to advise the committee that there have been significant developments under the Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement. Firstly, I have signed a variation agreement which extends the third CSTDA to 31 December of this year and, secondly, negotiations are well and truly in hand for a new disability services agreement which I anticipate will commence in January of next year.

The CSTDA has been one of approximately 90 specific purpose payments between the Commonwealth, states and territories. Under COAG's changed payment arrangements, a national disability agreement will be retained as one of only five or six payments. Along with disability services ministers from all Australian jurisdictions, I attended meetings on 1 February and then again on 30 May this year to discuss those funding and policy priorities for people with a disability, their families and their carers. State and territory ministers agreed to contribute to the development of the National Disability Strategy, which will deliver a whole-of-government, whole-of-life approach to disability planning. That will be in consultation with people with a disability, including their families, carers and other stakeholders.

All Australian governments will continue to develop this new national disability services agreement and a statement of objectives and outcomes for the agreement, including performance indicators and also the clearly defined roles and responsibilities for each level of government that will apply from 1 January 2009. Significantly, state and territory ministers have agreed to contribute \$901 million to support people with a disability. This is on top of \$1 billion in new funding pledged by the Rudd government. This is quite extraordinary and very, very welcome. This breakthrough agreement, which was reached on 30 May, means that Queensland now will receive an additional \$165 million over four years from 2008-09 to 2011-12 and \$18.3 million in capital funds immediately, providing a much-needed injection for those specialist disability services.

Queensland's share of that capital funding will go towards building an extra nine respite and accommodation facilities to support adult sons and daughters of older parent-carers. I will continue to work at the national negotiating table to deliver what is best for this state. I want the best financial and policy outcomes which will translate into improved outcomes for Queenslanders with a disability. We are looking over the horizon and planning for the future of these vulnerable people.

CHAIR: Minister, I refer to page 1-266 of Disability Services Queensland's Service Delivery Statements which refers to the strengthening of client safeguards. Can you outline any initiatives your agency has in place to ensure that safety is a top priority for people with a disability who are living in supported accommodation?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you for that question. I would like to place on record my commitment to ensuring the safety of people with a disability in Queensland who are receiving support from either government or non-government services. Safeguards have been established to ensure safety is a top priority and obviously to prevent any abuse and neglect of people with a disability. These include a range of legislative, policy and service reforms. The Disability Services Act 2006 has been in effect since 1 July 2006 and is based on the human rights principle that people with a disability have exactly the same rights as other members of society and they should be empowered to exercise those rights.

The Disability Services Regulation 2006 requires that all provided and funded service providers keep and implement a policy for the prevention of abuse, neglect and exploitation. Disability Services Queensland has developed this policy and it has also produced a resource kit to support staff, non-government service providers and families who might be implementing the policy. The act also gives Disability Services Queensland significantly broader powers to monitor and investigate the services it provides as well as those that the government funds. In addition, the act requires criminal history screening of all staff employed by Disability Services Queensland and funded non-government service providers.

The new Disability Services and Other Legislation Act 2008 establishes even more safeguards to protect the rights of Queenslanders with a disability. This is real landmark legislation that came into effect from 1 July this year. It will help protect the rights of people with an intellectual or cognitive disability who exhibit those challenging behaviours. It will also help to provide certainty for people in Disability Services Queensland who provide and fund services and who work with Queensland's most vulnerable citizens.

The legislation is a key element of the \$113 million response to the Carter report into enhancing the safeguards for this target group of an estimated 300 people. The initiative includes the provision of training for disability support staff and specialist practitioners through the Centre of Excellence for Behaviour Support. I am very confident that the combination of these rigorous measures will ensure that we do everything we possibly can to prevent the abuse, neglect or exploitation of people with a disability who live in Queensland.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, it is nearly a year since the release of Disability Services Queensland's response to the report titled *Challenging behaviours and disability: a targeted response*, which is mentioned on page 1-264 of the Service Delivery Statements. Can you advise what services Disability Services Queensland has put in place to address the recommendations?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you for that question. As you would know, Disability Services Queensland is leading the government's response to implementing the recommendations of Justice Carter's report from 2006. I believe these initiatives will absolutely and entirely establish Queensland as a national leader in research and services for adults with an intellectual and/or cognitive disability who exhibit those challenging behaviours. To ensure that these reforms are a success, the government's response, which is called Investing in Positive Futures, received that \$113 million that I spoke of over four years from the 2007-08 state budget. The initiative focuses on two broad streams of work—legislative reform and new models for service delivery.

