

**ESTIMATES COMMITTEE D**

Mr T. B. Sullivan (Chair)	Mr B. W. Davidson
Mr D. E. Beanland	Ms L. H. Nelson-Carr
Hon. T. R. Cooper	Mr P. W. Wellington

**PRIMARY INDUSTRIES****IN ATTENDANCE**

Hon. H. Palaszczuk, Minister for Primary Industries  
 Dr W. Hoey, Acting Director-General  
 Mr T. Johnston, Deputy Director-General  
 Mr G. Shakhovskoy, Acting Executive Director, Corporate Performance and Strategies  
 Dr R. Clarkson, Executive Director, Agriculture Industry Development  
 Dr P. White, Executive Director, Rural Industry Business Services  
 Mr K. Dunn, Executive Director, Animal and Plant Health Service  
 Mr J. Pollock, Executive Director, Fisheries  
 Mr P. Neville, Executive Director, Policy and Legal Services  
 Mr A. Harvey, Acting Executive Director, Forestry  
 Ms D. Anderson, General Manager, Finance and Business Development

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 The Committee commenced at 8.30 a.m.

**The CHAIRMAN:** It being 8.30 a.m., I declare the meeting of Estimates Committee D now open. The Committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 1998 in the areas set out in the Sessional Orders. For those who are visiting the Parliament, I would like to introduce the members here. To my left is the Deputy Chair, Mr Denver Beanland, the member for Indooroopilly; Mr Russell Cooper, the member for Crows Nest; and to his left will shortly be Mr Bruce Davidson, the member for Noosa. To my right is Ms Nelson-Carr, the member for Mundingburra; and Mr Peter Wellington, the member for Nicklin. I am Terry Sullivan, the member for Chermside, and I am chairing this Committee. On my left is Mr David Thannhauser, the research director, and all of our support people from Hansard and Bills and Papers. I thank you for your attendance.

The Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the organisational units in the following order: Primary Industries; Families, Youth and Community Care and Disability Services; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, Women's Policy and Fair Trading. The Committee has also agreed that it will suspend today's hearings for the following breaks: morning tea, 10 to 10.15 a.m., a short break from 11.45 to 12 p.m., lunch from 1 to 2 p.m., afternoon tea from 4 to 4.15 p.m. and a break around 5.15 p.m.

I remind members of the Committee and Ministers that the time set for questions is one minute and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a further double chime will sound at the end of these time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will also sound two minutes after the extension of time has been given. The Sessional Orders require that at least half the time available for questions and answers in respect of each organisational unit is to be allocated to non-Government members and that any time expended when the Committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between the Government and non-Government members.

I ask departmental witnesses to identify themselves when they first come forward to answer a question so that Hansard can record this information. In accordance with the Sessional Orders dated 15 September 1998, a member who is not a Committee member may, with the Committee's leave, ask a Minister questions. In this regard, the Committee has agreed that it will automatically grant leave to any non-Committee member who wishes to question a Minister unless an objection is raised at the time by a member of the Committee. Also in accordance with Sessional Orders, each Minister is permitted to make an opening statement of up to five minutes. Again, a single chime will give a 15-second warning and a double chime will sound at the end of that time.

In relation to the media coverage of this hearing, the Committee has agreed that silent television film coverage be allowed for the Chairman's opening statement and for each Minister's opening statement. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Primary Industries to be open for examination. The time allocated is three hours. The question before the Committee is—

"That the proposed expenditure be agreed to."

Minister, would you like to make a brief statement?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Certainly. Thank you, Mr Chairman and Committee members. I will make a very short opening statement. The role of the Department of Primary Industries is to foster and develop the economic potential of Queensland's primary industries sector, which makes a significant contribution to Queensland's prosperity and, indeed, our nation's. Primary industries provided some \$5,000m to State exports in 1997-98. The primary industries sector competes in the international marketplace while having to contend with arguably the world's most variable climatic conditions. Many of our primary producers have now moved out of the worst drought in living memory, but they are facing the possibility of a record wet year, which can be just as difficult to handle.

This year's Budget allocation for the Department of Primary Industries is \$381m. It will enable the DPI to provide services for industry which will help to maintain and improve the prosperous future for Queensland's primary industries and the dependent communities. The department has a very strong scientific and educational base on which we will build. We will appoint a chief scientist to work

with Queensland's major rural research organisations to develop strategic alliances and facilitate innovative practices and research effort in the primary industries sector.

A targeted cadet and trainee scheme will provide employment opportunities for local residents and rural communities. Funding has been allocated to expanding and diversifying market opportunities for Queensland's rural products and industries as well as increasing opportunities for market access. DPI will develop safe, integrated strategies to control the major insect pest, heliothis, in field crops. The funding for this all-important program is guaranteed. We will also undertake other strategies which have been identified as critical for Queensland producers to maintain Queensland's reputation as a supplier of clean green food.

I welcome, as do the DPI officers who have joined me, the opportunity to discuss the Budget Estimates for the Department of Primary Industries with members of the Estimates Committee. The 1998-99 budget for the Department of Primary Industries is a rock solid investment in the future of the sector and in the future of Queensland. Mr Chairman, I commend the Budget Estimates to you and I will be ready for questions now.

**The CHAIRMAN:** As our media leave, I will throw the first period of questions to the non-Government members.

**Mr COOPER:** I refer you to page 8 of the MPS 1998-99 Planned Performance under Farm Viability. It states—

"Agriculture Industry Development will continue to develop policy and legislation to facilitate viable and sustainable primary production and evaluate the impacts of legislation and policy from other agencies ..."

I take it that "other agencies" means external agencies in the farming sector. I note that your department is going to continue to focus its efforts on improving farm viability both within your area of responsibility and within other agencies. What is your understanding then of US President Bill Clinton's speech to the National Farmers Union on 15 September regarding US farm viability and the implications for Queensland primary producers as quoted by me in Parliament on 17 September? It was a very ominous speech which has grave implications for Queensland primary production.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Let me first open up by informing the Committee that the Department of Primary Industries is undertaking a number of initiatives to improve farm viability. One, of course, is the FutureProfit area. Another area, of course, is FarmBis which unfortunately has not been signed off yet with the Commonwealth Government simply because this thing called the Federal election is occurring tomorrow, but we hope to progress that pretty quickly after the election is over. There are other areas in which the department is progressing farm viability and one of those, of course, which is very important, is the Queensland Centre for Climate Application. More importantly, it is ensuring that our primary product picks up a reputation for being a

clean green product which will be easily sold overseas.

However, I would like to go a step further and inform the Committee that my department initiated the refocusing of FutureProfit, previously known as Property Management Planning, to ensure strong partnerships with industry. The workshops delivered through FutureProfit are designed to meet producers' needs. The success of FutureProfit's new focus was acknowledged in September 1997 when the program jointly won the Outstanding Program Award for Queensland as part of Adult Learners Week. The program was selected from over 200 applicants in three categories. The quality of the program has led to strong demand from primary producers and I really believe that in that area the department is certainly progressing pretty well.

**Dr WHITE:** To add more detail to what my Minister has just said, I will talk about what my group does. We are on about assisting farmers to make informed decisions. The fundamental issue associated with farm viability is farmers who can make informed business decisions about their futures. The suite of services we offer covers that whole spectrum of primary producers, from those who are in dire straits to those who are quite wealthy and doing very well—whether it be farm financial counsellors through whom we give information or helping producers to develop exports.

**Mr COOPER:** I am not sure whether the speech has been brought to your attention, Minister, but it does have grave implications in relation to farm viability and the effect of the Asian crisis. We should remember that America is not only a trading partner but also a very strong competitor. It has already told its farmers, on 15 September, that there is likely to be a 40% reduction in US farm incomes. They are going to get very aggressive with their exports into the Asian area. That will have a massive impact on Queensland primary producers. I am looking for some response to that, relative to the impact on Queensland's primary producers.

**Dr WHITE:** There is no doubt that America is a significant challenge to Australian agriculture. It always has been and always will be. It has had a system of protectionism in place for a long time, and that is consistently causing difficulties for us. It has come into Indonesia. It has extended credit to the Indonesians and presumably shored up its own markets. It is in a very powerful position in our Japanese markets and now it is moving into the Chinese markets.

I believe we answer that in several ways. I know that it sounds a bit trite, but we must get smarter with our exports. We have to look at what we can capitalise on. The Minister mentioned the clean and green issue before. That is something we can develop further. I think a big opportunity we have is diversification of our markets. Rather than go head to head with the Americans to penetrate the Japanese and the Chinese markets, we need to look at smaller markets that are more diversified. We have just commissioned a major initiative to look at developing markets for Queensland agricultural products in Eastern Europe and particularly the Middle East. I

think the way we manage our relationship with the United States is not take it head to head, because we will lose. We have to be smarter and look at alternative markets—look at what we have that the Americans do not have.

The other thing we can use is the Queensland Centre for Climate Applications. We can use our climate prediction work to look at the implications of El Nino and La Nina. I know a producer in Queensland who successfully penetrated the Japanese market on the basis of El Nino damaging the horticultural market in California. So it is about better market intelligence to our producers through things such as the QCCA, better market intelligence from our marketing officers and, basically, much more diversification in our export portfolios.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** There are a number of ways we can assist our producers. The most important, of course, is to look for new markets. To that end, the Government is looking at new markets in the Middle East and in Europe. Let us not forget the American market. Just recently a number of our rural women attended a conference in Washington. That basically showed that Australian technology and environmental management is world class. We can trade well.

**Mr COOPER:** I commend that speech to you, however, because I do believe the implications will be enormous. I know that it is very difficult, but your department's planned performance must take that into account. We can see where we go from there. What are your views on National Competition Policy and its application to primary industries, and what are the details of the six NCP reviews projected for completion in 1998-99? Reference to that can be found at paragraph 2 on page 37.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** In the first instance, National Competition Policy is quite a vexatious issue. It has been around for quite a long time. One side issue of National Competition Policy that I do not believe was considered at all when it was first introduced was its effect on people's lives. Since becoming Minister three months ago and having travelled widely throughout the State, I have picked up the message loud and clear that National Competition Policy is actually something our rural producers do not understand. If you do not understand something, you are pretty wary of it. That creates uncertainty. Unfortunately, that is the situation we have out there at present.

I highlight the dairy industry. It has undergone its review. The Government has to put together legislation to be passed by the Parliament by the end of the year. The Government is trying as best it can to protect the livelihoods of our dairy farmers by accepting the recommendations of the working group that has travelled throughout Queensland over the past month. One of those recommendations is to maintain the farm gate price.

The department has spent approximately \$120,000 on National Competition Policy reviews. Queensland Treasury and industry contributed to the costs of undertaking the NCP reviews and the DPI has provided the secretariat to review the committees. To give you a far better understanding

and a far better answer to the question you have asked on the line item in relation to the six NCP reviews, I will pass across to Peter Neville.

**Mr NEVILLE:** To date, the sugar NCP review has been completed and legislation is being drafted at the moment in consultation with industry and Government. The only other review that has actually been completed and considered by Government is one dealing with the grains industry. In that case, legislation is being proposed for early next year. Again, the emphasis of that one is maintaining the single desk for export barley. The other reviews mentioned are in various stages of completion.

**Mr COOPER:** In the interests of time, Minister, would you be agreeable to the response in relation to the six reviews going on notice?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Certainly.

**Mr COOPER:** You mentioned the dairy industry, milk, the farm gate price, the supply management and so on. On 1 January the industry will be deregulated. We have 1,650 dairy farmers and they are getting a bit anxious—and I do not blame them. We are both fully aware of that. Yesterday, National Foods announced that it will build a factory in South Brisbane, at \$26m. Hopefully we will see more competition, but I have concerns about it because this is a Melbourne-based firm. We know that Victoria has a huge supply of milk and it is very keen to get into the Queensland market. Therefore, the effect on the Queensland dairy farmer of that and deregulation will be quite enormous. What are your views in relation to the company coming here? Will it be sourcing its milk from south of the border? Where will it be sourcing its milk?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Let me answer that question this way: the honourable member is correct; deregulation post farm gate will occur from 1 January 1999. And yes, National Foods did announce that it will be building a major processing plant in Brisbane. My understanding is—and I have to be very careful that I do not break confidentiality—that National Foods will be acquiring local milk. I believe that the prospect of National Foods entering the Queensland market is going to be good news for our local producers, because a company that is going to invest well over \$20m in Queensland will not only be in the market milk end of things but also in the processing side, and at some stage I would expect that a processing plant to manufacture cheese would also be included. Then, of course, its competitor is Pauls or Parmalat. I certainly hope that, with its very large worldwide network, it will be able to use our product to extend or expand its product, sourced in Queensland, into the Asian market.

Having said that, I am going to be very positive and say that the future is going to be very bright for our dairy industry on both fronts. And if I can go back to National Foods—I am looking forward to National Foods not only supplying milk to the Queensland market but also to the top end of the New South Wales market, which would be good news for our industry. But that is all in the future. Of course, that is up to commercial decisions by the companies concerned. However, I certainly hope that that is the direction in which they will be headed.

**Mr COOPER:** I think we are all concerned and a little nervous about the effect of National Competition Policy on the dairy industry and other industries. We have seen the effect of deregulation in Victoria, where the consumer lost out, the dairy farmer lost out, and the big three food chains won very handsomely. We seem to be heading in the same direction. I know that we are both aware of that. So anything that we can do to support the dairy farmer is absolutely vital.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I believe that, as a Government and as an Opposition, we have worked pretty well together on this issue. I believe that this is one of the issues whereby all members of Parliament, irrespective of what political persuasion they come from, can work together to ensure that our primary producers are protected from issues such as National Competition Policy and deregulation. I would like to inform the Committee that the honourable member and I have been tick-tacking pretty closely together on this issue. I hope that, when the legislation does come into the House, it will have a speedy passage and we will be out there helping our dairy farmers.

**Mr COOPER:** We will give that assurance that we will work very closely in the interests of the farmers. I think it is far better than the endless petty squabbling that goes on, and the farmers often lose.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Mr Cooper, if you are cooperating so well, I am sure it will not be reported in the media.

**Mr COOPER:** I have disregarded the media, I am afraid. I would rather get on with the job.

In relation to sugar, I refer to the \$300,000 new initiative, the Sugar Cane Yield Improvement Initiative, on page three of the MPS. The coalition's Budget initiative in response to an industry submission provided \$300,000 over three years for specifically targeting declining commercial canesugar, that is, the c.c.s., within the Wet Tropics and identifying a viable alternative rotational crop. On what advice did you decide to alter the coalition's initiative to this one? This has been criticised by industry as being misdirected and ignoring the growers' plight in that area, and it does not address the core problem of rapidly declining viability in the Wet Tropics sugar industry.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The c.c.s. decline is a priority issue for the Queensland sugar industry, affecting the long-term viability of sugarcane production in regions across the State. The honourable member did mention the Wet Tropics. Of course, that is where we have our major problem. Unfortunately, the decline in c.c.s. has been evident for the past 15 years. It is only recently that Governments have finally realised that something has to be done to try to arrest, or to help our cane producers to arrest, the decline in the c.c.s.. As we all know, the lower the c.c.s. level, the lower the profit margin there is for the grower.

In relation to the question that the honourable member has asked about why there has been a change in that line item in the Estimates—the previous Minister, Marc Rowell, I believe, confused our growers in that he promised the \$300,000

initiative in the first instance to the canegrowers in Innisfail and also to canegrowers Queensland wide. Therefore, as a Minister, I had to make a decision to stop the confusion. We have \$100,000 set aside for low c.c.s. decline investigation, and we have put that through the Farming Systems Institute, which is going to specifically use that money to investigate the low c.c.s. decline.

We also have to remember that \$100,000 is not a great deal of money when compared to the Federal Government's \$13.45m which has been presented to the sugar industry in Queensland to have a look at c.c.s. decline and other issues. The bulk of that money has gone to the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations, where they will also be carrying out investigations into the low c.c.s. decline.

It is gratifying to see that the industry has been successful in drawing attention to these issues, and it is industry that has attracted the funds for the priority research. I have mentioned the Federal Government money. I have also mentioned the State Government money. I believe that, with both initiatives working in tandem, the Farming Systems Institute is the best place to put the money to do the work into the sugarcane—

**The CHAIRMAN:** The first session of questions from non-Government members has expired. We will move on to questions from Government members.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** My question relates to the eradication of the papaya fruit fly. On page 13, paragraph three of the MPS, it mentions that the papaya fruit fly eradication program has achieved outstanding success. What will be the benefit to industry of the removal of quarantine restrictions for the PFF in August 1998, one year ahead of schedule?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The papaya fruit fly eradication campaign has been very successful. The program is on target for completion in mid 1999, a year ahead of schedule. The overall gains in having the program completed a year ahead of schedule represent a saving of \$30m. That is the bottom line. The total cost of the eradication program under SCARM and ARMCANZ, with the national cost-sharing arrangements to 30 June 1998, was \$30m, with a budget of \$4m for 1998-99. Included in the 1998-99 budget is an allocation of almost \$2m for ongoing monitoring for PFF over the next wet season to validate area freedom in north Queensland and to gain international recognition of eradication of the pest. I am pleased to announce that I was in north Queensland just recently to make that announcement, which was received very, very well by industry.

Queensland's contribution to the cost-shared program will be 15.4% of \$5.2m over four years. In addition, the Queensland Government has provided \$3.8m for the purchase and refurbishment of a building for fruit fly de-infestation research in Cairns and a further \$4.5m to support growers through the waiving of Government service charges. The final cost of the PFF to the Queensland Government is estimated at \$13.5m of which, as I said previously, the horticultural industries are the major beneficiaries.

Declaration of area freedom occurred as planned by me on 23 August 1998 when all PFF quarantine restrictions were lifted and the PFF roadblocks closed. That achievement has removed the inconvenience to growers of compliance of PFF treatments and the need for industry and the public to stop at roadblocks. That was a terrible thing. Local people were stopped at the road blocks day in, day out, on the way to work, on the way back from work, as well as the many tens of thousands of tourists who travelled to north Queensland. The roadblocks have now been removed. Growers will, however, still need to comply with the quarantine restrictions for Queensland fruit fly for produce sent to markets in Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia.

In a nutshell, I would like to put on record the great work that was done by our DPI officers in firstly identifying and secondly eradicating the papaya fruit fly scourge in a time frame that was shortened by one year.

**Mr WELLINGTON:** I refer to page 8 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements. As the Minister should be well aware, the National Competition Policy is putting extreme pressure on the economic viability of all sections of the primary industries, especially the dairy industry. Why is provision made to cater for only 300 dairy farmers Statewide for efficiency workshops to develop business plans? Are you aware what provision is being made to cater for the dairy farmers on the Sunshine Coast?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I will not go through my previous answer that I gave to Mr Cooper in relation to the review of the dairy industry nor my thoughts on the National Competition Policy. However, the honourable member has raised a very legitimate question which, of course, concerns his own area of the Sunshine Coast. To give the honourable member a more detailed answer, I might ask Rosemary Clarkson to talk about the specifics of that area. If time permits, I will come back and finish off the answer.

**Dr CLARKSON:** The dairy industry in Queensland is working with the Dairy Research and Development Corporation and with the Queensland Dairy Organisation to look at efficiency issues. Efficiency issues will be most critical in the deregulation of the dairy industry. As part of that process, they are designing workshops to work with dairy farmers to look at property management and efficiency issues throughout the whole of the production process. The number of dairy farmers who will take part in those workshops is an estimate that is based on demand for those workshops so far.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** There is a great deal of uncertainty within the dairy industry at present. I am sure that the honourable member has had numerous representations from dairy farmers within his own electorate in relation to this issue. I assure the Committee that the Government is moving as swiftly as possible. I have now received a report from the working party headed by Pat Rowley, a name synonymous with the dairy industry not only in Queensland but also Australia. I intend to take a submission to Cabinet not this week but next week.

Once the submission has gone to Cabinet and been approved, the results of the working party will be made available to all dairy farmers and all interested people in Queensland to allay some of the uncertainty and some of the fears that our dairy farmers are experiencing. Legislation should then be progressed through the Parliament to be completed by the end of this year.

**The CHAIRMAN:** On page 15 paragraph 5 of the MPS states—

"Risk of consumer rejection and market disruption due to chemical residues will be reduced ..."

I note the resources that your department devotes to regulatory-based chemical residue control programs. What are you doing to reduce the problem at its source?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I am glad you asked that question, because the department is exploring innovative methods to help industry manage chemical residues. It has a contract with a dog trainer to train a sniffer dog to detect organochlorine residues in contaminated land. It is believed that this is the first time in the world that dogs have been used for this task. I inform the Committee that, when I made a presentation on the Estimates at departmental headquarters, we had as our star attraction Norm the sniffer dog to perform before the varied interest groups from industry. His performance was first class. Within a couple of minutes, he was able to sniff out the residue. The trial is still being progressed. This is a natural extension of the national organochlorine residue management program under which the DPI addresses the problems of organochlorine residues, such as dieldrin and DDT in cattle at the source.

New initiative funding of \$320,000 over three years has been allocated. That will allow further development of the concept and fund the training of at least one more dog. The cost of training and handling will depend to a large extent on the previous experience of the handler. Owners of properties affected by organochlorine residues are required to manage the problem on the property using quality assurance methods. Previous programs had the major emphasis on testing at abattoirs to detect the problem. The DPI expenditure on the Norm Program is \$780,000 per year with half coming from producer funds through the transaction levy on sales of livestock. The Norm Program is a joint industry/Government managed and funded program.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** As to pests and disease control—page 7, paragraph 7, of the MPS mentions the Plant Breeding Program being undertaken in the DPI. What advances has the DPI made in the control of pest and disease in field crops and, in particular, the control of heliothis in cotton, grain and horticulture crops?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** A major development in heliothis control has been collaboration among the grains and cotton industries with the Government to initiate regional management strategies to control heliothis. Attempts by isolated producers or industries to combat heliothis are weakened if

neighbours are not taking effective action. Regional management for heliothis control is a system that reduces reliance on insecticides by looking at the whole farm system. Key components of the strategy are pupae busting by cultivating to break the life cycle after crops are harvested, biological control by parasites and predators, growing trap crops to concentrate and destroy heliothis in spring and by careful use of insecticides.

To date, research on biopesticides, which are natural pesticides, has been encouraging and is also planned to be continued. Plant breeding to produce crop resistance to pests and diseases is a major focus of the department. The breeding of parental lines to produce midge-resistant sorghum hybrids has resulted in midge being reduced from being a major insect pest to one of minor importance, resulting in a benefit to the industry of \$15m a year. DPI has a large winter cereal breeding program including wheat, barley and oats that has produced many new disease-resistant varieties. DPI has also invested in producing parental lines or new varieties for other crops including maize, sunflowers, chickpeas, peanuts, soya beans, adzuki beans, navy beans, lucerne and medics. Basically, that is what is happening.

**Mr WELLINGTON:** I refer the Minister to page 31 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements, and ask: what is happening with the revised native forest sawlog allocation that is expected to be determined during 1998-99? How will this new policy affect the fragile sawmilling industry in Queensland?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The member has asked a very important question. I will start off and then I will call on Alan Harvey, as it is his area of interest. About 98% of the annual harvest of sawlogs from Crown native forests is sold non-competitively under the native forest sawlog allocation system, with about 58% of the volume also covered by 20-year agreements. As part of Queensland's commitment to the National Forest Policy, DPI Forestry, in collaboration with the native forest timber industry, conducted a major review of pricing under the allocation system. An independent tribunal oversaw the veracity of the review to assure all stakeholders of fair pricing arrangements. However, the review resulted in a new market-linked pricing system for Crown cypress pine sawlogs from 15 December 1997. Recommendations for the introduction of a new pricing system for Crown native forest hardwood sawlogs are currently under consideration. At this point I might ask Alan Harvey to give us a more detailed response.

**Mr HARVEY:** A large volume, around about 98% of the annual harvest of sawlogs in Queensland, is sold non-competitively under the native forest sawlog allocation system. A proportion, around about 58% of that volume, is also covered by 20-year agreements. Back in 1995, we became aware that the sawlog allocation system may potentially be in breach of certain sections of the Trade Practices Act. Since then, we have taken action to review the allocation system and endeavour to have it comply with the requirements of the Trade Practices Act. The first action taken was to implement a short-term

authorisation under the Competition Policy Reform (Queensland) Act. That was to give it protection up until 30 September 1998. Further, action is to be taken under the National Competition Policy reviews to give further protection through until 31 December 1999 for that system. There will be a short period of time under which those allocations will not be protected.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you. Do you want an extension?

**Mr WELLINGTON:** Yes. Could you please expand on your answer?

**Mr HARVEY:** The attempts we are making at this point in time to give protection to the allocation system will depend on the outcomes of the National Competition Policy review that has been conducted into the Forestry Act. I think that there will be detailed responses given on notice to that particular aspect, but it is the intention at this point in time to develop a long-term policy in the coming year, taking into account the outcome of the public benefits test component of the National Competition Policy review that is currently being conducted.

**Mr WELLINGTON:** When is it likely that we will know that outcome?

**Mr HARVEY:** It is my understanding that, at this point in time, a draft public benefits test has been completed and will shortly go through a consultation phase and, depending on the period of time involved in the consultation, there will be decisions taken in response to that action.

**Mr WELLINGTON:** Are we saying before Christmas? The middle of next year?

**Mr HARVEY:** Perhaps if I could continue?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Yes.

**Mr HARVEY:** The public consultation phase I would expect possibly would be completed before Christmas and then in the first half of next year we would be able to develop appropriate policies for the allocation system. The current timetable calls for some action to be completed by the end of this year—1998. As I said, the authorisation that has been proposed calls for further action before the end of 1999.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I can see where the honourable member is coming from. He needs a very detailed response. Could I suggest that we put that question on notice and that we give you a far more detailed response in writing.

**Mr WELLINGTON:** Thank you, Minister.

**The CHAIRMAN:** On page 19, paragraph 7 of the MPS, you mention enhancing fisheries management and resource protection by the introduction of the Vessel Monitoring Systems into the trawl sector. What benefits, if any, will the VMS bring to the management of the fishing fleet?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Quite simply, VMS is Queensland's own eye in the sky to protect and police Queensland's fishing fleet. That is the answer in a nutshell. In a more detailed response—and this is an initiative that was commenced by the previous Government—in 1997-98, \$3.15m was allocated to

enable Vessel Monitoring Systems which, of course, is the VMS, to be implemented into sectors of the Queensland commercial fishing fleet. An amount of \$1.14m was specifically allocated for 1997-98 and \$1.06m for 1998-99.

A Vessel Monitoring Systems steering committee, with the Department of Primary Industries, the Queensland Fisheries Management Authority, and industry membership was formed to provide advice on implementation. The Fisheries Act 1994 has been amended to enable Vessel Monitoring Systems to be utilised. As of 1 September 1998, all trawlers retaining saucer scallops must have Vessel Monitoring Systems installed. Of course, we are into October now and we are going into our next phase, our next set of trawlers. A total of 360 vessels are now utilising Vessel Monitoring Systems.

There are advantages to the Government in improved compliance and better fisheries management and, for industry, marine safety, communication and marketing opportunities through the adoption of Vessel Monitoring Systems. The Queensland Vessel Monitoring Systems funding package is very generous. I would like to inform the Chairman that the Queensland Government offers a \$1,000 rebate to each vessel installing a VMS and, in case of hardships, it goes up to \$2,000. The cost of the actual VMS unit is around about \$4,200. So that is a considerable saving.

I would like to inform the Committee that, up until now, the scallop fleet with their VMSs provided have been acting very responsibly. They have not entered the replenishment zones—well, not all; there are always one or two who cause a problem, but I will not go into that.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, Minister. Back to Mr Cooper.

**Mr COOPER:** Minister, I have noted that your Government has maintained the coalition Government's policy on the transfer of assets in relation to bulk sugar terminal assets.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Yes.

**Mr COOPER:** I note that your department is progressing that transfer, and we are pleased to hear it. Are you going to maintain the previous Government's commitment to waive stamp duty on that transfer?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** This is not going to be a non-answer, but the waiving of stamp duties is a responsibility of Treasury. I will come back to that later on.

In response to the honourable member's general question, the sugar industry has established a Bulk Sugar Terminal Management Group as the forerunner to the industry company Sugar Terminals Limited that will own and manage Queensland's bulk sugar terminals. The management group has an important role in developing and implementing the company structure, including the share entitlements of industry participants. A reconstituted bulk sugar terminal task force has been established to finalise some processes for use in the negotiation of terminal transfers and perpetual lease arrangements between the industry company and port authorities on a port-

by-port basis. The task force will develop a dispute resolution mechanism for resolving any disputes that may arise during negotiations between port entities and sugar industry stakeholders, and facilitate the resolution of any disputes. The task force will include representatives from the sugar industry and port authorities as well as the Treasury and Transport Departments. The Director-General of the Department of Primary Industries is the Chair. You want a detailed response, so could we provide you with further details at a later stage?

**Mr COOPER:** Sure. I just want a yes or no. I refer the Minister to the recent outbreak of sugarcane smut in the Ord River district and to the application of quarantine measures to prevent the spread of this disease to Queensland. That is at page 15 of the MPS under the heading Early Detection, Rapid Response, Back to Business. What measures have been put in place to ensure that the integrity of the quarantine response is not compromised by the movement of tourists, visitors and others through Queensland airports?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The honourable member has raised a very important issue in relation to the outbreak of sugarcane smut in Western Australia. When I was alerted to it by the BSES, I immediately formed a task force, which I chaired, comprising industry representatives, DPI officers and BSES officers. That task force has met on a number of occasions and, I believe, has done extremely well in providing a process and a mechanism under which to work on the sugarcane smut outbreak in Western Australia. Up until now, there has been no evidence of any sugarcane smut being found anywhere in Queensland, which is good news for our industry. However, we have to be very conscious and very vigilant to ensure that if any is detected at all we have provisions in place to quickly overcome it.

The BSES has the responsibility for providing technical services to the Queensland sugar industry. It has an incursion management plan that was used as the basis for a national response to the outbreak at Kununurra. The BSES has worked closely with my department's Animal and Plant Health Service to ensure that appropriate quarantines have been put in place on the movement of plants and equipment from the area in Queensland. I know where the honourable member is coming from.

I will ask Kevin Dunn to give you a more detailed response into the actual protocols and how they have been enforced. It is a very important question and I believe it deserves a detailed answer.

**Mr DUNN:** Following the detection of sugarcane smut in the Ord River in Western Australia, regulations were gazetted quickly under the Plant Protection Act here in Queensland to prevent the entry of sugarcane smut contaminated materials. To give some idea of the details of that, the movement of the causative fungus and the movement of host plants and soil from the Ord was prohibited, as was the movement of large machinery and so on, unless it had been certified as having been inspected and being clean and free of soil and so on from the Ord. Canefield machinery already sold and moved into Queensland was caught up with and inspected.

**Mr COOPER:** Can you clarify whether you are satisfied with quarantine measures at airports in Queensland? Are you satisfied that their integrity is not going to be endangered in any way by tourists, visitors and others using Queensland airports?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I will start and then pass it back to Kevin. This issue of the quarantines was raised with me about a month ago. I was not at all satisfied with the provisions that had been put in place. We discussed them at our sugarcane smut task force meetings. We were assured by BSES that the quarantine provisions are being enforced at the point of entry and the point of departure in Western Australia. As far as the quarantine provisions in Queensland are concerned, I understand that three airports are involved. I will let Kevin explain what protocols have been implemented. To answer your question, I was not at all impressed with the protocols that were put in place. I hope that everything is right now.

**Mr DUNN:** Just to further the detail, included in the quarantine provisions that were brought in in the August gazette was the fact that people entering canefields in the Ord have to wash their clothing and shoes before they come back into Queensland. That awareness has been raised particularly in the Ord, as the Minister has said, by the Western Australian department through signage. The BSES has also been active in introducing some signage in Queensland to create awareness among the travelling public and has talked to tour operators who conduct tours from Queensland to the Ord and back again. Of course, not everyone going to the Ord enters sugarcane land. Nevertheless, those people have also been targeted to increase their awareness. The major risk of introduction would be on sugarcane itself or on machinery that had actually accumulated dust and dirt from sugarcane fields. That is the main thrust for the quarantine measures that have been put in place.

**Mr COOPER:** Turning to page 6, the last paragraph relates to intensive livestock industries. Minister, I refer you to the Ministerial Portfolio Statement regarding the environmental and economic sustainability of intensive livestock industries. I note that there is no reference to any ongoing work into the environmental sustainability of intensive livestock industries in the planned performance for 1998-99. What are your thoughts on environmental management within the peak cattle feedlots, chicken and dairy industries—the intensive industries? Specifically, do you think that those industries are operating on an environmentally sustainable basis?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** That is a very technical question. The department is developing and progressing codes of practice in relation to intensive livestock industries. I will ask Rosemary to continue.

**Dr CLARKSON:** There are two parts to your question. One is about industry environmental codes of practice, and both the dairy industry and the pig industry are working very hard on those. In the pig industry, the environmental code of practice is about setting operational benchmarks for piggeries, and that code of practice is currently being finalised.

We have some very specialist officers trained in this area in the department, and they are working with the Departments of Environment and Heritage, Natural Resources, local government and, of course, representatives from the pig industry to develop the operational criteria that will be the basis of these codes of practice. Currently, DPI has appointed a full-time officer to assist the intensive livestock industries with the development of the codes. The code of practice will provide useful guidance for all piggeries regardless of whether they are traditional small family establishments or the larger corporate enterprises, such as the Danpork 10,000 sow proposal.

The other part to the question concerns using environmental research to turn waste into resources from intensive livestock areas. The focus of the research programs has been to find ways of utilising the waste. The DPI officers are leading the research efforts in the field, particularly in the field of compost manufacture. This uses cattle feedlot manures in combination with sawdust wastes from cypress pine and hardwood sawmills to produce a final product with high soil nutrient value for broadacre farming and horticultural industries.

Research is being targeted at achieving a better understanding of the nutrient value of animal wastes and their utilisation as alternative fertiliser sources. Further research is being conducted into current animal waste utilisation practices to determine whether there are adequate levels of monitoring to detect any potential downstream effects.

**Mr COOPER:** Thank you for that. Specifically, does the Minister believe that those industries are operating on an environmentally sustainable basis?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Codes of practice are being developed in a number of those industries. I think the industries recognise and realise that they have to become more environmentally conscious, simply because they are subject to the Environment Protection Act. That is a very important point to note. The code of practice for the pig industry is about to be released for public consultation. Upon completion of the process, the Minister for Environment and Heritage will be asked to approve the code, which will then basically make the code provide the guidelines to the Act. By developing these codes it will help the industry comply with the Environmental Protection Act, which is a very important point in our ever-changing world, where our producers have to be adaptable and the environment is a big issue. It will become a bigger issue, and to that end, with the development of our codes of practices in different industries, I believe that our industries will be able to progress.

**Mr COOPER:** I turn to the wool industry, which is mentioned on page 8 of the MPS. I refer to the Sheep and Wool Institute's planned performance in identifying and evaluating alternative enterprises and opportunities. Can you expand on the types of enterprise opportunities to be investigated and also the future as you see it for the traditional wool growing areas of Queensland?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The wool industry appears to be contracting further south from some of its more

traditional growing areas around Winton. The wool producers there are being taken over by cattle producers simply because of their proximity to the port of Karumba, which is used for live cattle exports. I believe that the hub of wool producers in Queensland is now around Cunnamulla. The department has projects to assist our wool producers to make the best of the market for Queensland wool by producing a clean product with minimum chemical residues. And, of course, a second sniffer dog is being trained to work in precisely this area. We also intend to help the producers by reducing costs of production wherever possible and by assisting producers to minimise risk in selling their wool. The DPI Sheep and Wool Institute is a partner with the Woolmark company in facilitating groups of producers to help themselves cope with the depression in the wool industry. Fourteen groups have been approved and their members are examining their operations with the assistance of institute staff.

An initiative to assist western communities to diversify their economic base has been the appointment of a goat industry development officer at Charleville and support for the establishment of a goat producers cooperative. Positive changes have been made to management and staffing arrangements to better meet the expressed needs of industry through institute work, which has been rearranged into eight project areas focused on serving industry and Government needs. I firmly believe that we as a department and as a Government should be working as best we can to assist our wool producers in exploring new markets.

As the honourable member would know, we both attended the wool summit at Roma. There was a great desire there by the producers to explore new markets for their wool. Of course, an area that we can look at is Eastern Europe, where tariffs have been removed on the import of wool in some of those countries.

**Mr COOPER:** I turn to the issue of horticulture and water. I note that page 9 of the MPS refers to your department's support of horticultural export growth via technical expertise services and resources. I believe that the subprogram will be of immense value to the horticultural industry. During my recent tour through the Lockyer and up to Mundubbera in the central Burnett, the resounding message from producers was that what they need to help them expand their export potential is water. I know that is not under your portfolio; it is under the area of resources. Do you concur with the industry that a lack of reliable water is the major constraint to export growth? What role do you see your department having in response to the need for a reliable and an additional water supply?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** This is a very important question, simply because water will become the most important and precious commodity in the world in the next century. The provision of water in Queensland to our industries, because of our variable climates, is of paramount importance. To that end, the Queensland Centre for Climate Control is doing and will be able to do a great deal to assist our producers

in being able to predict and forecast rainfalls to a pretty good level. That has occurred already, but it is in a different industry.

**Mr COOPER:** What about the issue of, say, piping water to dams and the provision of assistance?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Although the provision of water is the Department of Natural Resource's responsibility, I have my own personal view.

**Mr COOPER:** Do you support the need for reliable water supplies?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I do support the need for reliable water supplies, but I believe that we should be smart about the way that we manage our water and the way that we provide our water to our producers. For example, I refer to using drip irrigation and having closed channels instead of open channels. Once you close a channel, you save about 15% of your water. That is a heck of a lot when you talk about the horticultural industry. Yes, I fully support industry's call for water, but I do believe in managing water. If we can arrive at that, I think our horticultural industry will be doing very well. Dr Warren Hoey would like to add to that as well.

**Dr HOEY:** Can I just supplement the answer by saying that the department has been working with officers in other departments, including Natural Resources, to look at ways of improving the efficiency of irrigation. Those negotiations have been taking place over the last year or so and it is hoped to bring that forward as a funding submission because we realise the gains out of that for farmers of all persuasions using irrigation are quite enormous.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Back to questions on this side.

**Mr WELLINGTON:** I refer the Minister to page 5 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements and ask: why is there a drop in full-time staffing levels by 65 if this Government's policy is jobs, jobs, jobs? I realise that one is actual figures and the other one is estimated figures.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The honourable member has asked a very important question. This Government has been in Government for three months. When we discuss reduction of staffing or perceived reduction of staffing, I believe we need a more detailed answer and I might refer that to Greg.

**Mr SHAKHOVSKOY:** There is a predicted reduction in staffing numbers over the year. When you look at the breakdown of that, you will find that the major reduction there relates to two areas. The first area is in our Animal and Plant Health Service area, and that relates to a reduction of some 57 staff primarily related to the eradication of the papaya fruit fly. So you find that is one of the areas. The other smaller reduction of some 10 staff is in our corporate performance area, and that is related to the introduction of the new computer system for both our finance and human resources areas. So whilst there is a reduction, they are reductions both in the corporate area and in the papaya fruit fly eradication.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I think you can see from that answer that the question you have raised, of

course, is a legitimate one. However, if you recall my answer to the papaya fruit fly question, the program has been wound down a year ahead. There are 57 staff who are no longer required because the program has been wound down. It is similar with the reduction of staff in the corporate performance area that Greg mentioned. It basically lets me reinforce the point that this Government is not about staff reductions within the DPI; this Government is about maintaining funding in the DPI so that the DPI can maintain its role out there as being a benefit to our primary producers in Queensland.

**Mr WELLINGTON:** I refer the Minister to page 6 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements and ask: with strawberry production being an integral industry in my electorate of Nicklin, why is only 30% of strawberry production using sophisticated integrated management of mite pests and what steps are being taken to improve the situation, especially along the Sunshine Coast?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The honourable member has raised a very interesting issue in relation to strawberry mites. I will just respond briefly and then I will pass it on for a more technical answer to Rosemary Clarkson. The Victorian Department of Agriculture listed strawberries as a Queensland fruit fly host some 18 months ago. To meet the requirement to export strawberries to Victoria, growers are now required to be accredited and to spray the strawberry crops with the insecticide Rogor to control QFF. This insecticide also kills predator mites, which are an important part of the integrated pest management strategy used for mite management. Hence, growers are returning to the use of miticides for the control of mites in strawberries. There are mixed results in controlling mites with miticides as mites can quickly become resistant after two to three seasons of regular use. Excessive use can speed up mite resistance in some growers who started spraying too early. I understand where you are coming from now. I would like to ask Rosemary Clarkson to give a more detailed response to your question.

**Dr CLARKSON:** One of the problems I think is the timing of the use of miticides. The mites very quickly become resistant to miticides. One of the problems is timing and, if the producers spray at the wrong time, in fact it builds resistance and increases the problem. The staff of the Horticultural Institute are working very hard to put out information packs to help producers to manage the problem. I think one of the other problems is that, while mites are a problem in strawberry production in Queensland, most producers do not see them as the most important problem. I really cannot give you much more technical information than that. If you would like more information, I could take the question on notice and get more information.

**Mr WELLINGTON:** I would appreciate that.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** In conclusion, the Queensland Horticultural Institute is also conducting research to find alternative ways to control QFF in strawberries to reduce the need to use miticides and to again establish predator mites within the integrated pest management strategy. You have just

reminded me. I visited the QHI during our Cabinet meeting in Nambour and actually saw the scientists there working on this program. I thought I might let you know that.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** In paragraph 4 of page 9 of the MPS, mention is made of the plant breeding research being done in the department. What new crop varieties have been released to Queensland producers?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** DPI plant improvement programs continue to be productive, with new varieties released during the year or being prepared for release. These programs cost \$7.3m per year to run, made up of \$1.85m from base funds and \$5.45m from industry funds such as the Grains Research Development Council. Twelve sorghum breeding lines with superior yield and sorghum midge resistance have been released to industry breeding programs. The barley variety Lindwall has been released and is in the final stage of gaining commercial approval as a malting variety.

Two new high yielding disease resistant wheat varieties have been prepared. As a matter of fact, I announced their release in Toowoomba yesterday. One is the Kennedy variety and the other is called Baxter—both named after Australian explorers. Both have been very well received by grain growers in Toowoomba. There seems to be more keenness in the Kennedy variety than the Baxter variety simply because I think the Baxter variety has a higher yield and will be far better for the hot bread bakeries, whereas the Kennedy variety is more resistant to disease. A new high quality navy bean variety has also been prepared for release later on. One superior maize variety was released for north Queensland producers and two varieties of chick peas were released in conjunction with New South Wales agriculture.

Could I also add that the Farming Systems Institute, which was responsible for the two new wheat varieties, needs to be commended for its work. It takes between 10 and 12 years to develop a new variety. New techniques are being introduced into the Farming Systems Institute through biotechnology, which could reduce the time taken to develop these varieties by anything between four and five years, which is very good news for our grain growers in Queensland. I think I have pretty well summed up that response. In conclusion, it was a privilege and an honour to be up in Toowoomba yesterday to launch these two new varieties. I was very pleased with the reception that I received from the Farming Systems Institute, including the chair, Lyn Brazil.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I refer you to paragraph 2 on page 6. You mention research and development services in the department and delivering leading technologies. What is the department doing to ensure quality research and to enhance rural research, development and extension?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I gather the question is based on the Labor Party initiative of establishing a rural science organisation. Scientific and technological innovation underpins the success and competitiveness of many of Queensland's primary

industries, which have a major influence on growth and employment in rural and regional Queensland. The Department of Primary Industries, as part of the Labor Government's new initiative, will establish a world-class organisation to promote scientific excellence in research, development and extension services for Queensland's primary industries.