The Disability Services and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, which passed through parliament in April, implements a key recommendation of Justice Carter's report. The changes to the act have been made so that they can safeguard adults with an intellectual and/or cognitive disability who exhibit those challenging behaviours and who are in receipt of services provided or funded by the department.

The Investing in Positive Futures initiative includes \$4.2 million over four years to expand the services of the Guardianship and Administration Tribunal, the Office of the Adult Guardian and the Community Visitor Program to implement the provisions of that particular act. This amended legislation will also be supported by a new Specialist Response Service, SRS, through DSQ to assist service providers to meet the requirements of the new legislative framework. The SRS will comprise six teams of highly trained specialists from various disciplines, and their job will be to deliver behaviour change and develop positive social and other skills amongst the target group.

One of the key planks of this Investing in Positive Futures initiative includes \$10 million over four years for the Centre of Excellence for Behaviour Support that will be based at the UQ campus in Ipswich. This is the first of its kind in Australia. The centre will guide the work in relation to the target group through a combination of really innovative research, policy and practice improvements. It is very sensational. It is not only the first of its kind in Australia; we believe it is probably one of the first in the world. It has attracted a lot of interest when it comes to the staffing that the member for Burdekin was asking about earlier.

I would like to put on record how proud I am of the work that DSQ has done in the Investing in Positive Futures initiative. I really look forward to updating the parliament on many more of the groundbreaking reforms that are going to be taking place in this very important area.

CHAIR: Minister, I refer to page 1-266 of Disability Services Queensland's Service Delivery Statements which refers to the implementation of the government's Carer Action Plan. Can you explain how the government is ensuring that the work of carers of people with disabilities is recognised and valued?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you for the question. I do not need to tell you, I am sure, that carers make an important and incredible contribution to their families and loved ones, to the broader community and to Queensland in general. We as a government recognise that serious role and the responsibilities that come with those who are carers, and we do that through our carer recognition policy and our Carer Action Plan.

That plan was introduced in 2003. The carer recognition policy recognises those carers' needs and concerns alongside their role in supporting family members. The carer action plan was released in December 2006 to translate this policy into actions. I am very pleased to be able to inform the committee that significant progress has been made on the development and implementation of carer action plan initiatives which do recognise and value the vital work that carers do and to support them in their continuing caring role.

A key initiative of the plan is the carer business discount card, which will provide eligible carers with discounts from participating retail businesses in recognition of their valuable contribution to the community. Persons receiving either the Centrelink carer payment and/or carer allowance are eligible to apply for that card. In addition, a companion card will be introduced in Queensland. This initiative will improve social and recreational opportunities for people with a disability who have a lifelong need for attendant care support. That will enable them then to access a range of venues and activities. Participating businesses will issue the cardholder with a second ticket at no charge for their chosen companion. Where a carer would otherwise pay their own admission to assist a family member or a friend to attend that venue, the companion card will relieve them of that financial burden or of the burden that is implicit with the person being cared for.

I look forward to a very strong partnership with businesses to ensure the success of these two card initiatives in providing assistance to Queensland carers and, of course, to people with a disability. The Commonwealth government has also made a commitment for a national companion card scheme and has commenced discussions with all states and territories about this. So we have been pretty proud people being able to express what we were already doing in Queensland. We are very much well and truly on the way to implementing this companion card. We are going to be easily able to transition into a national card scheme.

Work is also progressing across government on other initiatives featured in the carer action plan. One of those is working with Queensland Health. That is about drafting a framework for improving consumer and carer participation in the mental health system. We are also helping to assist parents and carers to re-enter the paid workforce and providing training to youth support coordinators to enable them to better identify and assess the specific needs of young carers with a view to keeping them engaged in learning and employment. I look forward to the continued progress of carer action plan initiatives and increased recognition and support of carers by government agencies and, of course, the wider community.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. The next round of questions will be from non-government members.