The department's rural science organisation, Concept, will coordinate primary industries based research, development and extension through a high profile, internationally renowned chief scientist in partnership with industry, universities and other research organisations. Improved Statewide coordination of primary industries research, development and extension will assist technological innovation and long-term job opportunities for the rural sector.

**Dr HOEY:** The department's investment in research and development is heading up towards \$100m a year. The idea of having a rural science organisation headed by a chief scientist is, at the highest level, to keep an eye on that investment to make sure that the development of our research, development and extension expertise is world class, to look at obvious linkages between the department and other research and extension providers, such as universities and CSIRO, and look for obvious opportunities, and to make some recommendations to the organisation on how best it can move forward.

It is an increasingly competitive world. The replacement of infrastructure and people is a very expensive exercise, and quite often the best way to do it is to look for collaboration between like organisations rather than at competition. We will be competing using our strengths, which are in the applied R&D area. That is quite attractive to other organisations, such as universities and CSIRO. So the chief scientist and the rural science organisation will assist in bringing those relationships together with the aim of improving the outputs and the outcomes for Queensland primary industries.

**Mr WELLINGTON:** I refer the Minister to page 10 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements. With the importance of research and development, why has this department allowed the percentage of funding of research projects from external sources to remain static at 42%?

**Dr HOEY:** As the honourable member would be aware, a lot of the dollars for external funds come through the R&D corporations. Those dollars come from a levy on production from the various industries. I think in a number of industries—the wool industry is a particularly good example—the amount of money that has been coming into those R&D corporations has been much less. That is the case in wool and in beef. Therefore, the competition for those R&D dollars is that much higher. While we like to think of ourselves as being world class, when you get a decline in the industry you do not necessarily get a decline in the amount of competition across Australia. I think that is one of the reasons.

I think that has forced the organisation to look at other sources of funding, for example, forming partnerships and arrangements with the private

sector in the interests of trying to commercialise R&D. It is also a reminder that it is a very competitive world and we need to be in there looking at a range of other sources that are not necessarily traditional to us.

**Dr CLARKSON:** I am not sure I can add much more detail. As Warren said, many of the research and development corporations are suffering losses in industry levies and therefore in total funds, and the funds available have been reduced. The changes in all the institutional arrangements for the meat industry have seen a major loss, and we are expecting a considerable loss from the Tobacco Research and Development Corporation.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** It is very difficult to explain why there is a reduction of 7% there, but it could be attributed to a downturn in the economy, with research and development centres that normally supply funds to the DPI not being in a position to actually supply the funds that have been required. That could be part of the reason there has been a reduction in that area. Once again, if you give us a chance to have a good look at it, we can reply to you by letter or let the Committee know.

**Mr WELLINGTON:** I am happy with the explanation. I refer you to page 16 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements and in particular the table marked Key Performance Information. With regard to meeting national and international chemical residue standards, the number of high risk residue properties to be audited has dropped from an estimated 650 in 1997-98 to a low 200 in 1998-99. Note 3 on page 16 does not explain why the change to the National Organochlorine Management Program has reduced the number of properties involved.

**Mr DUNN:** The table does indicate the reduced number of properties that do have to be audited under the National Organochlorine Management Program. That program is the initiative of the cattle industry and it is contributed to by the cattle industry and the Government on a shared basis. The program began formally two or three years ago, in response to the organochlorine residues issues that hit the cattle industry back in 1987 and, more recently, in the early part of the 1990s. The program was a very forward-looking one, to better position the cattle industry in relation to the environmental residues of organochlorines that exist on areas of land that were treated with organochlorines for agricultural purposes or for timber preservation purposes many years ago.

As the Organochlorine Management Program has progressed, there have been refinements made in terms of the audit requirements under that program. The success of the program has led to a reduction in the number of properties that do have to be audited on a regular basis to ensure that their property management programs, to control any hot spots or organochlorine residue in the soil or in the timber and so on, have been fully looked after. The confidence gained by the success of the program, based on past audits, has enabled the reduction in the number of audits at this stage. That is the explanation.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** That reduction is proof that the audits are becoming much more efficient, which is probably good news.

Sitting suspended from 10 a.m. to 10.16 a.m.

**The CHAIRMAN:** We are back to questions from non-Government members.

**Mr COOPER:** I refer to my previous question about horticulture, water and the lack of a reliable supply being a major constraint to export growth. I take on board the director-general's comments relative to working cooperatively with the DNR. In that I wish you well. But I would like to know your views as far as this trend towards full user pays for water supplies. Recommendations and so on are coming through from COAG, the Council of Australian Governments. I would really like to know, from your perspective, what role you and your department are playing in developing a fairer water policy through COAG.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** We are bound by COAG irrespective of how we feel. But to give you a more detailed response to that question, I will call on Peter Neville.

**Mr NEVILLE:** We are bound by COAG agreements. Governments of various persuasions have signed onto that. However, more recently, at the ARMCANZ—the Agricultural Ministers meeting in Broome—there were some decisions taken to revisit some of the interpretations, I guess, which some States are putting on the COAG agenda in terms of the definitions of what should or should not be included in terms of full cost recovery and pricing of water. All that means, I guess, is that we are of the view at the moment that we need to go back to the Commonwealth and to go back, ultimately, to COAG in order to seek some clarification on two things. One is the time frame for the legitimate introduction of some of those new initiatives about water pricing, water tradeability, etc. So it is a timetable thing. But also, more importantly, it is the interpretation that some States are placing on it that other States do not necessarily agree with. And when you do define full cost recovery, these are things that determine to what extent you go back in history, if you like, and attempt to cost recover for some of the assets and infrastructure which have been paid for previously. It is an issue that is very much on the go and an issue that we are still very much debating and will continue right up to the COAG level.

**Mr COOPER:** Are you prepared to give a view yourself as far as the trend or the concept of full user pays for water?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** It is not really my position to give personal views to this Committee. We are here to discuss Estimates. Suffice it to say that, in answer to your previous question, I think that I have certainly put on record my position in relation to water and the importance of water to our industry in Queensland.

**Mr COOPER:** I am in a different position, so I can give a personal view. My personal view is that it is grossly unfair for any primary producer to be subject to full user pays because of the value adding to water. I do not think there is any greater

productive area than the agricultural industry as far as getting value for water—be it through exports, production, jobs and everything else. I just ask you to keep that well and truly in mind.

As to animal and plant health—I note on page 15 that the Queensland Animal Health Council will be developing recommendations for priorities, such as developing a funding base for compensation for animal health surveillance. I was wondering whether you can expand on that particular initiative. And how do you envisage any compensation would be applied?

**Mr DUNN:** The Queensland Animal Health Council was instituted in January of this calendar year. As the honourable member points out, one of its issues is to look at the funding base. This is an area that is not solely unique to Queensland. This is happening at the national level across all States. That is being championed by the Australian Animal Health Council, which is a joint partnership of Federal and State Governments and peak bodies of all the livestock industries. There is recognition that, particularly in relation to animal health, in the management of disease outbreaks involving some severe endemic diseases, such as John's disease, which is a chronic debilitating disease of cattle and sheep in southern States, and exotic disease outbreaks it is the individual producers who are impacted upon and who, for the good of the wider industry and the country generally, may lose their production and their herds who are not adequately compensated under the current arrangements.

The Queensland Animal Health Council is looking specifically at this issue at the State level. It is recognised that, where there is seen to be any need to commit industry funds at the State level into compensation measures, industry is currently hampered by the unavailability in legislation of a State levy mechanism. This is one of the issues that is being looked at by the Queensland Animal Health Council, as well as several other potential options to enable industry to consider the best way forward to generate industry funds which, in future, might be contributed towards such compensation schemes to help individual members of industry who are disadvantaged by disease outbreaks.

**Mr COOPER:** Do you have any intention of establishing a plant health council along the same lines?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I will pass that question over to Dr Hoey.

**Dr HOEY:** At the moment there are no plans to establish a Queensland plant health council, although I head up a SCARM subcommittee—SCARM being the Standing Committee for Agricultural and Resource Management across Australia—in setting up an Australian plant health council modelled on the Australian Animal Health Council, hopefully. We are working closely with the industries, which are far more diverse in the plant health area than they are in the animal health area.

It is our intention at this stage to have something operational at a Commonwealth level by 1 January 2000. That means that there might be some

flow-on to the States after that period. But it is a major task because of the diversity of those industries that have an interest in plant health. Some of them do not even have organisations that you can actually contact to ask, "What are your needs and how can we best meet them in a plant health way?" It is covering a very wide range of issues, particularly incursion management, but a lot of other areas as well. It is an issue that we will be watching. Our focus is on getting an Australiawide mechanism up in which we will be a major partner. Then we will have a look at the State's needs.

**Mr COOPER:** So you will come to that?

**Dr HOEY:** We will come to that.

**Mr COOPER:** I refer to page 15 and draw your attention to the issue of cattle tick control and eradication with particular attention to the Crows Nest district where cattlemen have been attempting to deal with that problem for a considerable period. That goes back to at least February 1997. You are the third Minister since then. There does seem to be confusion and definitely frustration for cattlemen along that tick line. They want to do their job. They are the ones holding the line for the rest of the industry. There is no question that they need some assistance, whether it be in the form of a tickicide subsidy or something else. I ask you to give this matter your consideration now. I know it has been brought to your attention previously.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I understand the problem that you have there. You have problems with straying cattle, deer and dairy cattle that cause a problem. Let me give you this commitment at this Committee hearing today. I will request the Tick Eradication Implementation Committee to provide me with a report. I will ask them also to have extensive consultation with the people within your electorate. After being given the recommendations, I will assure you that I will attempt to address the longer-term problem of repeated tick outbreaks in your Crows Nest area.

**Mr COOPER:** I appreciate that and the cattlemen will appreciate that. As you said, the problem involves feral deer and has existed for a long time.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I do not think the DPI has been able to establish what is the problem, but there are a number of issues there.

**Mr COOPER:** There are, and I take your offer on board. In relation to getting a report, I think you will find that the information is pretty well available; therefore, we will not have to wait too much longer to develop an action plan. Once the cattlemen have an action plan, they will feel a lot more comfortable about it.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** We will need some more consultation with the cattlemen concerned. You have that commitment now.

**Mr COOPER:** In relation to forest production, I refer to paragraph 6 on page 9 regarding the continued development of priority actions for the forestry industry strategy and the linking of those as appropriate with the Regional Forest Agreement

process. I ask the Minister to expand on the goals of that strategy and how they will relate to the RFA process.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Once again you refer to a very interesting issue within the portfolio of the Department of Primary Industries, that is, the RFA process. The Department of Natural Resources is the lead agency for the RFA process in Queensland. It also has the overall budget responsibility. It is currently coordinating regional assessments as a basis for developing a Regional Forest Agreement for the future management of Crown native forests in south-east Queensland. An Interim Forest Management Agreement has been signed by Queensland and the Commonwealth Governments pending the finalisation of a Regional Forest Agreement for south-east Queensland in line with Government policy. DPI Forestry is maintaining timber supplies to affected native forest sawmillers while the IFMA applies. Alan, would you like to expand on that, please?

**Mr HARVEY:** The Queensland Forest and Timber Industry Strategy has been going on for the last 12 to 18 months in concert with the industry. It is an industry-driven strategy. The industry has developed a background discussion paper, which hopefully will be the basis for developing up formal strategies for the industry. The Chair of that committee is Mr Warren Hyne of Maryborough. At this point, the Government has committed, through the DPI, a further \$126,000 for progressing that strategy in 1998-99. The linkage to the Regional Forest Agreement process, as the Minister has indicated, is something of vital interest to industry. They have indicated that they would like key elements in terms of resource security, which are reflected in the Forest Industry Strategy, as one outcome of the Regional Forest Agreement process. The current timetable for that Regional Forest Agreement in south-east Queensland is completion at the end of 1998, but it may extend into the early part of 1999. In terms of the impacts on industry, it is well recognised that that issue needs to be taken on board both in terms of the Forest Industry Strategy and the Regional Forest Agreement process.

**Mr COOPER:** I refer the Minister to Budget Paper No. 2, page 124. An allocation of \$11m has been made over four years to provide assistance to the forest industry for structural adjustment costs relating to the implementation of the RFA in south-east Queensland. Why has that allocation been cut from \$12m over four years under the coalition Budget plans down to \$11m? What plans are there for the extra funds required to see the RFA process concluded? You are going to be short.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I think I might ask Alan to respond to that again. I hope they were not rubbery figures that we had previously. We will find out shortly.

**Mr COOPER:** You will be short of \$1m.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Press releases are different from commitments.

**Mr HARVEY:** I would have to take that on notice. My understanding of the figures is as per our

current estimate in the 1998-99 budget. I am not aware of the other number referred to.

**Mr COOPER:** That suits me. In paragraph 2 on page 31 there is a reference to the DPI Forestry review of management options to increase supplies of exotic pine. Is that review still on target for completion in 1998? When do you anticipate calling for expressions of interest in the purchase of uncommitted resource from Gympie and Maryborough plantations?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I will let Alan answer that question again.

**Mr HARVEY:** The review in relation to the south-east Queensland exotic resource has been ongoing for some time. One of the critical elements of that review is our ability to look at the current industry structure and map that into what we require for the industry in the future and also to look at the long-term resource arrangements under which the industry receives current plantation timbers. Those agreements are 20-year agreements that are due to expire somewhere between the period 2002 and 2004. We need to take on board what we will do in terms of roll over or otherwise of those agreements to industry beyond that period. That strategic review is looking at issues associated with those long-term agreements as well as mapping out the future ramp up that industry is seeking to enable its future competitiveness on an international scale in terms of its continued operations here in this State. We are currently on track to consult with industry on those issues before the year is out. We would expect that either in the latter part of this year or the early part of 1999 we would proceed with the expression of interest or advertising for purchase of additional uncommitted resource in that plantation estate in south-east Queensland.

**Mr COOPER:** Obviously that means Gympie and Maryborough.

**Mr HARVEY:** It covers the region between Gympie and Maryborough and down to just north of Brisbane.

**Mr COOPER:** I will come back to fishing. I know that the Minister has been asked already about the Vessel Monitoring Systems. I refer to page 20 of the MPS, and ask: does the Minister have any intentions of further enhancing fisheries management and resource protection by continuing the coalition's very successful commercial licence buyback scheme for areas under heavy fishing pressure?

**Mr POLLOCK:** As part of the first initiative, we spent a fair bit of time working with the fishing industry to develop a longer-term view as to how ongoing adjustment would be carried out. As you would appreciate, the initial \$4m was not going to make a big difference to the total number of licences in the industry. However, that did occur and it was carried out quite successfully.

The longer-term plan is for the industry itself to build in adjustment arrangements where they would co-contribute through a levy system to ongoing adjustment. To date, we have one management plan in place, which is in the Gulf of Carpentaria. The industry has agreed to levy themselves in the order

of \$1,000 a year to contribute to a buyback scheme. We have money in the department to at least match the amount of money that the gulf fishing sector will generate. As far as future arrangements are concerned, it depends on two things: one is what the industry itself wants to do as far as adjustment is concerned; and two, how much money the Budget process can deliver in out years. At this stage we have covered the only one that is on the books.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Mr Cooper, do you want to ask one more question on this area while this gentleman is here or do you want to come back to it later in the next section?

**Mr COOPER:** I am happy to ask a further question now. Under the planned performance for the Fisheries Program in 1998-99, which is on page 21 of the MPS, I know the department's goals of increased aquaculture enterprise productivity and profitability via production, research and development and enhanced fish health services and licensing systems. However, I say that in many areas potential aquaculture producers have major problems in gaining site and project approval. What work are you and your department intending for 1998-99 to streamline the approval process within the DPI and other relevant agencies?

**Mr POLLOCK:** A couple of issues impact on this. One is the effect of the Integrated Planning Act, because approval processes for aquaculture will by and large be overtaken by the provisions of the IPA. However, notwithstanding that, we did initiate a review of licensing arrangements last year, which has been completed. In fact, some of the steps that have been taken have reduced licence approval times by two or three weeks, I think it is, in about an 11-week period. So that has been quite significant.

As far as site selection is concerned, that is both offshore and onshore, we are working with the Department of Environment and Heritage to look at the cage-culture type of operations, which are new. So it would be on an experimental basis to identify suitable sites from an environmental and production capacity angle. Onshore, we are working with the local authorities around Cooloola, I think one of them is, but more importantly between Townsville and Bowen/Mackay. We have a series of projects working there, which will work with them to identify the most suitable sites and then the performance requirements that attach to those sites for aquaculture development to proceed.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you. We will now move on to Government members' questions. Referring to page 7, paragraph 3 of the MPS, the department has supported the development of the live cattle export industry. With the severe reduction in the number of live cattle that are being exported to South-East Asia, what is your department doing to assist the future development of the live cattle industry in Queensland?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Staff from the department of DPI are working closely with live cattle exporters and beef producers to service existing South-East Asian markets and to develop alternative markets in Egypt, Libya, Mexico and China. The northern livestock exporters working group, with

representatives from Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia, is coordinating development initiatives. I understand that I will be chairing that group in Queensland towards the end of this year.

Earlier this year, a delegation involving DPI staff, a beef producer and a live cattle exporter visited Egypt and China to investigate live cattle and beef market opportunities for Queensland. Shipments of live cattle into Egypt have begun. DPI staff have worked closely with the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service and the China animal and plant quarantine to modify import protocols so that live cattle from northern Australia can be imported into China. The Livestock Export Advisory Committee is assisting the live exports industry to develop solutions and is advising me on key issues.

The Queensland Beef Industry Institute has a \$700,000 program of research development and extension in the live cattle export area and plans support for a major feedlot and abattoir project in Foshan, China, which will source Queensland cattle. I think that the Committee would realise that that initiative had already been announced by the Queensland Premier before he did visit the Foshan province in China. My understanding is that things are going along to schedule.

In relation to my livestock export advisory committee—they have produced a worthwhile report on the future of the port of Karumba and the need for additional holding yards. To that end, I spent a couple of days with the chair of that committee, Don Heatley, and also a representative from the meat workers union. We had a very good two days speaking with cattle producers and inspecting possible sites and also speaking with live cattle exporters. I think it was a trip that was beneficial to all and it certainly gave all the people who did accompany me on the trip a far better understanding of the importance of live cattle exports for our Queensland economy.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** According to page 2, paragraph 5, of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements, new initiative funding has been provided for Northwatch. Can you outline how much funding has been allocated to Northwatch and what this will deliver?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Northwatch is a very, very important program for our Queensland primary production. Our Government has approved the allocation of \$1.07m for 1998-99 to the Northwatch Program. It is a new initiative and it will enhance the protection of agricultural industries from pest and disease incursions from the more remote areas of Queensland, including the Cape York Peninsula and the Torres Strait islands. There is a long and growing list of pests and diseases that pose serious risk to trade and also to the economy of Queensland in close proximity to our northern remote areas. Some have recently entered the Torres Strait and/or Cape York Peninsula area. Of course, I refer you to the question that you asked about the papaya fruit fly at the beginning of our deliberations on the Estimates.

There are four key strategies within Northwatch. These are an enhanced surveillance

system to improve DPI's capacity for the early detection of incursions of exotic animals and plant pests and diseases into the remote areas of north Queensland—which, of course, is our monitoring surveillance section. In our response activities, there will be an enhanced capacity to initiate a rapid and effective response to incursions of exotic animal and plant pests and diseases into north Queensland, including Cape York and the Torres Strait islands. The development of contingency plans and control strategies will be a feature. Preparedness education aims to increase the awareness of the threat of exotic pests and diseases in the northern areas of Queensland among tourists and residents in the region. At the Coen Inspection and Information Centre, a traffic inspection and information point near Coen has been established to enforce quarantine restrictions and increase awareness. I would like to inform the Committee that when I was in Opposition, I inspected the Coen Inspection and Information Centre and found it doing a mighty good job.

I continue by informing the Committee that the improved community awareness and education program is vital to increase the understanding of target pests and diseases in both the Cape York Peninsula and the agricultural and horticultural production areas of north Queensland. Extension material will also be produced and circulated to increase public quarantine awareness in the area. This strategy will strengthen the informal community-based early warning system against pest and disease incursions. The Coen Inspection and Information Centre, as well as having a vital regulatory function on the movement of animal and plant material, will provide an outlet for educational material explaining the need for enhanced pest and disease surveillance in Cape York Peninsula. Northwatch activities will work in conjunction with AQIS.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** At page 26, paragraph 4, you make reference to new market opportunities. Could you outline what the Department of Primary Industries is doing to develop new markets for Queensland's rural products?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I think this is a follow-up to the question that was asked by the honourable member for Crows Nest. To expand on the question that I gave to the honourable member, we are all aware of the economic and financial problems being experienced by several of our Asian trading partners. The downturn of those economies has had a considerable impact on some of Queensland's key exports, although the extent of the impact varies depending on the country and the product combination. There is no doubt that Queensland should have a balanced portfolio of export markets, and I have directed my department to examine and develop opportunities in new markets, many of which were mentioned in the previous answer.

More specifically, the Rural Market Development Unit in my department is currently working to identify those real opportunities, after which it will work with potential exporters to gain an increased access to those markets. To date, the Rural Market Development Unit has completed an analysis of the European Union's common agriculture

policy. The analysis identifies niche markets for Queensland's rural products in Europe. I believe that there is also enormous potential to develop trade in the Middle East. The DPI is assisting industry to focus on Queensland products that have a long-term supply capability and that will be competitive.

Rapid development in China also offers immense opportunities. Under the auspices of the Queensland/Shanghai sister-State agreement, the DPI is examining the feasibility of potential joint venture projects in Shanghai. The Shanghai provincial government and the central Government in Beijing strongly support project alliances between Queensland and Shanghai.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Picking up on a couple of issues that have been raised before, on page 6, paragraph 4, of the MPS, among other things you mention the development of new approaches to estimating piggery waste production. What is the Government doing to ensure that the Queensland pork industry takes advantage of the current high demand for Australian pork exports?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The Chairman's question is of great importance to pig producers in Queensland, especially considering the problems that they have experienced over the past nine months—indeed, probably over the past year—with the import of Canadian pork and the proposal to import Danish pork. I will not dwell on that point, simply because it is not the real answer to the question.

The Australian pork market, of which Queensland is a part, is a domestic market with minimal but increasing imports and exports. The Japanese pork markets now offer major export opportunities as a result of Taiwan, its major supplier, withdrawing due to an outbreak of foot and mouth disease in 1997. Pork export contracts are on offer, but because of limited export standard processing capacity this demand may not be fully satisfied in the short term. However, this situation will change with the combined export accredited slaughter capacity of Danpork and the expanded Darling Downs bacon facility, which is expected to process 1.45 million pigs per year and be operational in the year 2000. Rosemary, would you like to add to that?

**Dr CLARKSON:** It is worth while noting that the pork industry has succeeded in gaining a commitment from the big retailers, Coles and Woolworths, to use Australian product whenever they can. Certainly all the fresh meat used by Coles and Woolworths is Australian product. All packaged pig meat products have to be labelled with the point of origin, so Coles and Woolworths are able to be very sure that any packaged products that they are selling are 100% Australian. The problem for them is with unpackaged product, such as shaved ham. Coles has gone to the lengths of getting all their suppliers to write letters to assure them that it is 100% Australian product. That is about the best that those companies can guarantee. The pig industry is to be congratulated for putting that sort of pressure on those retailers.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Changing tack a little, at the bottom of page 24 of the MPS, under the heading

Business Development Services, you mention that there has been a 30% increase in the demand for the FutureProfit workshops. What are the benefits of the FutureProfit Program to rural producers?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** This issue was raised previously by the honourable member for Crows Nest, but it might be opportune now to expand a little more on the role of our FutureProfit Program to rural producers, simply because it is a very good program. I would like to inform the Committee that the DPI initiated the refocusing of FutureProfit workshops to ensure strong partnerships with industry. Of course, those workshops were designed to meet producers' needs. It has been a quality program and it has led to a strong demand from our primary producers.

It was proposed that there be involvement of 10 groups of six to 10 families in the FutureProfit workshop series. To date, 35 groups are actually participating in the workshop series. In recognition of the popularity and effectiveness of the program, to date the department has committed \$1m in base funding and \$1m in new initiative funding to the FutureProfit Program. In a nutshell, participation in the program helps producers develop a clear picture of their current positions and helps them to set goals to achieve success for their businesses and families. The whole-systems approach of the FutureProfit Program enables farm families to apply strategic planning skills to the social, financial, natural resource and production aspects of farm management.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** Minister, turning to page 25, paragraph 5: how will the Business Strategy Unit serve the priorities of DPI's industry development councils and institute boards?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The Department of Primary Industries has adopted the theme of building for the future to lead the department into the next century, which is not too far away. The Business Strategy Unit in the Rural Industry Business Services Group seeks to strengthen the capacity of Government and industry to build a future that will see the increased and sustained profitability of the rural sector. The BSU will assist Government and industry to achieve this by providing business intelligence systems that deliver user-friendly information on global and local business climates. It will capture, analyse, interpret, present and communicate credible data on the performance of industry, and major trends and issues. With this information, clients—which will include industry development councils, institute boards, rural industry associations, departmental management teams and regional coordination teams—may consider preferred future positions for rural industries and design blueprints for building the necessary policies, strategies and services that will enable Queensland industries to grow towards those positions. The types of information to be provided include trends and significant developments in marketing and trade, economics and finance, technology and the environment, law, Government and politics, which are shaping the future.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** I turn to the issue of surveillance for animal diseases. Paragraph 5 on page

13 of the MPS mentions that a disease surveillance system was implemented across the beef and sheep industries. How will animal health surveillance programs need to be adapted to meet trade demands, particularly with regard to TSE?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Queensland's participation in the high-priced exported markets for livestock and livestock products depends on its animal health status. Trading partners are now requiring quantified animal health information to substantiate claims of freedom from important diseases. The TSEs are important diseases especially with respect to human health. To support the trade of livestock and livestock products to the European Union, Australia must demonstrate freedom from the nervous system diseases bovine BSE, or mad cow disease, and scrapie of sheep. Neither disease occurs in Australia.

We have a \$3.8m animal health surveillance program which is designed to be flexible and react rapidly to meet the animal health information requirements of current and potential markets for livestock and livestock products. The diseases for which surveillance is carried out are regularly reviewed in order to satisfy Queensland and national requirements, the latter being part of the National Animal Health Information System. Freedom from TSE is a requirement for the export of livestock products to the European Union.

I have to re-emphasise that to export into this market Queensland must meet internationally agreed criteria for freedom. This is a national program coordinated by the Australian Animal Health Council and funded by State and Commonwealth Governments and livestock industries. In this first year of the program, Queensland has a target to test brains from 195 cattle and 45 sheep showing signs of nervous disease.

**The CHAIRMAN:** In paragraph 2 on page 14 mention is made of banana black sigatoka. What has the DPI done to protect the production areas of the valuable banana industry from this disease?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** DPI has established a partnership with industry under the auspices of the Banana Industry Protection Board to protect industry from a range of serious pest and disease threats. The board manages a budget of \$1.05m per year, of which \$310,000 will go towards black sigatoka surveillance and control in 1998-99. This employs three inspectors directly and supports several other DPI staff indirectly. I met with a number of those staff and inspectors while I was at Innisfail about a month ago. I think I opened their field day, if I remember correctly.

A contingency plan has been developed to eradicate any outbreaks detected. The most recent outbreak was detected in the remote Pascoe River area. This involved only a small number of plants but involved \$30,000 in additional expenditure for surveillance, which is a fair amount of money. A much larger outbreak was detected near Daintree in 1997 which involved a major eradication campaign and the provision of assistance from industry for the affected growers. The total cost to industry and Government amounted to \$500,000. Black sigatoka susceptible bananas are replaced with resistant varieties to the

extent that 99% of all bananas in Cape York and Torres Strait are now resistant. This slows down the spread from these northern areas to the production areas further south. DPI teams working in the northern areas have established good relationships with local communities. Their work is integrated with the Northwatch Project, which covers all of the major animal and plant pests and diseases in the northern area.

For the benefit of members of the Committee, let me explain to you that black sigatoka is a fungal leaf disease which has devastated banana producing areas overseas. The disease is established in Papua New Guinea but not in Australia. Hence we can all see the need for Northwatch and the program that we have going on at present in relation to this issue.

**The CHAIRMAN:** We will return to questions from non-Government members.

**Mr COOPER:** I wish to continue my line of questioning on aquaculture. I refer to page 3 and the new initiatives under the Agriculture and Industry Development Subprogram. On what basis was the decision taken to increase the allocation for the northern fisheries centre whilst scrapping the \$1m western Queensland freshwater aquaculture initiative aimed at encouraging producers to diversify into freshwater aquaculture in areas where such opportunities have been historically limited—areas that would have benefited from much-needed regional job growth? We recognise the importance of the northern fisheries initiative. Earlier we were speaking about programs for woolgrowers in western Queensland. Had this \$1m program proceeded, it would have provided an ideal opportunity. They were extremely interested in it and it would have gone a long way towards giving them an indication of our willingness to provide assistance in that area. It was a very sensible way to go. I worry that some of the emphasis is on marginal or coastal electorates of the State rather than western Queensland. I do not want western Queensland to be forgotten.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I understand from where you are coming. I can sympathise with the question, especially in relation to the aquaculture proposal for western Queensland. In my own mind, that is still a high priority. However, the department decided that the northern proposal was to be funded this year and, to that end, I will ask John Pollock to explain the reasons why.

**Mr POLLOCK:** The western Queensland aquaculture initiative, as the Minister said, was a matter of priorities. In reaching that decision, recognition was given to the fact that there are two national projects under way that will in part feed into our understanding of inland aquaculture. One of them, the Rural Industry Research and Development Corporation—the RIRDC—has a project nationally to understand the potential for farmer operated integrated aquaculture. That project is in very early days yet, but anything we did would have supplemented or complemented that.

Secondly, the Rural Industry Research and Development Corporation has also just started a project developing a national plan for inland saline aquaculture. Part of the priority setting process that

we advise the Minister on took those two projects into consideration. As the Minister said, we all have an ongoing interest in western Queensland's aquaculture potential. But we were better off waiting for those two projects to get under way before we did anything else.

**Mr COOPER:** I noted the Minister's interest in that aquaculture program in western Queensland. I hope the Minister has a win the next time around. He should not let the bureaucrats beat him every time.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** It was not a case of winning; it was a case of prioritising.

**Mr COOPER:** I turn to rural industry business services. I refer to the Rural Market Development Subprogram on page 26. Again, I am referring to President Clinton's remarks to the National Farmers Union on 15 September, when he indicated very clearly that the US would revive its rural economy through exports. How has your department factored the impact of this into its Rural Market Development Subprogram?

**Dr WHITE:** We have talked previously about strategies to overcome the domination of Americans in international markets. I am not too sure what else I could say to you about that.

**Mr COOPER:** In relation to the Rural Market Development Subprogram, obviously you have to take into account matters that can be foreseen. We now know about the Asian crisis. Someone might have predicted it way back, but we know about it now. With the US making a major push in the area of exports to revive its slumping rural economy—just like everywhere else—it will make a major push into the Rural Market Development Subprogram. How have you factored the impact of what we can expect from the US into that? I take it you have read his remarks?

**Dr WHITE:** No, I have not, but I have a fair idea of where Bill Clinton is coming from because this is not an isolated remark that he has made. I am not too sure of that particular remark there. I guess we need to continue to seek markets. There are a couple of opportunities there in relation to getting better market access for agricultural products to try to remove some of the barriers to trade that are not strictly according to the rules. We are going down that track.

The other thing is gathering intelligence on alternative markets. We have done a fair bit of work evaluating the policies of the UK. To give you an example of some of the things that we do in that particular section, an analysis was done at 4.30 yesterday afternoon, in fact, basically on the potential effect to Australian agriculture if China devalues its currency. So they are the sorts of activities that we do. We do studies of what is happening and then get that information out to primary producers through the industry development councils.

I would see our main role as keeping up to date with what is happening in our markets and providing that information to growers to act upon. One of the things we will be pushing in the very near future is what a change in China's exchange rate will mean to

us. It is going to be quite significant because China is a very important market to us. One of the other things we are looking at also is, as I said, market access.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I might step in there and just complete the answer. Market research has consistently shown that one of the biggest impediments to export was not knowing where to find the export market intelligence needed to access the markets. The DPI has introduced AgrilInfonet to assist Queensland's primary producers to gain easy and affordable access to information about export markets. This initiative based on a computer generated database of contacts, and a commercial intelligence service was developed by the DPI in response to the growing export focus amongst Queensland primary producers and processors. AgrilInfonet provides a network and information service where export inquiries from primary producers are distributed through AgrilInfonet to a variety of information providers and contacts who respond directly to the primary producer client. AgrilInfonet can also provide product and country market snapshots which are specifically tailored to meet the information requirements of exporters or potential exporters.

**Mr COOPER:** I note from the comments that you have made that you are, in fact, endeavouring to factor in matters such as that, which is difficult—that is what I am driving at—and then what initiatives we can take. I do not expect the department to do it all at all, and I do not think anyone else does. I think it is a coordinating thing in partnership with the various producer organisations and so on. We just really wanted to establish that, yes, you are moving in that sort of direction. Again, I can commend you to read that speech because the effect of that is going to hit us next year. I did hear yesterday that the Chinese were not going to devalue this year. That is three months away.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I hope you are right.

**Mr COOPER:** Do not hold me to it. You cannot pick these things.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** You did not say that over a Bible, did you?

**Mr COOPER:** No, sir. With regard to the review that you are doing on State drought policy and the Drought and Rural Adjustment Scheme on page 25, in what areas are you aiming to improve the current arrangements and when do you expect to complete this review?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The review of the drought strategy is ongoing. My understanding is that the review is to be completed by the middle of next year. It is going to be a very, very comprehensive review. I think it is the Operations Review Unit of the department which is undertaking this drought relief review at present. It was initiated in line with a commitment to a broader Queensland drought policy introduced in March 1992. At the time the full review was initiated, it was anticipated that seasonal conditions would have improved sufficiently to make a review of all the DRAS worth while and relevant. However, 9% of this State still remains drought

declared. Consequently, completion of the review at this point would not yield relevant or worthwhile information and may cause confusion amongst producers accessing drought assistance under current arrangements.

As part of the review, discussions were undertaken with regional DPI staff, graziers, representatives of industry organisations and other stakeholders. Feedback from these meetings has been provided to participants. As I said earlier, the full review report has not yet been completed. When completed, it will form part of the input into the review of the Queensland drought policy which has now commenced. My understanding is that it will be completed by this financial year—the middle of next year.

As I have been going around the State I have been talking to as many producers as possible to get their input as to how they believe the drought review should go. I have been listening very carefully to their recommendations and I have had a very wide ranging number of views in different positions coming from different industry groups. I am taking them all on board and I will certainly be trying to do something about that. However, our biggest problem, as you would know now, is rain.

**Mr COOPER:** I think most producers will always be mindful of drought. The next drought is only as far away as the last fall of rain. The idea is, though, to get their views because if it is done based on some sort of technical system and reading it from, say, Canberra which they have done before, primary producers could be in drought for six months before they ever wake up and then you have to bring them out to show them. We should keep on doing what we are doing and going around and seeing for ourselves.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** We had the problem of John Howard going out to John Painter's property two years ago to be actually shown what a drought looks like.

**Mr COOPER:** You have to be there.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** That is right.

**Mr COOPER:** I note that the MPS states on page 26 that the Rural Market Development Unit will assist six horticultural and flower market groups in international marketing and export market development. Your Government did promise prior to the election to support the International Garden Festival. Is this some sort of assistance, do you think, that will compensate for not proceeding with the International Garden Festival?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The decision on the International Garden Festival was made at a different place at a different time. I think you probably know that I cannot discuss issues that have been raised in Cabinet. However, I do not think that that has anything to do at all with the International Garden Festival. These initiatives are there basically to support the industry. To give you a more detailed response, I will ask Peter.

**Dr WHITE:** This is one of a series of activities that we are undertaking within our particular group. We believe that there are a number of potential

exporters out there that are looking for new markets but lack the tools and lack the market intelligence in relation to some of those activities. We have gone right across-the-board—timber, beef and into the horticultural area—to put together information packages for primary producers to assist them to export and bring them together. This happens out in the regions as well. A number of groups have been banding together to get economies of scale for their particular operations. As you know, exporting is an extremely difficult activity to undertake, and I think there is as much collegiate support as professional support from us. That is important to enable it to happen.

This is ongoing work we are doing with and for industry. There are significant markets offshore for nursery, ornamental-type products. The Middle East is a major one and we have some nurseries putting significant product into there. This particular product is highly prized in Asia—significantly more highly prized than it is in Australia. We see some big opportunities there. We see good opportunities to differentiate Queensland products. It is easier to differentiate these sorts of products than perhaps normal fruit and vegetables because we do have some very interesting, unique products. We are getting on with the business of helping primary producers to export.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The future of our producers is export growth. DPI and Government have to get out there with the producers and help them.

**Mr COOPER:** Moving on to corporate performance strategies, page 37, I note that your department intends to resolve the majority of identified problems associated with the millennium bug by July 1999. That means that not all identified problems will be resolved, so what contingency plans are in place to counter the rest of the problems that appear to exist?

**Mr SHAKHOVSKOY:** This is a really large-scale problem that is facing most organisations, as you are aware. DPI is not exempt from that. We have put together a very comprehensive approach to looking at the problems and we are finding, as are most organisations, that you cannot solve all of them. Not only can you not solve all of them, you are not sure what all of them are going to be. So part of the planning is really about contingency.

The organisation has certainly done a fair bit to look at replacing a lot of equipment, replacing computer systems, but it is also looking at contingency plans and it has a range in place. We have addressed the vendors of microchip-controlled equipment and asked them to provide statements of compliance and to advise on action necessary to achieve that compliance. Compliance statements have also been requested from suppliers of critical goods and services, and business systems are being upgraded, modified or replaced as necessary. Those contingency plans are in place. We are confident that we have most things in place. For those things that are not, the contingency plans are in place.

**Mr COOPER:** As you say, we can but wait and see. I ask about the downgrading of the Kingaroy

DPI office accommodation and the replacement of the planned conference centre with "a room for small meetings", in the words of your spokesman in the South Burnett Times. That downgrading was demonstrated pretty clearly just recently when the Australian olive growers had a conference in Kingaroy. They had to use three venues. The balance of the funds provided for that conference centre is about \$1.6m. Will that \$1.6m be allocated to other priority projects in the South Burnett region?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** This project has been very dear to my heart. Kingaroy was one of the first areas I visited. I had lengthy discussions with the mayor and other people within the Kingaroy community. I discussed with them the issue of the new DPI facility at Kingaroy. I was basically told that if the DPI went ahead with this \$2m facility it would then stall the development of a large motel complex that would have its own conference centre. With that in the back of my mind, I came back and thought to myself, "If private enterprise can provide that facility, why should Government be interfering?" Hence the decision to downgrade the proposal to add a conference facility to the DPI office, which is what DPI staff had been after for quite a long time. That is the position I came from. Since then, other statements have been made which contradict that. I will let Terry continue with the more relevant details.

**Mr JOHNSTON:** There is no doubt that accommodation in Kingaroy was a very high priority, and we have been very careful to make sure that the office accommodation part of that project continued, while there was some uncertainty about the need for the larger conference centre. However, at this stage we have provided some additional money for meeting facilities, which we provided at many of our other stations. We find them very adequate and certainly very strongly used by industry groups to have meetings both during and after office hours.

In terms of the money which was previously allocated for that project, the real problem at this stage is that, in the reallocation process associated with the Budget, that money has now gone into other areas. In practice you can say, I guess, that that money went into the heliothis initiative, which was previously unfunded. The department has quite a large capital works program, but at present it has a couple of quite large projects on its plate. There is no suggestion that it is not possible to go ahead with the Kingaroy conference facility at some stage in the future, if in fact the local community were still pushing for that.

**Mr COOPER:** I take it the motel is an approved proposal.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** My understanding is that it was approved at the time of my discussions with the mayor and other people there, but the status of the proposal now is that it has a 50/50 chance of going ahead, even with our support.

**Mr COOPER:** In relation to the necropsy facility at Yeerongpilly, I asked questions concerning health and safety issues and the \$763,000 that was projected to be spent at this centre. Minister, I believe you have previously informed me that you are committed to the continuation of a study

investigating the co-location of the DPI, the University of Queensland and the CSIRO veterinary laboratory services at the site in south-east Queensland. Can you tell me why that \$760,000 is being spent at Yeerongpilly, or are you proceeding with both?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The necropsy facility had to be addressed pretty quickly, because it was basically a workplace health and safety issue. It is as simple as that. My understanding is that the facility is now complete.

**Mr COOPER:** And you will continue with the co-location?

**Dr HOEY:** Discussions with the University of Queensland and CSIRO are continuing. The feasibility study is drawing to a close. In fact, we have a further meeting this afternoon. Recently the Minister met with the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Queensland and one of the senior executives in CSIRO to resolve some of the difficult issues, but we believe there is much to be gained by bringing together the scientific expertise from the university, CSIRO and DPI. Additionally, it saves a lot of dollars in terms of separate reinvestment in expensive laboratory infrastructure.

While doing this, we want to make sure that the department's needs as a provider of quality market assurance and market access information through its animal health laboratories are looked after. At the same time, we believe that we can capitalise on the expertise that is available within other organisations. At the moment, discussions have not been finished and we expect some resolution in the near future.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** But at the end of the day, we should get a world-class facility.

**Mr COOPER:** You are heading in that direction.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time for questions from non-Government members has expired. I will come back to questions from Government members. On page seven of the MPS, the fifth paragraph mentions the Sheep and Wool Institute, which has had just over a year of operation, I believe. In what ways do you consider it has contributed to improving your department's service to the sheep and wool industry, even given that short time?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The depth of partnership between the DPI and the industry is stronger and better than it has ever been through the development of the Sheep and Wool Institute. I saw this myself when I addressed the Wool Summit in Roma on 19 August this year. Communication between the Sheep and Wool Institute and industry's Sheep and Wool Council of Queensland and other industry groups is frequent. It is also positive.

Positive changes have been made to management and staffing arrangements to better meet express needs of industry. That is, institute work has been rearranged into eight project areas focused on serving industry and Government needs. An initiative to assist western communities to diversify their economic base has been the appointment of a Goat Industry Development Officer at Charleville, as I said earlier, and support for the

establishment of a goat producers cooperative. That is basically the response that I would like to give to that question—if that satisfies you.

**The CHAIRMAN:** That is fine.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** I refer to web training. In the second paragraph on page 25, you mention the DPI web site. How does the web training assist the development of a strong information technology capability in regional Queensland?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** This is one of the great initiatives of the DPI. I would like to give credit where credit is due to the DPI staff who have been progressing web training, web nets and so on. It is a great initiative of the department, and it should be fully supported. Under the priorities established by this Government to extend the use of information technology such as the Internet, DPI Web Services is conducting training for primary producers across the State.

The DPI recognises that access to technical, marketing and business information is an essential ingredient in improving the prosperity of rural businesses. Through an investment of \$200,000, which includes the cost of establishing a mobile training room consisting of 12 laptop computers, and time and travel by qualified lecturers, DPI Web Services improves access to information for producers by providing training and actively building the quality and range of information that can be accessed through the DPI's web sites.

The DPI's web training complements the Commonwealth's Networking the Nation initiative through addressing identified shortfalls in information technology skills and services in regional and remote Queensland. Two thousand people from rural and remote areas in Queensland attended DPI web training in the last year; and 2,000 people is a fair number. DPI Web Services also provides a user-friendly DPI web site which provides access to electronically held technical, business and export information on a 24-hour basis seven days a week. The DPI has also formed partnerships in information services and product delivery with industry organisations and other information providers to improve delivery effectiveness. DPI Web Services provides web services for industry partners, such as the Queensland Dairy Authority.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** I refer to the second paragraph on page 6 in relation to molecular biosciences. In this paragraph you say that your department's partnerships are an important element in growing Queensland's primary industries. How will the establishment of the Institute of Molecular Biosciences benefit Queensland agriculture?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** An Institute of Molecular Biosciences will be established within the St Lucia precinct. The institute will be a joint venture between the Queensland Government, the CSIRO and the University of Queensland. This institute will support the development of a local biotechnology industry capitalising on the considerable internationally competitive infrastructure and expertise which exists in south-east Queensland. The Department of Primary Industries recognises the importance of biotechnology for Queensland's agricultural

industries and is keen to support the establishment of the IMB so that framework technologies and critical intellectual property is owned locally and is readily available to Queensland producers.