Mrs MENKENS: I refer to page 1-265. Could the minister supply a breakdown of segments of spending by percentage? How much is spent on those people with, firstly, a mental disability, secondly, a severe disability and, thirdly, young people with a disability? Can you give an analysis of the percentage of those three areas?

Ms NELSON-CARR: The reason I am taking a little bit of time here is I am trying to work out how to answer the question. This is very difficult for us to do because it is not straightforward. It is not as simple as that. Some of our young people, for instance—or any people—might have a mental illness or a mental disability as well as a physical disability.

Mrs MENKENS: A combination of both?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Yes. So we do not actually break down all of that into separate entities as such. Maybe we could supply something with a little more detail. We are about building a better mental health system in Queensland obviously and we have put a sizeable amount of money into doing exactly that over four years. What I can do is give you a bit of a brief outline about what we spend on young adults with a disability and what we spend in mental health. I do not know if that would answer your question the way you would like. What do you want me to do?

Mrs MENKENS: Thank you, Minister. Yes, please. I would appreciate a brief breakdown of those figures, or would it be easier to provide them on notice?

Ms NELSON-CARR: I do not know, as I said, that we can do it the way you have asked. I can give you a rundown on what we do. I am talking about non-government mental health services when it comes to mental health. With young adults with a disability, for instance, we have the Post School Services Program. In 2007-08 we spent an additional \$2 million to provide support for an additional 129 young adults who were transitioning from school. You know what that program does: assisting young people to participate in active adult life. In recognition of young adults with disability who leave the care of the state at the age of 18, DSQ delivers the Young Adults Exiting the Care of the State Program. That supports young adults to access supported accommodation and community access services so that they are able to access community life. In 2007-08 \$2 million in recurrent funding and \$2.1 million in one-off funding was allocated to support 75 young adults with a disability. Just quickly, on mental health—non-government too—as part of the budget we committed an unprecedented \$528.8 million over four years to build that better mental health system I was talking about. That gives you a bit of an idea.

Mrs MENKENS: To follow on in that same vein, how many young people are currently in residential care and what would be the cost of that? How much would be spent this year? What was the amount budgeted for 2007-08 and the amount actually spent?

Ms NELSON-CARR: You would be aware that we only deal with adults in residential care. I think that question would probably be better directed to the Minister for Child Safety, or are you talking about younger people in residential aged care?

Mrs MENKENS: I am talking about young, disabled people who are in nursing homes. I am sorry about the brevity of the question.

Ms NELSON-CARR: That is okay. We have allocated \$23.9 million over five years to that initiative—and that is actually being matched by the Commonwealth—when it comes to younger people in residential aged care. We actually implemented the Helping Younger People with Disability in Residential Aged Care Program. That is a Queensland initiative and we are very well advanced in that initiative. DSQ is sharing models of support and design for housing with the relevant departments that we have but also with other states and territories.

Mrs MENKENS: That is an important area, is it not?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Yes. They can actually select from a range of support options under this initiative. Support does give them the ability to live independently, live with their family or whatever their support network may be, or they can share support with other individuals. The funds for 2006-07 were allocated for two organisations to develop accommodation for 26 people and two people received recurrent funding to live with their families. In 2007-08 a further \$3 million was provided in recurrent funding to that same initiative. These funds assisted seven people to move from aged care and 17 people to avoid entering aged care. In the two years of this initiative, accommodation options have been available for 52 people. So far 45 people have been assisted and seven more people will move into the available places in the coming months.

We have specialist accommodation developed in Brisbane and Gordonvale outside Cairns. I am not sure if you have seen that one. Family Support Group Australia has developed accommodation options on the Gold Coast. In December last year I was able to attend the official opening of the Youngcare apartments in Jindalee. Have you seen those?

Mrs MENKENS: No.