**Dr CLARKSON:** I think it is important to note that, with this particular institute, the aim is for this to be a seed institute from which new biotechnology companies can be generated. It is not a research institute per se; the aim is for it to be a seeding for some high-tech biotechnology companies to emerge. It is important, I think, to note that the CSIRO and the University of Queensland have signed a letter of intent to put another \$80m into the venture. The Queensland Government has actually retained a consultant to advise on how the Queensland Government can get the best return on its investment in this institute. The DPI has its own biotechnology unit out at the university beside this institute, and that biotechnology unit will be able to undertake some of the research for these new companies as they emerge.

**The CHAIRMAN:** At the very bottom of page 7 and over onto page 8 you talk about quality management in the horticultural area. What exactly is your department going to do to assist horticultural producers to improve the quality of their products?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** This issue has been raised a couple of times previously, but to give you a response—the Department of Primary Industries is providing major support to horticultural producers to encourage them to adopt quality management systems as a means of improving the quality of fruit and vegetables produced in Queensland. A two-year training program on quality management based around a set of 10 comprehensive workshops is being conducted by staff of the Queensland Horticultural Institute. This training is targeted at stone fruit, mango, melon and vegetable growers. It will involve projected direct expenditure of approximately \$300,000 in the 1998-99 year.

Growers are being trained in the principles of applying quality management systems. Effort is being put into introducing growers to ways of managing not only quality but also food safety issues in producing fruit and vegetables. Two hundred and forty horticultural businesses are involved in quality management training over two years. At the end of that time, businesses will be able to elect to continue implementing fully accredited quality management systems. The Queensland Horticultural Institute is also developing a broader five-year plan to expand training opportunities for growers wishing to manage and improve the quality of their horticultural products. This will provide access to training for producers not included in the current program.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** I ask you to have a look at the second table on page 11. You mention funding for a sugar subprogram. What contribution is the DPI making to priority research issues for Queensland's sugar industry?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Has the BSES been in your ear to ask this question? The State Government, through the Department of Primary Industries, contributes \$3.8m annually to R&D for Queensland's sugar industry. This funding supports

extensive world-class research capability within the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations and other research organisations. That is the BSES, okay? An extensive range of research services, including facilities and expertise, is available across the State to respond effectively to priority issues.

State Government funding is allocated to projects by the BSES board which includes representatives from key industry sectors. The DPI sugar subprogram also advises on research priorities. This process ensures that State Government funding is responsive to industry needs and can be used to target priority or urgent issues. The swift response of the BSES in dealing with the threat of sugarcane smut in Queensland demonstrates the value and the need for this research infrastructure. The sugar industry also leverages additional support and access to broader R&D capability through cooperative research with organisations such as the DPI institutes and the CSIRO.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Page 21, just above the table, refers in paragraph 4 to the conduct of research projects into major fisheries in collaboration with and with the support of fish stocking groups, the charter fishing sector and indigenous fishers. I believe that a \$12 levy on the annual registration fee for private vessels was introduced in 1995-96 to support recreational fishing services. Can you tell the Committee how much has been raised by that levy and how it has been used?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** That is a very detailed question. The concept of a levy on the annual registration costs for private pleasure vessels arose from the inquiry into recreational fishing conducted in 1992 by that great Labor icon Tom Burns, who was then the Deputy Premier. The purpose of the levy is to fund the additional services requested by the recreational fishing sector. There is strong support for that levy provided it is allocated to support services for recreational fishing. The levy is set at \$12 per vessel per annum. That raises \$1.6m annually, which is assigned to the DPI for distribution. A small carryover amount from previous years has enabled \$1.7m to be allocated this year.

The largest portion of those funds, \$1.013m in 1998-99, is allocated to the Queensland Fisheries Management Authority to partly fund the fisheries management planning process, to support the management advisory committees and zonal advisory committees, to fund the Statewide surveys of recreational fishing and to contribute to research and information projects. A significant proportion of the funds, \$652,000 in 1998-99, is assigned to the Fisheries group of my department. These funds provide for the Quick Response Unit within the Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol, a pilot study of fish stocking in the Maroochy River, a fish stocking liaison officer in north Queensland, a contribution to aquatic habitat management, fish ladder research and several other smaller projects to further support recreational fishing.

Each year an amount of \$35,000 has been allocated to Sunfish. I think that should be \$135,000, otherwise they would feel very short-changed. I will increase it to \$135,000. Sunfish is the peak body that

represents recreational fishing in Queensland. Sunfish uses that money to carry out angler education and to provide coordinated advice to Government, particularly in relation to fisheries habitat management. I think there is a problem with one of those figures.

**Mr POLLOCK:** The \$35,000 is correct. That is the figure that comes out of the PPV levy. The \$125,000 was a coalition Government initiative. It is in the third year of funding this year. There are two separate amounts.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** So they are getting a bit more than \$125,000.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** On page 9, paragraph 11 refers to bulk sugar terminals and the transferring of ownership of the bulk sugar terminals from the Government to the Queensland sugar industry. Would the Minister advise on progress in relation to the transfer of ownership of bulk sugar terminals to the sugar industry?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Quite a deal of this question has been answered previously. I sum up by saying that the sugar industry, as I said previously, has established a Bulk Sugar Terminal Management Group as a forerunner to the industry company Sugar Terminals Limited. In April 1998, the Queensland Government agreed to transfer ownership of bulk sugar terminals to the sugar industry, providing security of tenure through the granting of long-term leases for access to port facilities. Industry was then charged with setting up a bulk sugar terminal management group as the forerunner to the industry company, Sugar Terminals Limited. This group had contracted PricewaterhouseCoopers as its consultants to assist it to develop and implement details of the company structure and share entitlements of industry participants. At present that is under way. I think that should answer the question. Most of the other information has been covered in the previous answers.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** As to beef priorities—page 6 refers to the Agriculture Industry Development Program and the fostering of the growth and development of Queensland's primary industries. What are the priority areas that the Government is addressing for the beef industry?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** That is a very important question, especially for our beef producers in Queensland. In partnership with the beef industry, the department has identified six priority areas that it is targeting for the continued economic development of the industry. These are industry development, market-driven beef production, development of the feedlot and live cattle export sectors, animal health services for market access, skilling for better enterprise management and grazing land management for long-term viability. The impact of the DPI's work with the beef industry is being demonstrated by an improvement in industry performance and enterprise viability through development of a culture of participation within and between industry sectors, increased efficiency and sustainability of beef enterprises, increased recognition for Queensland as a preferred supplier of

high value cattle and beef, pest and disease surveillance systems that satisfy international market requirements and increased consistency of quality and diversity of value-added products sold on domestic and export markets.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I now declare that the time allocated for consideration of the Estimates of expenditure for the Minister for Primary Industries has expired. I thank the Minister and the portfolio officers for their attendance. The hearing is now suspended for a break and will resume at 12 noon, with the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and Minister for Disability Services.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I thank all the members of the Committee for their cooperation.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, Minister.

Sitting suspended from 11.43 a.m. to 12.04 p.m.

# **FAMILIES, YOUTH AND COMMUNITY CARE; DISABILITY SERVICES**

## **IN ATTENDANCE**

Hon. A. M. Bligh, Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and Minister for Disability Services

Mr K. Smith, Director-General

Ms M. Alison, Acting Deputy Director General

Mr G. Clarke, Director, Human Resources, Finance and Property Services

Mr A. O'Brien, Manager, Budget and Resource Management Branch

Ms C. Finn, Director, Information Management

Mr D. Martin, Program Director, Families

**The CHAIRMAN:** Ladies and gentlemen, the hearings of Estimates Committee D are resumed. The next item for consideration is the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and Minister for Disability Services and the time allocated is three hours.

For the information of the Minister and the new witnesses, the time for questions is one minute and for answers is three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a further double chime will sound the end of these limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will also sound two minutes after any extension of time has been given.

The Sessional Orders require that at least half the time available for questions and answers in respect to each organisational unit is to be allocated to non-Government members and that any time expended when the Committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between Government and non-Government members. Also, in accordance with the Sessional Orders, each Minister is permitted to make an opening statement of up to five minutes. Again, a single chime will give a 15-second warning and a further double chime will sound the end of that time limit. I ask departmental officers, especially those who come to the table for just a very few questions, to identify themselves when they come forward on each occasion for ready identification by Hansard. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and Minister for Disability Services to be open for examination. The question before the Committee is—

"That the proposed expenditure be agreed to."

Minister, would you like to make a short statement?

**Ms BLIGH:** Thank you, Mr Chairperson and members of the Committee. This is the most significant budget in terms of welfare spending in the history of this portfolio. In honouring the Labor commitment to Queenslanders, by the year 2001-2001 an additional \$280m will have been injected into the base budget of this agency across the range of services provided or funded by my department.

In the area of disability, we have made \$137.8m available over four years to meet the unmet needs of people with a disability and to assist with the further relocation of a number of people from the Basil Stafford Centre. The importance of this funding is that it will contribute to the lives of people with a disability and their families and provide access to long overdue services to improve their quality of life.

The budget provides significant funding of \$25m over four years to assist community organisations to meet the impact of new industrial obligations as well as a mandatory increase in employer superannuation contributions. This is a recognition of the invaluable contribution that community organisations and staff make to the lives of ordinary Queenslanders. It reflects my personal commitment and that of the Labor Government to ensuring that this work is acknowledged and that workers receive award rates of pay.

One of my priorities as Minister is to strengthen the Government's response to the protection of children, which I regard as the core business of this portfolio. The budget provides an initial allocation of \$2.5m a year to relieve the pressures on front-line child protection workers and to provide additional services. The budget will also go towards supporting children already in the department's care.

The budget recognises the strain that is currently placed on the Queensland child-care sector by cuts in Commonwealth funding. To help ensure that Queensland children continue to receive the highest quality child care, the Government has committed \$14m over four years for capital facilities and upgrades, including play equipment. Three work-based child-care facilities for employees at major public sector workplaces will be funded by an allocation of \$2.4m over four years for construction. There is a further \$1m allocation over four years for an outside school care program for young people between the ages of 13 and 15 years. Queensland's additional contribution to the State child care budget overall is an allocation of \$17.4m over four years.

This Government's Crime Prevention Strategy aims to address the causes of crime, and the budget of my portfolio reflects this priority. An amount of \$6.3m will be provided over four years to establish three pilot community juvenile justice centres across the State. These centres will aim to integrate young offenders into the community by addressing the causal factors of their offending behaviour and enforcing the orders of the court to ensure that they face the consequences of their offences.

In the area of ageing, the budget also includes a significant boost to funding for services to older Queenslanders. Twenty-eight thousand older Queenslanders will be assisted through the reintroduction of the 50% reduction in the motor vehicle component of car registration fees at a cost of \$13.2m over four years.

The implementation of these budget initiatives will require strong leadership of the department. Unlike the former Minister of this portfolio when he came to the Estimates last year, I am very proud to have my new Director-General, Mr Ken Smith, here at this Estimates committee to discharge his

responsibilities as the accountable officer for the department. Mr Smith is a professional and skilled officer who will devote all of his energies on a full-time basis to leading the department and will provide the leadership necessary to see this ambitious and exciting program brought to fruition. For the benefit of Hansard, I would also point out that Margaret Alison will be assisting me at the table, as will Mr Arthur O'Brien, who is on my left. Mr Chairman, I am available to take questions.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I will ask the media to leave. The first session of questions is by non-Government members. I ask Mr Beanland to start off.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Good afternoon, Minister, staff and departmental officers. I refer to page 3 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements and the total outlay of \$621,571,000. In its Budget, the former coalition Government announced the introduction of an electricity concession for low-income, seriously ill people on life support systems. The concessions were something like \$16 per month per machine for oxygen concentrators and some \$9.70 per month per machine for kidney dialysis. I ask: where within your budget is this concession? Where is the funding for it?

**Ms BLIGH:** As the honourable member would be aware, this scheme was announced by the previous Government. It was announced without ensuring that any recurrent funding would be available to support the concession program and, as I understand it, it was not included in the Budget papers introduced by Mrs Sheldon in May.

Following discussions between myself, the Treasurer and the Minister for Mines and Energy, it has been decided that our Government will proceed with this initiative. The scheme is intended to provide a concession, as you have already identified, to low-income, seriously ill people who have been medically assessed by Queensland Health. In respect of oxygen concentrators, an applicant will be required to hold an appropriate concession card and be provided with the machine free of charge through Queensland Health. Persons issued with a kidney dialysis machine free of charge through a Queensland hospital may also be eligible for the concession. It is proposed that the concession be up to \$48 per quarter per machine for eligible users of an oxygen concentrator and up to \$32.25 per quarter for eligible users of a kidney dialysis machine. It is proposed that the concession will be retrospective and payable to eligible applicants from 1 July 1998. In relation to the specifics of your question—the allocation for the funds for this initiative are held in the Department of Minerals and Energy, where it will be funded from the CSOs.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Could you indicate the number of staff currently working in the office of the director-general and whether Mr Adrian Lovney is one of those staff members?

**Ms BLIGH:** In a moment I will defer to the director-general to give more details. The member may be aware that, when I came into Government, the office of the director-general had a staffing complement of somewhere between 35 and 40 people which, in my view, was excessive for any

department of the Government. I could not see any reason why the Department of Families would warrant such a large office of the director-general. In my view, the office of the director-general should be one that is focused on strategic policy development and is not one that ought to be characterised, as the previous one was, by a departmental liaison office of more than 12 people.

I requested a review of the office of the director-general, and the numbers have been brought down considerably. There are a number of vacancies at the moment. I am sorry, I cannot refer you to further details about what vacancies we are carrying. Interviews are being conducted and, yes, Mr Adrian Lovney is employed in the office of the director-general and acting in the capacity of the Cabinet legislation and liaison officer. I might refer to the director-general for further information.

**Mr SMITH:** The staff in the office has been reduced. Page 34 of the MPS outlines the executive support reduction from 37 to 35. The internal audit I brought into the office of the director-general because I believed that that should report to the director-general, and there were some functions previously that have moved out of the office into other areas of activity. Overall, the staffing levels have declined and will be kept to a very tight level.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Just on the matter of Mr Lovney—I was reading in, I think, Saturday's paper that he is also president of an organisation that is funded by your department, or does receive funds from your department. I recollect that when you were in Opposition you were somewhat critical of people being employed in your department and in receipt of funding from your department. The position that he occupies is a very important position—a very senior position—as the Cabinet Legislation and Liaison Officer. I was just wondering whether you still believe that or whether you have changed your views in view of the fact that he is now employed in that important position.

**Ms BLIGH:** You will be aware that the code of conduct for the Public Service requires that Public Service officers have to maintain some distinction between the activities in their private lives and the obligations of their workplace, and they should make every effort to ensure that there is no possible conflict of interest or even a perception of a conflict of interest. Mr Adrian Lovney is, as you have referred to, the President of the AIDS Council of Queensland, which I have been informed receives in the vicinity of a couple of thousand dollars from this department for emergency relief. It is a very small amount. Mr Lovney is the Cabinet Legislation and Liaison Officer, which, as you have said, is a very senior position in the organisation. However, that is not a position that has responsibility for assessing or making recommendations on applications for funding. While I continue to hold the view that all Public Service officers, whether in my department or others, have to avoid all conflicts of interest and possible conflicts of interest, I do not believe that this constitutes such a conflict.

**Mr BEANLAND:** In relation to the same page of the MPS, what is your department's current

position in relation to output-based funding requirements for community-based organisations. I understand that some change has been made by the department in relation to that and that you have put a freeze on output-based funding arrangements?

**Ms BLIGH:** That is correct. You will be aware that when in Opposition the then Labor shadow Cabinet approved a number of election commitments in regard to this portfolio. One of those election commitments spelt out in some detail a number of concerns that we had about the increasingly rapid implementation of a range of market-driven funding allocation mechanisms, such as competitive tendering and output-based budgeting. During my time as Opposition spokesperson, I received a number of concerns and complaints from community organisations right across the State about the rate of implementation and the nature of implementation, and concerns that those mechanisms were not being done in consultation or partnership with them, and that they may have limited application in some areas of the department to effective funding mechanisms. To this end we promised that we would impose a moratorium on the implementation of those mechanisms and that we would develop a community services industry forum representing Government departments—my department, the Premier's Department, Treasury and Health—along with representatives of peak organisations in the non-Government sector to work through the aspects of those funding mechanisms that ought to be implemented and identify those that should be jettisoned for a lack of relevance to this portfolio.

I think there are significant questions in the field about whether or not issues like competitive tendering and some parts of output-based budgeting are applicable in this form to the delivery of human services. We will be looking at that. I have delivered on the election commitment to put a moratorium on it. We are in the process of appointing a community services industry forum that will be chaired and convened by the Premier's Department. I take this opportunity to assure the member, and other members of the Committee, that this moratorium does not in any way represent a move away from the requirement for accountable allocation mechanisms of Government funds.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I refer to page 19 of the MPS, and the total estimated expenditure of \$91,665,000 for 1998-99. Referring specifically to the Child Protection Information System, I understand that the previous paper system required a certain number of support staff. After reading the weekend papers, it seems that the new system has some problems, in that it requires considerably more staff—something like 20, I understand. What are you doing to address the complaints that this system is not working?

**Ms BLIGH:** I am unfamiliar with the reports in the weekend papers to which you are referring. Would you detail that?

**Mr BEANLAND:** I do not have it with me, but there was a report in the weekend paper about some problems with information coming into that particular area.

**Ms BLIGH:** As the member has identified, since about 1994-95 the department has moved from a paper-based system of child protection information notifications and assessments to one that is now in line with current practice in all other States, that is, based on computer information technology. At this stage I am unaware of any problems being encountered by that system. I think it is probably best if I take the question on notice and you provide me with details of the problems that you are referring to.

**Mr BEANLAND:** How many staff do you now employ for the Child Protection Information System?

**Mr SMITH:** I have just been informed that there are 21 staff.

**Ms BLIGH:** All staff in area offices would also utilise the system.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Is it true that you are reviewing the positions of program and regional directors within the department?

**Ms BLIGH:** No.

**Mr BEANLAND:** How many internal reviews do you have under way at the moment? I put a question on the notice paper and the answer stated that there were no reviews. However, I believe that a number of reviews are currently under way. For example, the review that you announced yesterday, the review involving the Children's Commission and a further review that was announced some time ago in relation to a death at Basil Stafford. It would seem that reviews are occurring.

**Ms BLIGH:** In relation to the question on notice, I understood that what you were asking for was whether we had established any task forces and that is why I answered as I did. In relation to the reviews that you have alluded to, there is a legislative review being conducted of the Children's Commission legislation, not of the Children's Commission. It is a legislative review that, as you have alluded to, I have already made a public announcement about and it was also part of our election commitments.

In relation to the review of a death at Basil Stafford, two external reviewers were appointed to look at that matter. In the time of the previous Government, a death occurred under what appeared to be similar circumstances. Two external investigators were appointed at that time and I appointed the same external investigators to review the death and determine whether or not all departmental practices had been adhered to and whether or not any processes needed to be improved or any further investigations of officers needed to be done. The recommendations of that report will be implemented.

In relation to the review of the Children's Commission legislation, that was identified in the question that you raised about consultancies. I identified it as a consultancy. To my knowledge, there are no other internal activities in the department that I think could reasonably be described as a review of any activity or position. I might ask the director-general to further comment.

**Mr SMITH:** Clearly when looking at the core functions of the organisation in determining our strategic plan, people are involved internally at looking at what our directions should be as an organisation. A range of internal committees look at our day-to-day business operations and directions, but none of them involve a range of other parties. They are very much involved with the day-to-day business of the organisation.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Do you have any proposals to review the positions of program directors and regional directors?

**Ms BLIGH:** No.

**Mr BEANLAND:** In relation to one other question that I put on the notice paper, you said that there have been four voluntary employment redundancies and two terminations since 4 July. Can I have some details about the names of the people involved, why they were offered VERs or whether they asked for them and how much each person received?

**Ms BLIGH:** I am happy to answer parts of the question and will refer other parts to the director-general. In relation specifically to those people who took VERs, there was one manager at a level of AO8, one AO7, who was a principal liaison officer, and two AO4s, one of whom was an executive assistant and one of whom was a grants officer. There were two retrenchments—one OO4, who was a chief cook, and one OO2, a general services officer. I believe it is appropriate to refer to the director-general—as you know, he was responsible for operational staffing—the questions of why those decisions were taken and what the circumstances surrounding them are. However, before he does I would like to make the point that that amounts to a total of six during this period. I think it compares very favourably to a total of 30 in the financial year previous to this one under the previous Government, and a total of 67 in the first financial year of the term of the previous Government.

**Mr SMITH:** I assume it is okay to mention people's names?

**Mr BEANLAND:** No, I do not particularly want names. Could we have the classifications and the amounts?

**Mr SMITH:** One officer was at an AO8 level. These were VERs, where people had requested to take a package voluntarily. One was an AO7. There were two AO4s. In addition to that, as a result of changes that have been going on for some time in our direct service delivery, there have been two retrenchments of people. I have the total but not the individual amounts. The two relate to Challinor. One was an OO4 and the other was an OO2.

**Mr BEANLAND:** What was the total amount? Do you have the total amounts of the payouts?

**Mr SMITH:** The severance payments were \$185,633.79.

**Mr BEANLAND:** In the few moments left, I wish to ask a couple of questions about the Children's Commission area.

**The CHAIRMAN:** You have 25 minutes in this block; you have another nine minutes left in this session. We have extended the times slightly.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I refer to page 19 and the subprograms under the Families Program, which total \$91,665,000. Can I have a breakdown of the increase in the Children's Commissioner budget, which has gone from \$1.682m up to \$1.983m—up \$301,000?