Ms NELSON-CARR: They are fantastic. That is a joint project between the Wesley Mission in Brisbane and Youngcare for which DSQ provided \$1.4 million in recurrent funding. These apartments will be home to 16 people who were living in aged care or who were about to be admitted to aged care. It was incredibly moving to take part in that to see how those apartments have absolutely changed the lives of those people—very moving indeed. DSQ also worked closely with St John Community Care in the design of two five-bedroom homes at Gordonvale which I have not seen yet. Have you seen those?

Mrs MENKENS: No.

Ms NELSON-CARR: They will support 10 people and they were opened in May of this year.

Mrs MENKENS: I was aware of them but I have not visited them.

Ms NELSON-CARR: Me, neither. Can I ask for a minute extension of time through the chair—10 seconds?

Mrs MENKENS: I am happy, but I am taking the government's time.

CHAIR: Go ahead.

Ms NELSON-CARR: It is the details of expenditure on upgrading houses at Brian Parker Place and Wacol. Can I table those details?

Mrs MENKENS: Thank you.

CHAIR: Minister, I will remind you that you need to seek leave to table those.

Ms NELSON-CARR: I seek leave.

Leave granted.

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

Ms GRACE: Minister, another issue which is dear to my heart and a concern to some of my constituents is—and I refer to the SDS where it mentions supporting older parents as part of a bilateral agreement with the Australian government. I am aware that often older parents struggle to cope with caring for a person with a disability. Will the minister please outline what services are available in Queensland to support older parent carers of people with a disability?

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thank you very much for that question. As a parent who has never had anyone with a disability, I admire and respect these people so much. The enormous commitment that older parent carers make to their adult sons and daughters is simply staggering. I really do take my hat off to them.

We do provide a range of support for those older parent carers through respite accommodation and assistance in their future planning. In 2007-08, 22 respite service providers operated from 25 locations across Queensland. They all provided respite services specifically for older parents who were aged 70 years or over and also to Indigenous carers aged 50 years or over. Respite was also offered to carers aged between 65 and 69 years and Indigenous carers between 45 and 49 years who required hospitalisation. 364 families engaged in transitional planning with project officers who were employed through our Respite for Older Carers Initiative.

Another way the Queensland government assists older parent carers is through the department's succession planning and lifelong planning initiatives. These initiatives provide support to all carers including older parent carers to plan formal and informal networks to support families as their needs and circumstances change over time, which is what happens. In 2007-08 Disability Services Queensland provided \$1 million in succession planning funding to three service providers operating statewide to assist families in setting short-term and long-term goals. Funding of \$1.07 million has been allocated to lifelong planning support strategy and succession planning for 2008-09. The strategy will provide a model of prevention and early intervention support at the high-risk transition points in the lives of people with a disability and their families. I am very proud that we can now work proactively in this important work with a very strong and unusual relationship with the federal government—now the Rudd federal government.

The Queensland and Commonwealth governments entered into a bilateral agreement on respite for older parent carers under the provision of the Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement—and that was from 2005. Each government contributed \$13.1 million over three years to increase that support to those older carers. In 2007-08 this represented a commitment of \$4.8 million each by the Queensland and the Commonwealth governments to increase access to respite for older parent carers. All disability services ministers have agreed to make support for older carers a policy priority for the next national disability agreement, which is very good news indeed.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. The time allocated for the consideration of the estimates for the Minister for Communities, Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Seniors and Youth has expired. I thank the minister and the portfolio officers for their attendance. For the information of those attending today, the hearing transcripts for these portfolios will be available on the parliamentary web site in approximately two hours.

That concludes the committee's consideration of the matters referred to it by the parliament on 3 June 2008. I would like to thank all staff who have stayed behind to assist and also the administrative research director for her assistance in putting together today's proceedings. I would also like to thank the committee members for the way they have participated in these proceedings.

Mrs STUCKEY: On behalf of the non-government members, I would like to extend our sincere thanks, too, to the minister and her staff, also to all the parliamentary staff—Ms Deborah Jeffrey and the research team, to *Hansard* and everybody here—and also to our sole opposition staff member sitting over there, Rebekah Henricksen. Thank you very much. It has been a long but a very good estimates committee.

Ms NELSON-CARR: Thanks everyone. That was a long, marathon effort.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. I declare this public hearing closed.

Committee adjourned at 7.15 pm