**Ms BLIGH:** As the member would be aware, because of the way that Treasury handles the budget process, carryovers from the previous year are identified as an increase in budget. For the Children's Commissioner this year there was a carryover of \$394,000 from the previous budget, which I think basically is the amount that you are looking for.

**Mr BEANLAND:** In relation to the Children's Commissioner, a review by Mr Briton is currently taking place. What are the terms of reference for that review and what is the estimated cost of the review?

**Ms BLIGH:** The terms of reference of the review are very straightforward. I do not have the terms of the review, but I can provide them to you very quickly. In relation to the purpose of the review—as you would be aware, the Children's Commissioner legislation has been the subject of some criticism for some time, not least of all by the Commissioner himself, who has found in the implementation of the legislation a number of operational difficulties. You would be aware that it was fairly groundbreaking legislation when the Parliament passed it and, not surprisingly, two years on there are issues which have been identified.

If you look at the question on notice that was provided to you, in relation to consultancies you will find the terms of reference of the review spelled out clearly there. They are as follows: to review the Children's Commissioner and Children's Services Appeals Tribunal Act 1996, to inquire into its scope and effectiveness in practice, to identify any gaps or anomalies and recommend any amendments which may be required to ensure that the Act better protects and promotes the rights and interests of Queensland children and young people.

As to some of the problems that have been identified by both me, the Children's Commissioner and other practitioners who have worked with the legislation—you would be aware that the dominant one has concerned difficulties in relation to the way that the Commissioner's Act interfaces with the Children's Services Act and difficulties related to accessing files from my department. Other matters will include the need for clarity about the application of the Financial Administration and Audit Act and issues around the confidentiality requirements.

The question of appeal rights was something that was considered by the Children's Court earlier this year in relation to a case. The judge of the Children's Court indicated that they might warrant some revision. There are questions of overlapping jurisdiction, which have been the subject now of comments for two years in a row in the annual report of the Ombudsman. The Crime Commission has been instituted since the original Children's Commissioner Act. The total cost of the consultancy to review this

legislation is in the vicinity of \$60,000. We have allocated \$60,000 for that.

**Mr BEANLAND:** When do you expect the review to be completed? What is the completion date?

**Ms BLIGH:** I have asked the reviewers to bring forward their report by the end of December. When we worked it out in weeks, it ended up being due on Christmas Eve. It may be some time around that week.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Is that being undertaken by Mr Briton himself without staff? Does he have staff?

**Ms BLIGH:** The review is being undertaken by Mr Briton, but there is an allocation within the consultancy for him to contract people as necessary throughout the time required under the review.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I turn to juvenile justice, which is addressed in the second paragraph on page 22. The evaluation of community conferencing is referred to. Who will undertake the evaluation of the pilot programs in your department?

**Ms BLIGH:** You would be aware that this program was put in place in 1996 as a result of amendments to the Juvenile Justice Act taken during your term in office. External evaluators were appointed some time ago. The evaluators were due to bring down their report in July 1998. In a moment I can provide you with the name of the people conducting the review; I do not have their names here.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Is this the same review that has been going on for a while?

**Ms BLIGH:** Yes, the same review. It was Griffith University.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I am aware of what is happening. I just thought there might have been some change.

**Ms BLIGH:** This is the same review. Its report was handed down in July of this year.

**Mr BEANLAND:** While on the subject of juvenile justice, I refer to page 24 and staff resources. The number of juvenile justice officers has been reduced from 137 to 121. If you turn to page 19, you see that there has been an increase of some 15 staff as indicated on that page. Has there been a transfer of staff from one section to the other, as appears to be the case to me, or is there something else going on? Have people lost their jobs and others been hired? What is the score?

**Ms BLIGH:** There is no such mystery. You will be aware that we have an election promise to implement community juvenile justice centres in three locations across the State. It is our intention that those centres will undertake the tasks that are currently undertaken by staff in area offices that have juvenile justice responsibilities. Those staff will then be transferred to those centres. The positions will remain in the area offices, but their responsibilities will become child protection and family service responsibilities as opposed to juvenile justice responsibilities.

**Mr BEANLAND:** So at the end of the day, on my calculation, there is a reduction of one?

**Ms BLIGH:** I might refer this question to the director-general, who can give some more details.

**Mr SMITH:** The estimated savings that can be generated by the development of the community juvenile justice centres is in the order of \$1m. That would equate to the 16 positions that are being transferred from JJ to the Families Program, looking at, say, an average of \$50,000 for salaries and on-costs. With the 16 positions, that would equate to approximately \$800,000. The recurrent support that comes with the new juvenile justice centres in the proposed three locations would enable freeing up of staff to then move to family support officer positions.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The first session of non-Government members' questions has terminated and the Government questions will start now for 25 minutes, after which we will break for lunch. Minister, I refer you to page 4 of the MPS, the Key Inputs. The third item from the top indicates an allocation of \$336m in grants and subsidies, and the Budget Highlights document produced by your department indicates that \$245m of that is going to be provided to the non-Government sector. Can you explain to the Committee what your department is doing to strengthen the partnership between the departmental and the non-Government sector?

**Ms BLIGH:** As I alluded to earlier in answer to a question by the member for Indooroopilly, you would be aware that we published a number of election commitments in relation to strengthening the partnership between the Government and non-Government sectors. Those two documents went to two questions: firstly, the whole nature of partnership and the requirement for partnerships to be based on a level of respect and equality between the partners. While that is always difficult to achieve when one partner has all the money and the other partner wants all of it, I believe that we can do a lot better than we have in the past to improve the nature of that relationship.

To that end we have identified a range of areas that warrant a lot of work being done by the partners and they fall into the three categories of building the relationship, which goes centrally to questions about respecting the independence of the non-Government sector, ensuring that the funding processes of Government do not use implements such as service agreements to try to exercise political influence on organisations which are essentially independent of Government, and establishing mechanisms that will on an ongoing basis provide forums for the two partners to work together to improve services.

The second area is the area of funding, which I answered in some respects to the previous question from the member for Indooroopilly in relation to the need to really start to address the funding mechanisms that have been growing up in a fairly ad hoc way around the move for Government to provide services through non-Government programs. Those issues concern both issues such as competitive tendering, to which I have already alluded, and also a need for us to start to address some of the needs for financial security experienced by those

organisations, and a commitment on our behalf to work towards triennial funding agreements to free agencies up from having to annually apply for their bread and butter and never know what their future is, as well as doing what we can do to work with other levels of Government and other departments to ensure that wherever possible we minimise the number of agencies of Government that any single organisation in the non-Government sector is having to apply to for funds. It would be well known to the member for Chermide in his own electorate, as it is to all of us, that there are many relatively small organisations which are on a regular more than an annual basis applying to two or three different levels of Government and two or three different Government departments to put together their funding allocation for that year.

The other area that we are seeking to work to improve is the continued structure of the non-Government sector. That really goes to issues about how we utilise issues around competition and the relevance of various funding mechanisms such as output-based funding. To this end, as I have already outlined, we have developed a proposal to put in place a community services industry forum which will be representative of both Government and non-Government to work towards the implementation of a five-year community services industry plan.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Will that proposed triennial funding that you mentioned be a rolling triennium so that they have an idea three years out what is going to be coming?

**Ms BLIGH:** Wherever possible. Obviously, there are always going to be pilot projects and one-off grants for particular projects. But the aim is to maximise the use of rolling triennial funding mechanisms to improve the certainty and financial security of organisations which, in my view, will underpin improved service delivery because people will be able to focus on services rather than focusing on where the dollar is coming from next.

**The CHAIRMAN:** In your first answer you touched on something which I have heard from many non-Government organisations as the bane of their life, and that is the amount of time they put into preparing funding submissions. You said that you will try to simplify that in some way. Can you explain what mechanism might be introduced to make that simpler, particularly for the smaller community-based organisations?

**Ms BLIGH:** I am not in a position to give details about that at this stage. I think it would probably be counterproductive for me to pre-empt the outcomes of the discussions with the non-Government sector. Going back to my point about partnership and respecting the equality of the partners, too often Government comes up with good ideas and asks the non-Government sector to implement them. In my view we ought to be sitting down and working out from people in the field what problems they are experiencing and work together on areas of simplifying them. I have no doubt that we can simplify many things.

**The CHAIRMAN:** In the second paragraph on page 2 of the MPS under the heading Policy

Commitments and Strategy, Whole of Department, it is noted that funds totalling \$25m over four years are going to assist non-Government organisations with employer and industrial obligations. Why is it necessary to allocate these funds and what will be your highest priorities for distributing these funds?

**Ms BLIGH:** These funds are necessary because over a period the non-Government sector has become increasingly aware of its industrial rights. It has moved from earlier this century a framework of voluntarism characterised by people not being paid anything for the work they do to a gradual sense of the value of the work that they do and an expectation that they will receive the industrial rights that workers in any other sector of the economy receive. As those awards have been implemented by the respective industrial unions that represent people working in the field, the funding that has been allocated by departments such as this and others in Government have increasingly been seen to be inadequate to meet the demands of those awards. Unfortunately, it has meant that, in a number of areas, services have had to be cut; in order to pay award wages, services have had to open four days a week instead of five days a week or implement complicated salary packaging arrangements simply to be able to recruit and retain highly qualified staff.

In terms of the specific funding, there is an overall \$24.986m over four years. It has been allocated in the following ways. I might just go to the particular awards that it will be funding. There is an award known as the CASH award, which is the Crisis Assistance and Supported Housing Award which we anticipate will be ratified in October, and our figures have been done on that basis. There might be a bit of leeway there, depending on when the commission actually ratifies it. There will be \$2.205m in 1998-99 and recurrent \$3.075m for that award. The Social and Community Services Award, known as the SACS Award, which members would be more familiar with, will be allocated \$2.256m in additional funds this year and on a recurrent basis.

In awards there are various levels and ranges within levels. We fund organisations at the bottom of every level and not many organisations have all of their workers at the bottom of all of their levels. This will allow us to fund to the mid point which gives organisations some flexibility. It will also allow us to increase the level at which single workers in organisations such as the neighbourhood centre working on their own and taking on significant responsibilities are paid. We will be able to increase the supplementation there from level 4 to level 5 for that award.

The Disability Support Workers Award will be allocated \$0.506m this year and \$0.49 in the out years on a recurrent basis. The provision all up also provides for supplementation of an increase of 1% from 6% to 7% in employer superannuation contributions. That will be a total of \$0.639m. Overall I think it is a package that will significantly improve the ability of organisations to meet their industrial awards like all other employers.

**The CHAIRMAN:** In giving your answer, you referred to awards plural, and I am very aware that

some people who are carers work for a variety of employing agencies and there are different awards, pay rates, scales and classifications. In the review that you are going to be doing about the funding arrangements, would the department be considering taking on board the issue of the different awards to see if they can be simplified and unified across the sector?

**Ms BLIGH:** The member would be aware that the question of award rates for particular occupations and provisions is a question for industrial commissions and negotiations between employers and employees and the unions that represent them. But within that, wherever possible I am very happy to take that on board. As I said, I have an open agenda about providing an opportunity and a forum for the non-Government sector and the organisations that represent it to come forward with issues that are presenting them with difficulties, and we will work with them to determine how to resolve them.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** Still on page 2, you outline that \$126m will be provided over four years for disability funding. The Government's election promise was to provide \$30m to assist unmet needs for people with disabilities. Has this commitment been met and how will the additional funds be used in this regard?

**Ms BLIGH:** Yes, the commitment has been met. I am very pleased to explain it because I think it is a bit difficult to see on the face of the Budget papers. In order to understand the allocations in this financial year, there has been an allocation of \$21.2m for the 1998-99 financial year. This includes a one-off capital expenditure of \$1.2m. The previous Government made a \$2.5m allocation in the mid-year Budget review, in December last year—the full-year effect of that is \$5m—and we have continued that but not counted it in our election commitments.

In addition, as with the other election commitments of the Labor Government, our election commitment in relation to the disability program will start from 1 January. Our commitment is \$15m, because it is half of \$30m for the half of the financial year. The \$21.2m allocation this year is \$15m plus \$5m plus \$1.2m. There is provision in the out years for \$35m per year, which is the \$30m commitment we made in the election plus the five-year, full-year effect of the mid-year allocation by the previous Government. That is a total of \$126.2m over the four years.

The money will provide a range of services to both individuals and families who, as I said in my opening statement, have been waiting for a very long time for adequate services to meet their needs. It is intended that there will be wide consultations with the community over the next couple of months to work through appropriate allocation mechanisms and to establish, in partnership, priorities for expenditure. The commitments were that we would be giving priority in funding to individual support packages, life-style support and accommodation support. That is where the money will be directed.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** Page 11 of the MPS outlines new funding in the disability program of

\$126m over four years to address unmet need. How will the needs of people with disabilities and their families living in rural and remote areas be addressed?

**Ms BLIGH:** Part of our election commitment was to implement pilot programs of a system of providing services, known as local area coordination. The proposal is based on a very successful system being implemented over the last four or five years now in Western Australia. It is a method of funding and service delivery that is specifically targeted to remote and isolated areas of the State. I think Western Australia has very similar service delivery issues to Queensland, with a very decentralised population.

We originally promised that we would be able to fund at least four pilots. I believe we will be in a position now to fund five pilots. We are yet to identify which areas those pilots will be in, but they will be in remote areas of the State which are currently receiving no or very few services. One of those, I believe, will be appropriately located somewhere in the cape, servicing the gulf area, but we will have to work on the other areas as we develop a better understanding of where the high need areas are.

The point of local area coordination is to provide direct services in those areas, with one coordinator being responsible for a designated number of families and individuals within a certain geographical area, with a certain amount of funding available to meet the ongoing needs of those individuals. Those needs are then allocated on an annual basis, in conjunction with those individuals and families, with direct packages provided for their needs, rather than Government saying, "We are giving out one particular kind of service and you will have to access it in that way." I think it is an exciting project and I think it has a lot of application in the State, with the population dispersion that we have. I look forward to the pilots. They will be value added on an ongoing basis. If they are as successful as they have been in Western Australia, I anticipate them being expanded beyond the five.

**Mr WELLINGTON:** I refer you to page 9 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements, and in particular to the table on major capital works projects. Does the reduced estimate for multipurpose community centres mean that this Government is cutting back on funding for centres of this type as it feels there is insufficient need for them?

**Ms BLIGH:** There was originally a decision to build five new multipurpose centres. They were to be located in Miles, Acacia Ridge, Nambour, Edmonton and Cannonvale. We are almost at the end of the construction and implementation of those centres. That program has come to an end and there is at this stage no budget allocation to expand it beyond those five. I am aware, as the honourable member no doubt is, that there are many other areas of the State that would be seeking the construction of similar services, and we will be looking at that on an ongoing needs basis.

**Mr WELLINGTON:** I refer you again to page 9 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements and

particularly to community care. How much of the increase in funding for the ageing will be spent on the Sunshine Coast region?

**Ms BLIGH:** The bulk of the increased funds in the Office of Ageing are funds that are being made available around the International Year of Older People, which will be celebrated internationally in 1999 and was launched yesterday by the Governor. It is \$4m over four years, so it is \$1m a year, and there will be funding for a range of services, projects and research into the needs of older people. Those funds will be made available to communities on the basis of application. We look forward, in probably the next two months, to being in a position to publicly advertise the availability of those funds along with the guidelines and other details about the availability of those funds.

It is difficult for me to predict how much of that will go into the Sunshine Coast area, simply because it is to some extent dependent on how many organisations from that area apply and the merit of their applications. I think it is fair to say that the Sunshine Coast is one of those areas in the State, along with a number of others, which we know has considerable pockets of aged people who have chosen that area, for good reason, in which to retire. I would assume that a number of the organisations that provide services to people up there will be applicants. Until we go through that process, it is not possible for me to give you a dollar figure. I would also be expecting that each region of the State will be provided funds. There will be funds available in every region of the State.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** Page 11 of the MPS indicates that work will continue through 1998-99 on the closure of the Challinor Centre. Can you inform the Committee about progress in the relocation of the Challinor residents?

**Ms BLIGH:** Yes, I can. Members will be aware that this has been an issue for some time and has been the subject of considerable debate in the Parliament. There has been a series of problems with the relocation of the residents of the centre. Certainly, when I came into the Ministry I inherited a considerable problem in that the situation we faced was that the University of Queensland bought the site, by a decision of the previous Government, in December 1996 and was due to take over the site from 30 September. There were about 50 people there for whom no alternative accommodation had been found, either in the short term or the long term.

We have moved very quickly to rectify that. Unfortunately, it does mean that a number of people who have been in that institution for 30, 40 and 50 years will have to move twice, and that is something which I believe is regrettable but unavoidable. Everybody has been allocated short-term accommodation and the last people will move into that accommodation in the first week of October, so they all should have moved in by either today or Monday or Tuesday.

A range of services have come to the party and provided private rental accommodation in and around the Ipswich area. Also, Multicap had an unused facility on its site and a number of people have gone

there. As well, some people have been temporarily located to the Basil Stafford Centre. The long-term outcome for all of these people is that they have all chosen to retain accommodation in centre-based care. That means the construction of two much smaller centres. It was a commitment of the previous Government which we agreed to honour.

We have located a site in Brisbane south, in Loganlea, for the construction of one of the centres. This site has been the subject of extensive public consultation. Neighbours were all door-knocked. They were provided with letterbox drops of information. There has been public advertisement in the Courier-Mail regarding the redesignation of the site, because it is Crown land. I have met with people in the local area and hosted an afternoon tea with both them and members of the families of people who are seeking to relocate to that centre. The process is not over yet, but I am very confident that that land will be redesignated, that we will be in a position to start construction in January and that people will be in a position to move in in July.

We are also looking for a site in the Ipswich area. My officers have identified a number of sites and are having consultations with the Ipswich City Council about those sites. We have established two family reference groups—one for each of the sites—and we are working with those family members to identify suitable sites. They will also be actively involved in the design of the houses to be erected on the sites. This is for the people who are moving out into the centre-based care. The vast majority of people leaving Challinor have all now moved into community-based housing, which was their first preference. That, I think, accounted for about 70 people.

**The CHAIRMAN:** That process of consulting with the local community seems to have gone very well. My recollection is that, a couple of years ago, not far from my electorate, there was great resistance. Can you say what this process seems to have about it that has been so well received?

**Ms BLIGH:** I think there are a number of things. Firstly, it has been a very extensive consultation process. One of the things that no doubt upsets people wherever they live is when things are done to them without any knowledge. You may recall that when the previous Government sought to identify a site at Chuwar, the first that the local neighbours heard about it was when they woke up one morning to find their back fence being bulldozed. When they went and asked the bulldozer driver, he was able to tell them what was happening. Not surprisingly, that resulted in quite a bit of distress in the local community.

In this instance, we have embarked upon an absolutely comprehensive process that has allowed people to discuss their fears and concerns very early in the process. I believe that officers of my department have done an outstanding job in the process that they have undertaken. Firstly, they set out to doorknock all of the houses within a certain radius. I think that they actually doorknocked about 50 houses. When we embarked on this program, we did not know that the Federal election would be

called in this process, so they have my pity, because every house that they have been to has assumed, in the first instance, that they are probably politicians looking for their vote. But having overcome that problem, they spent a lot of time sitting down and having cups of tea with people. They went in the morning and then from four to six in the evening to capture those people who would otherwise be at work. People were given a private forum in which to talk about the fears that they might have.

I think that we need to be honest about the fact that a lot of people have no experience or understanding of what having an intellectual disability might be like. We all fear the unknown. So that has been a very useful process—having an opportunity to have an afternoon tea in the local neighbourhood centre, which I hosted. The family members of potential residents of these centres met with neighbours. They took the opportunity to sit down with one another and actually say, "Well, I can tell you what my brother is like. This is what he is like. I want him to move into a neighbourhood where he will feel welcome." It has been a very positive process. Neighbours have made comments like, "We hope you have an open day. We would like to be involved with the centre. We think it is good for our children to live in a neighbourhood where there are people with disabilities and they have a broad understanding of the diversity of our community." I believe that all of those things have combined to what has been a very positive outcome, and I hope that we can repeat it in Ipswich.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** We have come a long, have we not? Still on Challinor—on page 11, in paragraphs six and seven, regarding the closure of the Challinor Centre and the relocation of Basil Stafford residents, what action is being taken to provide security of employment for residential care staff employed in the Disability Program in the Ipswich and Brisbane corridor?

**Ms BLIGH:** The member may be aware that, in the lead-up to the State election, a lot of concern was expressed by residential care officers in the employ of my department, many of whom, because of constantly changing Government policy in this area, had been temporary employees for an unacceptably long period. They had been on temporary contracts—some of them for three and four years—and the temporary contracts were not 12-month contracts; for many of them they were rolling three-month contracts. Of course, that meant that they were in no position to apply for housing loans and all the other sorts of things that require you to have some kind of secure income—both housing and personal loans. That issue was something that I was very concerned about. As you would be aware, in the lead-up to the election we made a number of significant commitments in relation to jobs and job security.

I took a decision, on coming into Government, that there had been too many mistakes and bungling with the attempts to construct centres for people moving out of Challinor. It was proposed by the previous Government to outsource that to the non-Government sector and into the private and possibly for-profit sector. It was my view that we owed the

people in Challinor a much better process than that, and the only way that we could do that was to control it ourselves; that it should return into public control, and the centres will be owned and operated by the State. This then gave us the opportunity to provide permanency to a number of the residential care officers in the area, because we knew that we could predict that these centres are now being built, and they will be able to get these jobs.

On 24 July, the department was in a position to appoint 67 of the temporary residential officers to permanent positions in both the Ipswich Alternative Living Service and the Basil Stafford Centre, and a further five employees were provided with permanent positions at Mount Gravatt. Action is still being taken to fill a further 24 permanent positions to cater for projected staffing requirements for the centre-based care facility in the Ipswich area. In addition, 15 permanent residential care officer positions are to be filled in the Brisbane South region to staff new client accommodation at Ford House, which was one of the short-term accommodation ones I talked about.

Upon the finalisation of this latest exercise, all current permanent residential care officer positions will have been filled. There obviously are some people who continue to be temporaries because they are genuine temporaries; they are replacing someone on maternity leave, for example, and there will always be those sorts of appointments. However, I have indicated and made it clear to the department that I will not countenance the use of long-term temporary arrangements for staff in any area of the department. I believe that it is a very poor management tool, and it does not provide the best for the staff of our department.

**The CHAIRMAN:** This would be an appropriate time to break for lunch.

Sitting suspended from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.

**The CHAIRMAN:** It is now time for questions from non-Government members.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I refer to page 7 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements. The third paragraph relates to amendments to the Child Care Act. What funding has been included in the budget to educate centre operators on the new Child Care Act and the updated requirements of the new Act?

**Ms BLIGH:** It is my understanding that the previous Government announced in last year's budget an allocation of \$2.5m over three years for that purpose. Therefore, it does not show up as a new allocation in this budget, but it is part of the base. If there is any further information on that, I will be happy to provide it to you by the end of this hearing.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Perhaps that would be helpful. I presume that, in that case, it would come under that subprogram on page 9. There is an amount for child care of \$22m-odd for this year.

**Ms BLIGH:** I am sorry, I have to correct my previous answer. I was mistaken. The \$2.5m has been provided for the domestic violence amendments for that purpose.

In relation to child care—as you may be aware, we have begun some very preliminary consultations with the sector. At this stage, we are not anticipating having those introduced into the House, at the best, prior to Christmas. I would not anticipate them being debated or passed until halfway through the last half of the financial year. It would be our intention not to proclaim them until we have gone down the path of an education process, which I anticipate will involve funds in the next financial year.

**Mr BEANLAND:** What is the estimate of the additional cost to the department? Will that be all for the next financial year, or is there a cost for this year—apart from the legislation, that is?

**Ms BLIGH:** Any costs this year will be covered from within our existing base, but they will be minimal.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I refer again to page 7 of the MPS—the Key Performance/Activity Information. What is the reason for the projected estimated increase in the projects funded by the Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund? I notice that projects there—in terms of units—have gone from 2,298 to 2,400. Does this mean increased funds, or is it smaller allocations? What is happening?

**Ms BLIGH:** It has been estimated on the basis of an expected increase in revenue into the Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund from gambling revenue.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I refer to the staffing levels on page 9—the full-time equivalents. What are the reasons for the increases in the staffing levels for Ageing Administrative from 34 to 37 and Child Care Administrative from 85 to 90?

**Ms BLIGH:** The increases in staffing levels have been estimated on the basis of an expected increase in workload to implement initiatives in those areas. As you would be aware, there has been an allocation of \$1m for a grants program in relation to the International Year of Older Persons. It is anticipated that that will involve further work for the department. The increase in child care—similarly, there are significant funds. The \$14m over four years will require additional staff to implement and monitor that initiative.

**Mr BEANLAND:** That is for those programs that are in the pipeline?

**Ms BLIGH:** That is right. There is also a projected increase of another two staff in the responsible gaming secretariat into that community support.

**Mr BEANLAND:** You said "gaming". That is to cope with the allocation of funding in that area, I take it.

**Ms BLIGH:** Yes.

**Mr BEANLAND:** In relation to page 6, under the heading 1998-99 Planned Performance, the first paragraph refers to additional funding of some \$17m over four years. That is about \$4.25m per year committed to assisting with the implementation of the Crisis Assistance and Supported Housing Award. Have you allocated this financial year \$4.25m for this? If so, it would appear that you have had a

reduction from the \$5.5m that was allocated on a recurrent basis under the similar aspects in the previous coalition's Budget.

**Ms BLIGH:** I think you may be comparing the wrong thing. The allocation of \$5.5m in the previous Government's Budget in May was for the SACS Award, the Social and Community Services Award. The \$5.5m was for the SACS Award specifically. The CASH Award is a separate award that has yet to be ratified by the commission. It is anticipated that it will be ratified in October this year. We have done the calculations on the basis of that assumption. It is possible that it may require a lesser allocation if it takes longer to ratify the award.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I turn to page 11. The second paragraph from the bottom of the page refers to some \$1.3m in 1998-99 for additional funding to assist people living in the Basil Stafford Centre to relocate to community accommodation. How does that compare with the \$2.2m, I think it was, allocated by the coalition Government in the May 1998 Budget to accommodate up to 15 people between July and September? Where do you plan to locate those people? Have those matters been resolved? What is the number of people being located?

**Ms BLIGH:** \$2.2m was allocated by the previous Government in the mid-year review in December 1997. Those funds have now been allocated to enable 20 people to relocate from the Basil Stafford Centre to community living arrangements. The addition in this Budget is an amount of approximately \$1.279m in the 1998-99 financial year to facilitate that further. We have allocated \$11.6m over four years. The bulk of that will be spent in the out years. You would appreciate that this process takes quite a bit of time to not only plan but to also allocate, find and equip suitable housing. We anticipate, therefore, that there will be more of it spent in the second and third years of this initiative. That is a further \$11.6m. That \$11.6m is in addition to the \$2.2m allocated by the previous Government. It is anticipated that approximately 12 people will move into supported accommodation in the community during the financial year 1998-99. It is anticipated further that that allocation of funds will provide the capacity over the three-year initiative to allow approximately 60 to 65 people to relocate, depending on the size of the package when it is finalised.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I turn to page 12, the key performance/activity information indicators. I notice one there in relation to service types. There are a number there—total direct service residential clients down to residential services. There have been decreases in all of those with the exception of the Alternative Living Service. There has been an increase of 473 to 481. I am looking for an explanation as to why that one in particular has gone up and the others have gone down.

**Ms BLIGH:** The "Centres" refers to Challinor and Basil Stafford Centre. As you would be aware, the Challinor Centre will close on 30 September. The decrease in that figure reflects the gradual movement out of the Challinor Centre and the Basil Stafford Centre of a number of people, some of whom have

moved into the ALS system. There has been an increase in the ALS system. We anticipate it over the life of the financial year.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I turn to page 19; the subprogram totals \$91,665,000. What funding has been allocated this financial year for the Positive Parenting Program.

**Ms BLIGH:** The Positive Parenting Program?

**Mr BEANLAND:** Yes, I notice \$300,000 has been allocated to the Shopfront Strategy. Have other funds been allocated?

**Ms BLIGH:** No, you may be referring to the election commitment to fund Positive Parenting Programs. That has been allocated to the Department of Health to implement.

**Mr BEANLAND:** There is no additional funding in your portfolio?

**Ms BLIGH:** No, I think it is an annual allocation of \$3m to supplement the Health budget to carry out that initiative.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Page 16, paragraph 6, relates to child protection services. You have allocated an additional \$4.4m over four years. How much additional funding has been allocated for the 1998-99 financial year? Is it \$1.1m?

**Ms BLIGH:** \$1.1m of that \$4.4m has been allocated for the 1998-99 year.

**Mr BEANLAND:** In relation to child protection, page 16 refers to workshops. How many workshops are being proposed? Where and when will they be held? Who is conducting the workshops?

**Ms BLIGH:** There is a proposal to hold five public workshops in relation to the Bill. One was held earlier this week in Brisbane. It is more than five. They will be held in Rockhampton, Townsville, Cairns, Mount Isa and Toowoomba. The workshops will be conducted by a combination of departmental officers and invited guest speakers. The structure of the workshops has been a brief introduction to the major changes in the Bill followed by a very short panel of guest speakers, speaking for 5 to 10 minutes each from a particular area of interest or expertise. The Brisbane workshop was addressed by the Children's Commissioner, by Ian Dearden representing the Civil Liberties Council, by Liz Meadows from the Young People in Care Organisation and by Chel Quinn representing the Child and Family Welfare Association of Queensland. Departmental officers then conducted smaller working groups among the participants, which numbered over 100, and will report back to me at the end of the workshops on the outcomes of those consultations.

**Mr BEANLAND:** What funds have been allocated for that purpose?

**Ms BLIGH:** Those funds are out of internal—

**Mr BEANLAND:** Departmental sources.

**Ms BLIGH:** Internal departmental sources, but I do not know that we have even—

**Mr SMITH:** There is no specific additional allocation. It is coming from the base funding for the program.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I have all the jargon, director-general.

**Mr SMITH:** I could give you some more.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Spare us, please.

**Mr BEANLAND:** You are doing an analysis of this program, are you not? Who is undertaking that task? What is the cost and what data is being assessed? You were talking about best practice.

**Ms BLIGH:** I am not entirely sure of the intent of the question.

**Mr BEANLAND:** It says that a comprehensive analysis of child protection data will provide the foundation. I am referring to that analysis. Who is actually doing that?

**Ms BLIGH:** Basically, the director-general is overseeing the analysis and it will be conducted internally to form future budget strategies. An officer has been appointed to oversee the implementation of the legislation. He will also be working on the program. I might ask the director-general if he can give any further details in relation to that.

**Mr SMITH:** There are two areas being worked on. One is looking generally at the total child protection package and how we may go forward in terms of the services relating to that package. Particularly, there is also work, with respect to the comprehensive analysis of child protection data, through those practice development workshops that we have referred to. With respect to those workshops, the program is allocated \$60,000 to further develop the Working with Families Policy and the practice associated with that. That should ensure that approximately 240 child protection workers are trained. That would include those involved in indigenous support and child protection and support.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Reference is made also on page 16 to the Child Protection Bill 1998. What funding has been allocated for the implementation of this legislation and what additional staff will be required?

**Ms BLIGH:** The implementation of this legislation will impose further costs on the department in two phases. The implementation phase of the Bill prior to its proclamation will require a translation process of children in the care of the department from existing court orders to new orders. There will also be costs incurred post the implementation phase. There will be costs incurred not only by this department but also by the Department of Justice in the courts budget. At this stage, that will be a process that is developed through the next Budget process. It is not the intention of the department, or it is not my intention, to have the Bill proclaimed before the end of this financial year simply because of what will be, I think, a very substantial and quite complicated translation process that the department advises me will take between six and eight months to complete.

There will be resource implications with the implementation of the Bill. We are in the process of putting together the costs of that at this stage. The next Budget will be the appropriate forum for that to

be determined. There was an allocation by the previous Government of \$500,000, which is still in the base budget of the department for implementation costs associated with advertising and training of relevant departmental officers and non-Government officers about the new Bill.

I should say in this regard, though, that the previous Labor Government in 1995, when it put forward the then child protection legislation, made a budget allocation of \$8m as a child protection strategy to accompany the implementation of the Bill. That \$8m has been in the budget of the department for the last three Budgets in a row, despite the fact that this Bill has never made it into the Parliament—or made it into the Parliament and got withdrawn again. Some of that \$8m has gone into some child protection and family support strategy, but there are substantial other parts of that money that the previous Government has allocated to other areas of the department and, in fact, returned some of it as savings to Treasury.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I am sorry, I lost track of that a little. You started off saying that the money was in the base but you finished up by saying that some of it is not in the base. Could I ask how much is there, or is it all there, or have sums now gone elsewhere?

**Ms BLIGH:** Sorry, in 1995 the then Labor Government allocated \$8m for a child protection strategy. That \$8m is in the base of the department, but under the previous Government it was allocated to a range of purposes not all of which are associated with child protection and none of which are associated with the new Bill—with the new Act—because under the previous Government the new Act never materialised. In relation to your question about whether or not there is allocation in this Budget for what I have said I believe will be quite substantial resource implications of the new Act, that will be a process determined in the next Budget round.

**Mr BEANLAND:** So——

**Ms BLIGH:** There is \$500,000 allocated in the previous Government's Budget just for the purpose of advertising the existence of the new Bill and those sorts of minor costs associated with any new legislation. That is in the department, in the base, and will be spent for that purpose. It is rolled over from last year because it was not needed for that purpose. That was not part of the \$8m, though.

**The CHAIRMAN:** You have had 20 minutes. Do you have a final question on that?

**Mr BEANLAND:** No, that is right.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time for questions by Government members returns.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** Earlier this morning, concerns were raised in relation to the involvement of your Cabinet and Legislation Liaison Officer in a non-Government organisation. Can you clarify the amount of funds received from your department?

**Ms BLIGH:** Yes. Thank you, I am pleased to have the opportunity to clarify this. I indicated to the member for Indooroopilly that I thought that the amount of emergency relief allocated to the

Queensland AIDS Council was in the vicinity of a couple of thousand dollars. It is, in fact, \$6,377 per annum. Further, these funds are not allocated on a submission basis. Organisations do not tender competitively for them, having become the approved provider for emergency relief. The Queensland AIDS Council, like all emergency relief providers, just simply has a rolling allocation. So it is not a question of influence being exercised over the funds.

I would like to put on the record a fact that I was unaware of this morning, which is that Mr Lovney, upon appointment, put in writing and made a declaration of his interest in this matter to his then supervisor, Margaret Alison, who was Acting Director-General at the time. He indicated in the letter that he put to his supervisor that he would be seeking to resign his position as soon as possible, but as it is a position that involves a substantial degree of responsibility, in fairness to his organisation, which administers a total budget of \$2m, he felt that he needed to give them some notice. At the recent AGM he gave notice of three months and will resign from that position at Christmas time.

I would assume that Mr Beanland is a supporter of the good work done by the Queensland AIDS Council and there was no intent in his question to cast any aspersions on the operation of that organisation or, indeed, the integrity of this officer who has, as I have outlined clearly, acted absolutely scrupulously in this regard.

**Mrs NELSON-CARR:** On page 6 at paragraph 5 of the MPS there is reference to an allocation of \$14m over four years to be provided for equipment and renovations in child-care services. Why is this funding needed and in what ways will it improve the quality of care for children?

**Ms BLIGH:** Throughout the last two years the child-care sector, in both private and community-provided services, has come under significant attack by savage funding cuts by the Commonwealth Government, which has withdrawn almost \$830m in operational subsidies from community-based services across Australia. In addition, they have frozen child-care assistance at the 1996 level. So parents are facing an increasing gap between fees and the child-care assistance available to them. Child care is become increasingly beyond the reach of many parents. Centre-based child care is becoming beyond the reach of a number of parents, and this is seeing an increasing exodus from the formal care system into the informal care system. This is putting the viability of services at risk.

While no State Government anywhere in the country will ever be able to replace the operational funding that was ripped out of this system by the Howard Government, the Labor Government felt that it was important for us to make some contribution to the costs of running child care. We have put forward an allocation of \$14m over four years, which will allow those organisations which are encountering viability difficulties to at least put forward an application or to receive assistance for the purchase of playground material, materials and facilities such as shade covers, covered play areas, capital equipment,

upgrades and maintenance, which will provide some relief on their already stretched budgets, and which will hopefully help to minimise fees and keep child care affordable for the bulk of working families.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The notion of grants and subsidies to non-Government agencies is something that is always difficult as a local member to handle with community groups. I have already asked you about the total outlays on page 4 of \$336m. On page 18 specifically under the Families Program, the fourth item down is \$41.834m on current grants and subsidies. What funding will the facility currently being constructed at the Shaftesbury campus receive out of this \$41.834m?

**Ms BLIGH:** The facility currently being constructed at the Shaftesbury campus will not receive any recurrent funding. No recurrent funding was made available by the previous Government and this Government will not provide any such funding to the facility either.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Why is there not any recurrent funding for this significant facility?

**Ms BLIGH:** That is a very good question. It is never the normal departmental practice to provide capital grants for the construction of facilities for which there are no recurrent funds available. There are a number of unusual features about this grant. The grant of \$300,000 was made available in the 1996-97 Budget for a residential assessment centre for children in the care of the department or at risk of coming into care. We are talking about a very vulnerable group of children. The decision to make the funds available for the construction of such a centre was made in isolation from any identified need for any such facility or any departmental program to support the operation of such a facility.

Some aspects of the tender process beg serious questions. Tenders were called and they closed at 2 p.m. on 9 May 1997. A selection committee was convened at 3 p.m. on that day. The selection committee comprised the program director of the Families Program, the program director of the Community Care Program and the director of the Strategic Planning Coordination and Review Branch of the department. Each of those officers reported directly to the then director-general, Mr Allan Male, who has a direct personal and pecuniary interest in the Shaftesbury centre, one of the applicants for the funds. At 3 p.m. the selection committee comprising those officers shortlisted for consideration the Shaftesbury centre and one other of the seven applicants. Somebody on the selection committee twigged that there might at least be a possible perception of a conflict of interest and they seconded Mr Eric Finger to the selection process after the shortlisting had occurred. In retrospect, this seems nothing more than a cynical attempt to lend some propriety to a process that was seriously flawed. That happened on the Friday. On the following Monday, the evaluation of the applications was finalised. On the Tuesday, the selection report was finalised. Within four working days of the tenders closing, the Shaftesbury facility had been identified as the successful applicant.

Some five weeks later, on Wednesday 18 June, the recommendation was signed off. It may not seem an auspicious date to members of this Committee, but to members of the previous Estimates committee it was, because the previous Estimates committee was held on 19 June. The Minister at that time was unable to provide any answers to questions raised in regard to this facility because at that stage he had not approved it. However, he did approve it on the Sunday after the Estimates committee met. Applicants for the funds had been advised that the decision would be announced on 15 May. It was a specific condition of this grant that the successful tender must be in a position to start construction before 30 June 1997.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Again I refer you to grants and subsidies, and the general amount of \$336m and, since we are on this, the amount of \$41.834m. Groups that I deal with from my electorate have difficulties with the lengthy time frame that the Budget process, the application process and the never-ending round of Budget submissions has. What is the normal process in grant approvals and, specifically, what is the usual time frame between departmental approval and formal signing off by the Minister?

**Ms BLIGH:** It is difficult to give an average time for that sort of process. Obviously it is determined on a case-by-case basis, depending on the nature of the facility being tendered for, the number of applications received, the degree of difficulty for the department in processing all of those applications and whether or not it is a Statewide program. In cases such as this where one of the conditions of the grant was that successful applicants be in a position to start construction by a certain date, it would be usual practice for the process to be finalised, approved and signed off in plenty of time for the applicant to meet that condition. That was clearly not the case in this regard.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Bearing in mind the same two Budget items, this week I was talking to two groups that are involved significantly in the whole non-Government sector of providing service. In fact, they are major recipients from this department. It appears that what you referred to before about the uneven nature of the partnership is often perceived where the smaller non-Government agency is seen to be in the inferior position because the Government holds all the money. Are these the main problems that the department or non-Government agencies face in the selection process when non-Government agencies apply for departmental funding?

**Ms BLIGH:** As I alluded to in my earlier answer to your questions, non-Government agencies, particularly smaller agencies, often face a range of difficulties when they are seeking funding from any Government source. Those difficulties often include a lack of resources to put together comprehensive submissions, sometimes a lack of experience by officers drafting submissions and the requirement that the submission be drafted while staff are also responsible for delivering services under very difficult circumstances.

In the case of this grant—and a number of other grants that I have raised from time to time under the administration of the previous Government in this portfolio—it would seem that the organisations that applied were faced with an additional burden, that is, they were competing with somebody who had an inside edge. As I am sure the member for Chermide is aware, the Shaftesbury organisation was originally founded in 1966 by Reverend Allan Male who, under the previous Government, subsequently became the director-general of the department. As the founder of the organisation, he was the director for 30 years until he resigned that position in 1996, but he continued to retain a position on the board and continued for some time as a signatory to the cheque account. As I have identified on other occasions in the Parliament, he is a party to a loan to the Shaftesbury organisation of \$130,000. Therefore, we have a situation where the director-general of the department has a direct pecuniary interest—in fact, he is owed money—in an organisation that is a direct applicant for a \$300,000 grant, the origins of which are almost unknown. Given the many problems surrounding the Shaftesbury organisation over the years, I can understand the reticence of the member for Beaudesert in not wanting to be faced with the need to defend or justify the decision to make those grants.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Again referring to page 4 and page 18 under grants and submissions, my experience has been that the number of applicants and the total funds applied for far exceed the availability in the budget and there is a struggle for those funds. How does the department go about sorting that out? Obviously you have selection criteria, but who determines the selection criteria and how do you apply them?

**Ms BLIGH:** The selection criteria are determined by departmental officers who put forward the program proposal, which is finally approved by both the director-general and the Minister.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Within each program?

**Ms BLIGH:** Within each program area. Obviously it is important, as you identified, to make sure that the selection criteria are rigorous and that when applications are received there is a very thorough assessment of each application against each selection criterion.

In the case of the \$300,000 grant to the Shaftesbury centre, frankly I find it almost impossible to understand how the selection committee could have ranked this proposal as the most deserving against the criteria that were publicised for the project. On at least four criteria, the facility should have been found to be inappropriate.

The first criterion required the possession of suitable land in an environment conducive to the personal growth and development of children and young people. The land at the Shaftesbury facility is a large, unfenced property right on the Bruce Highway and it is co-located with a medium-security adult correctional facility for serious offenders, including drug and sex offenders. Frankly, I find that an interesting notion of personal growth.

The second criterion required a proven track record in prevention, rehabilitation and training services to children and young people. The Shaftesbury organisation has never provided services to children. It has only ever been a youth program and serious questions about the programs it has offered over the years have raised questions in many departmental reports for more than a decade.

The third criterion required the provision of sketch plans for a suitable facility costing not more than \$300,000. The proposal put forward by the Shaftesbury organisation proposed dormitory-style accommodation, a form of accommodation for children in care that, to my knowledge, has not been put forward since about the 1950s. Not only was dormitory-style bedroom accommodation proposed but also open-style bathrooms. Again, that is entirely inappropriate. As I have identified before, it was also a requirement that the successful applicant be able to commence construction before 30 June 1997. Building approval was not sought from the council until March 1998. Construction did not begin until 1 June 1998—almost a full year after the grant had been made. Lastly, applicants were required to make a commitment to work in close partnership with the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care.

This organisation, as I have already said, was subject to a number of adverse departmental reports dating back to 1975. In 1981 the then Children's Services Department stated that it found it very difficult to control or influence the former director-general and the standard of programs being funded. In 1984 a departmental evaluation found that the former director-general's program had little to offer offending adolescents, was partially sexist in nature and had not changed in a positive light since its inception in 1967. In 1990 a report said that the Shaftesbury centre had operated with limited accountability over the years. In 1992, quarterly funding was withheld subject to financial accountability.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time for that answer has expired. My electorate is on the north side of Brisbane. I come into contact with people not just from the inner northern suburbs but also the outer ones. I also mix in different church circles, having been on various committees. You are speaking about certain criteria, but I have been told that it appears that this centre and others seemed to have been doing a good job. Could those criteria not have been too inflexible and could you not have a process that is too inflexible such that groups that need funding are not getting it?

**Ms BLIGH:** In terms of flexibility, I think there has to be, as I said, rigour in the development of criteria and in the way that applicants are assessed against criteria. It is my view that there are no reasonable grounds on which to conclude that a facility for children who are in the care of the department or at risk of coming into care—therefore, by definition a very vulnerable group of children—could ever be adequately offered a service where they are being co-located with an adult correctional facility for drug offenders and sex offenders. I would not think that any reasonable

person either working in the field or in the general community would regard that as an acceptable process. The committee, however, on that criteria ranked it very highly—9 out of 10. As I said, I do not believe that the man-in-the-street test would rank it a 9 out of 10 on those criteria. I would be very surprised if the member for Chermerside or any other member of the House could identify an organisation that had been operating for this long in their electorates that had been subject to as many adverse reports as this one, and yet it managed to not only get through this process but be determined as the most meritorious.

I would like to make it clear that this is no reflection on the capacity of Mr Eric Finger, who operated as an external representative in this process. As an external representative, I believe he was entitled to receive accurate and honest advice from the departmental officers on the panel. In the face of the multitude of problems that I have outlined with this application, I do not believe it is reasonable to conclude that this organisation was even suitable for consideration let alone the best applicant for considerable public funds.

**The CHAIRMAN:** In respect of all of these grants and subsidies, I hear the terms "accountability" and "transparency". I take that simply to mean honesty and fair-handedness. What procedures concerning payments and audit are normally employed by the department to ensure that we have this transparent accountability with respect to funding grants to non-Government organisations?

**Ms BLIGH:** There is a range of accountability mechanisms. In relation particularly to capital grants, you would be aware that this department has a relatively low capital program compared with other departments, but rigorous accountability guidelines are still employed. The usual process for the awarding of capital grants is as follows: a letter from the Minister is sent to the successful tenderer outlining the Act under which the grant was made and the accountability mechanisms required. A capital agreement outlining all of the obligations of the parties is then signed by the successful organisation prior to any funding being advanced. Funding is then advanced in a schedule of progress payments, and those progress payments are made in gradual instalments relating to the staged completion of a project. None of this occurred with this grant to the Shaftsbury organisation.

The whole cheque for the whole \$300,000—the block grant—was forwarded on 22 June 1997 with no letter of authorisation, just in time for the end of the financial year. A letter authorising the grant and outlining the accountability requirements was not sent by the then Minister until 28 July 1997, five weeks after the cheque had been forwarded. It was not until December 1997 that a capital agreement—six months after the money had been received—was entered into by the organisation. That capital agreement required completion of the facility by June 1998. One complete payment of \$300,000 was made in advance, with no staged payment on progress, that is, this organisation received 12 months of interest on a \$300,000 grant that it did not

begin to use—money which in my view rightly belonged to taxpayers. No construction of this facility had even started in June 1998. The organisation, the Shaftsbury campus, sought and received an extension to the terms of the capital agreement to allow it to construct by the end of December this year. When did it receive that extension? It received it on 12 June 1998, which I am sure, Mr Sullivan, you will recall was one day before the State election, and the Government was well and truly in caretaker mode.

In the context of recent allegations of past abuse in institutions for the care of children, all of which were well known to the former director-general and Minister, the construction of this facility is clearly inappropriate and out of step with established best practice for the care of children not only in Australia but internationally. While I cannot reverse what has been done, I would like to assure the Committee that no children will be placed in this facility under this Government, nor will any recurrent funds be provided to it.

In my view, it is unlikely that any future Government of any political persuasion will ever utilise this unsuitable facility for the care of children. In addition, the organisation has informed my department that it will be seeking funds to construct another eight to 10 similar facilities on its site. I can assure the Committee that no capital funds will be provided under this administration for this entirely fanciful notion. All of this, I think you will agree, is cause for serious concern. The director-general has referred this whole matter to internal audit, which is conducting a thorough investigation into what is clearly a suspect process and the involvement of any serving officer of the department in it.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I have some other questions on funding matters, but the 20 minutes for questions by Government members has expired.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Page 7 refers to the toll-free Gambling Help-Line, which will be piloted in three regional centres and which will provide a 24-hour service. What are those three regional centres and what funds have been allocated for this?

**Ms BLIGH:** The toll-free Gambling Help-Line is being piloted in three centres—Mount Isa, Cairns and Rockhampton. I recently launched the pilot in Cairns. The funds available to this initiative total \$300,000. There is \$100,000 for each of the pilots.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Did you compare your cost of running one of these to that of the non-Government sector? Did you look at what opportunity there might have been to subsidise the non-Government sector to do this?

**Ms BLIGH:** All of the pilots are being conducted by non-Government organisations.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Could we have the names of those?

**Ms BLIGH:** I will take that on notice and come back to you.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I refer again to page 17, on which is found a reference to \$2.7m over four years for the SACS Award, which we were talking about a

little earlier. Firstly, I presume that means there is roughly \$680,000 this year? Does it divide up equally?

**Ms BLIGH:** It is in the vicinity of that. I actually outlined it before. I will locate the exact figure.

**Mr BEANLAND:** As I understand it, there could be a bit more later in the piece than there is now. That is the reason I asked the question. The costs may not necessarily be up front in the first year.

**Ms BLIGH:** For the SACS Award there is in fact \$2.256m this year, because the SACS Award supplementation will be backdated to 1 July. The recurrent supplementation is \$2.256m. This is on top of the existing supplementation for the award.

**Mr BEANLAND:** In relation to the second paragraph on that page, there was reference to a training package to equip community workers with skills to conduct the parent education courses for vulnerable families. What are the details of this training package that is going to assist parents?

**Ms BLIGH:** Two projects are being funded under the initiative. The first provides recurrent funds of \$200,000. They have been provided by the Commonwealth for the development of an accredited training package to enable community based workers to conduct parent education. The training package will be generally targeted at very young parents, parents who are geographically isolated and those experiencing chronic ill health, poverty or inadequate support networks. During May 1998 a consultant was approved and contracted to develop and deliver this parent education and support package. The successful consultant is the Brisbane Education Centre and it is working jointly on the project with Learning Queensland.

Project 2 involves Commonwealth funding of \$80,000 non-recurrent which has been provided to develop culturally appropriate parenting education materials and resources for parents in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in north Queensland. In January 1998 the Cape York Remote Area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care Advisory Association was approved by the then Minister to manage the projects being conducted in four stages over a 12 month period. This is being conducted in a number of stages. The first stage has been completed and involved consultation with these communities. The second stage is the development of resources. The third and fourth stages relate to the production and distribution of the resources.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Can I just clarify those? Whereabouts are these courses being held? In the cape, did you say?

**Ms BLIGH:** There are two projects. The second project is specifically targeted at parents and families in Cape York and indigenous communities in that area. That is an allocation of \$80,000. The larger allocation is a different project. It is a \$200,000 project that will provide accredited training to community based workers throughout the State. It is not a geographically targeted program.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Where specifically have the courses been held to date?

**Ms BLIGH:** There have not been any held to date to my knowledge. I understand that a range of initial consultations have already taken place with non-Government service providers in this field with departmental staff in relation to the content of a proposed training package, and an initial draft of the training package is currently being developed. Very soon service providers will be invited to nominate staff to undertake this training.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Where are you looking at? Are you looking at places such as Longreach or the Gold Coast? I am just trying to get to the bottom of this.

**Ms BLIGH:** They will be targeting the locations where family support workers have been funded. There are 40 family support workers funded across the State. You will be aware that there is a disproportionate number of them surrounding the residential home of the former director-general, the Reverend Allan Male, but apart from that anomaly I understand it is a relatively even distribution across the State.

**Mr BEANLAND:** So courses will be held in those localities?

**Ms BLIGH:** In those localities.

**Mr BEANLAND:** What, in hiring halls? What sort of operations are they going to be?

**Ms BLIGH:** My understanding is that they will be held in departmental offices that have training facilities and those sorts of things.

**Mr BEANLAND:** How many families are you looking at in each case? Is it a small group?

**Ms BLIGH:** The training is for community workers who are working with the families, and they will become accredited to then use the materials with the families that they work with. So there will be some workers who will work with 20 families and some with a great deal more, depending on the nature of their service and the way they are run.

**Mr BEANLAND:** In relation to the Moving Ahead Program on which there are questions on notice, is there a commitment to long-term support and funding of this program? I am not sure on reading your answer. I see that funds have been allocated; I understand that. But is there long-term support and funding for this or is it still being evaluated at this stage?

**Ms BLIGH:** The program is being evaluated, but that does not indicate a lack of support for the project. As you would be aware, the previous Government put this project in place. Frankly, it is my view that it was irresponsible of it to do so without any idea of what would happen to the young people on these programs at the end of the two years that the funding has been approved for them. There is no hesitation by this Government to continue support for transition post-school programs for young people leaving special schools who have special needs. The question arises of what will happen to those people who are in these programs at the end of their two-year period, and the first lot of those will be up in

June next year. So it is not a question of commitment of funds for the two-year program; it is about providing resources and assistance for young people as they make the transition out of the Moving Ahead Program. That is a question that we are in the process of examining in relation to the allocation processes of the \$30m to ensure that some of those young people have access to putting applications in for those funds if they need further assistance.

**Mr BEANLAND:** On page 16 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements, in the two bottom lines you talk about independent evaluations being completed for four pilot shared family care services in October 1998 and five pilot assessment services in December 1998. Who is going to undertake these evaluations and what are the costs?

**Ms BLIGH:** I will have to take advice from the director-general. They were appointed in October 1997. External consultants were appointed to evaluate the transfer of departmental care providers to non-Government shared family care services. I might just ask Mr Martin, who is the program director, to tell you which consultants are undertaking the evaluation.

**Mr MARTIN:** The assessment services are being conducted by Deakin Human Services associated with Deakin University, and the shared family care pilot assessment is being conducted by Pamela Spall and Associates, the Queensland firm.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Sorry, who was the second firm?

**Mr MARTIN:** Pamela Spall and Associates.

**Mr BEANLAND:** What is the cost of that?

**Mr MARTIN:** The cost of each is approximately \$50,000.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Some of that information might have been in the questions on notice, too.

**Ms BLIGH:** It has just been drawn to my attention that when I answered the question in relation to the SACS award, the figure I used—the two point whatever—was over the whole department. I think your question was specifically in relation to the Families Program. You mentioned a figure of \$640,000. Your figure is right, but it is recurrent and it will be evenly spread over time. The principle of the answer was right. The figure was across the department.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Thankyou.

**Ms BLIGH:** Can I just draw your attention in relation to those consultancies that their terms are spelt out in more detail in the answer to the question on notice.

**Mr BEANLAND:** In relation to Corporate Services on page 34, I ask for detail of the increase in Information Management from \$10.5m to \$12.3m.

**Ms BLIGH:** I might ask Carmel Finn, the director of this program to answer that.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Is it to do with the year 2000 or is it the you-beaut scheme we have got?

**Ms BLIGH:** Director-General, would you like to comment on that while we are waiting for Carmel? Do not get this man started on Y2K or you are really going to regret this.

**The CHAIRMAN:** You would have three minutes maximum.

**Mr SMITH:** Some of it is associated with year 2000 compliance issues. There is significant work in upgrading the IT infrastructure for that purpose. A large part is related to the implementation of the SAP HR module which will come on stream in February of next year. I might hand over to Carmel.

**Ms FINN:** Some of the money is associated with the year 2000 projects—\$305,000 of that. Some of it is related to the implementation of a system in the juvenile justice area. It is a carryover from the previous year. There is money in there associated with the administrative work associated with the Forde inquiry and some money associated with enterprise bargaining initiatives. So it is in the overall program, it covers much more than just the information technology.

**Mr BEANLAND:** What is the amount for enterprise bargaining initiatives?

**Ms FINN:** It is the 2.5% supplementation from Treasury—the increase for the information management directorate for that.

**Mr BEANLAND:** The other matter you mentioned was work associated with the Forde inquiry. What is the figure for that?

**Ms BLIGH:** It is \$200,000.

**Mr BEANLAND:** We have the \$305,000, the \$200,000 and the 2.5% enterprise bargaining initiative. What is the figure for that?

**Ms BLIGH:** \$163,000.

**Mr BEANLAND:** We are still a fair way short.

**Ms BLIGH:** We have the machinery of Government changes at \$209,000.

**Mr BEANLAND:** It is still a little short, I think.

**Mr O'BRIEN:** You have the machinery of Government changes, the juvenile justice legislation at \$440,000, and year 2000 projects at \$305,000. There are additional corporate services costs to do with new initiatives of the department. It is putting on additional payroll people, additional finance staff and additional IT people to do with new initiatives of the department. That is \$295,000. There is the Forde inquiry, \$200,000; enterprise bargaining, \$163,000; and some minor adjustments of \$232,000.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Which gives you a grand total.

**Mr O'BRIEN:** \$1,844,000.

**Mr BEANLAND:** On page 33 is another one of these figures—I am sure there is a very good explanation for it—that has to do with non-labour operating costs. I see note 3 in relation to this, but obviously a lot of other figures go to make up the increase. Non-labour operating costs have gone from \$9.5m in 1997-98 to \$18.1m in 1998-99. What do the increases relate to?

**Ms BLIGH:** There is the allocation for the Forde inquiry, which rests administratively in this program, \$2.8m; plant and equipment purchased out of administrative savings, \$1.142m; juvenile justice information management project carryover, \$907,000;

SAP recoverable loan, \$895,000; corporate on-cost for the 1998-99 initiatives, which Arthur alluded to before, \$614,000; machinery of Government change, \$562,000; administrative and other commitments carryover, \$363,000; HRMIS SAP HR project additional funding, \$353,000; year 2000 project funding, \$305,000; corporate systems branch set-up, \$159,000; CBD office accommodation, 75% funding, \$146,000; the SAP HR project carryover, \$135,000; Managing for Outcomes training and project management carryover, \$100,000; community and personal histories grants carryover, \$27,000; QGFMS Queensland Treasury fees, \$23,000; and survey development for nutrition in child care carryover, \$15,000. That adds up to an increase of \$8,546,000.

**Mr BEANLAND:** What does the \$562,000 for machinery of Government changes relate to? That has come up a couple of times now.

**Mr O'BRIEN:** An amount of money from corporate services was transferred with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Program moving to the new Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development. The change is because we gave it more money in 1997-98 than we did in 1998-99. \$562,000 has come back to the department. We published more corporate costs for that component of the department in 1997-98 than we have given it in 1998-99.

**Ms BLIGH:** Than were required by the program.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Do you say that money is coming back to the department?

**Ms BLIGH:** Basically, yes.

**Mr BEANLAND:** From the Department of Equity and Fair Trading?

**Mr O'BRIEN:** When you publish these things and the department splits, you have to publish your previous year so that you are comparing apples with apples. To compare apples with apples, we had to give it the corporate services cost that was published last year. The actual cost that we worked out was less than what we published last year. In effect, the difference becomes an adjustment.

**Mr BEANLAND:** What is the figure that was published and what is the real figure?

**Mr O'BRIEN:** You would have to check the Ministerial Portfolio Statements of that department. I believe there is a note to that effect in its Ministerial Portfolio Statements.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Later in the afternoon there will be some information from a question on notice. That might assist you, too.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Current grants and subsidies are referred to on page 33. There has been an increase from \$32,000 to \$474,000. What do the increases relate to?

**Ms BLIGH:** There is a carryover, which was referenced before, from the community and personal histories area, of \$164,000 which, as you would be aware, shows as an increase but is a carryover from last year. There is \$310,000 in a grants pool that has

not been allocated but is being held in the corporate area for that purpose.

**Mr BEANLAND:** What is that for? I understand that it is in the corporate area, but what area does it normally go into?

**Mr O'BRIEN:** Basically, that grant pool meets emerging priorities across the department. So if we had an emerging priority in the Families Program, that money would be transferred to the Families Program and spent out of the Families Program. It would not be spent out of the Corporate Services Program.

**Mr BEANLAND:** So this is what you might call a sundries item for a rainy day, or something like that; is that what you are looking at—for a problem that might occur down the track?

**Mr O'BRIEN:** It is for emerging priorities.

**Mr BEANLAND:** But you will spend it somewhere during the year?

**Mr O'BRIEN:** We will spend it on grants across the department as they emerge.

**Ms BLIGH:** If you take out the carryover from the community and personal histories, it is an increase on the allocation made last year of \$195m to \$270m. So it is not quite as big a leap. As you will see in the actuals, we spent only \$32m of it. So it is a contingency.

**The CHAIRMAN:** It is now time for questions from Government members.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** Paragraph 7 on page 6 of the MPS indicates an additional \$1m over four years to expand outside school hours care programs. What programs does your department have in place for out of school care and how are they being expanded?

**Ms BLIGH:** The out of school care area of the department is the fastest growing type of child care being utilised by parents across the State. The Government has a number of programs which address parent and community needs for outside school hours care. There are presently, as you probably know, three programs operating under this sector, namely, the Outside School Hours Care Upgrading Program, the Outside School Hours Care Activities for Young People Program and the Vacation Care Access Program.

The Outside School Hours Care Activities for Young People Program aims to establish outside school hours care activity programs for young people aged between 13 and 15 years. This initiative is responding to parental and community concerns regarding the supervision of young people after school while their parents are still at work. This budget's additional \$250,000 will see approximately \$550,000 worth of funds available for the establishment of innovative services for young teenagers over the coming years. There has been a slow uptake of this program because, as you would probably appreciate, young people aged 13 to 15 are reluctant to attend anything that is called child care. We are looking at the moment at being a little more lateral about where we put these programs—perhaps not having them in schools but having them in some of the youth facilities and looking at what is actually

happening in those programs so that they are very much about young people, rather than 13-year-olds turning up and having to mix with seven and eight-year-olds. Parents find it very difficult to convince their 14 and 15-year-olds to attend those sorts of programs. There is still that need, but we are looking at meeting it better than we have been able to in the past.

A further \$0.16m is available in 1998-99 for the final funding round of the Outside School Hours Care Upgrading Program. This was actually developed initially by the Goss Government and has been in place ever since. The program has assisted these services to upgrade their facilities in line with national standards. Over \$4m has been provided to 234 services. Over half of all eligible services have utilised this funding. A number of vacation care services which are ineligible under the Commonwealth Government's means-tested Child Care Assistance Scheme are now funded under the \$0.3m State Vacation Care Access Program. Each of these has a focus on vacation needs of either children with a disability or children in isolated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Previous Minister Wilson, in the June/July school vacation, found it necessary to assist a number of outside school hours and vacation care programs by topping them up to meet viability issues, because the complexity of the Child Care Assistance Scheme under the current Federal Government and the withdrawal of operational subsidies from these vacation care programs is again threatening their viability. Similar to Minister Wilson, I made a one-off grant of \$2,500 for the September school holidays to all vacation care services, but we will not be able to do it at Christmas.

**The CHAIRMAN:** There have been discrepancies with outside school hours care facilities, depending on whether they were established under the Federal Government's scheme or under your department's funding. I believe that the Office of Child Care was looking at this. It was supposed to go to COAG a couple of years ago. Do you have any idea as to how that is progressing so that the funding to the different types of outside school hours facilities is more even?

**Ms BLIGH:** Not long after coming into the Ministry, I was briefed by the department about the outside school hours care problems being experienced in there. The Commonwealth has, as I have already said on a number of occasions, withdrawn substantial financial support from these programs. You are right; the viability of them is being threatened. I have written to my Commonwealth counterpart seeking immediate discussions. Obviously, that is all in abeyance at the moment. I anticipate being in a position next week to continue lobbying in that regard.

We have made one-off grants—myself and my predecessor—to help those organisations that have had the Commonwealth operational grants ripped out from them to make the adjustment over the last two school holidays. But in my view, in the next couple of months some of those organisations are going to have to face some very tough decisions. We have

been able to fund those one-off adjustments out of some carryover money that will not be available in the future and which, in any case, would not have been enough to sustain that kind of adjustment over the six to eight-week holiday program at Christmas.

So you are right to point out that the viability of a number of these programs will be called into question, and parents who often do not utilise any other form of care for their children except vacation care—because they have not been able to get holidays at the same time as the school holidays—will face some very difficult decisions about managing the care of their children during those times.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** The third paragraph on page 7 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements refers to the amendments to the Child Care Act and its regulations during 1998-99. What are the major issues which will be addressed in these amendments, and will they deal with the informal home-based care?

**Ms BLIGH:** The Child Care Act 1991 regulations protect children and families that use a range of children's services, which include long day care centres, kindergartens, occasional and limited hours care centres and family day care schemes. The regulations, as they currently stand, set legal minimum standards for child care service provision. There are a number of amendments that are required to the Act. They have been required for some time. It is probably timely to draw the attention of the Committee to what can only be described as an absolutely woeful legislative program in this portfolio over the past three years. There has been almost no legislative program, and there is a considerable backup of issues that need to be brought to the Parliament. This is certainly one that is long overdue. Amendments are required, firstly, to clarify and update some provisions in order to maintain their original intent and to ensure that the legislation is effective in its implementation, and a second group of amendments to facilitate the incorporation of national child care standards into Queensland's regulations. Problems that have been identified include insufficient clarity regarding departmental powers and processes and concerns regarding issues such as criminal history disclosures.

Another matter around which there is some ambiguity is the question of the minimum staffing levels over award meal breaks in services. I will also be looking at the question of how to amend the Act to ensure the safety of children who are cared for in the informal home-based sector, namely, by a person in their own home, for reward outside of any licensed family day care scheme. This is becoming an increasing problem due to the movement out of the increasingly expensive formal care system. In my view, it is an issue that many people in the community, including parents, are finding unacceptable.

It is a sad fact that the Howard Government's savage cutbacks to child care funding mean that many Queensland families are unable to pay child care fees in licensed regulated centres and are seeking cheaper and more affordable forms of care and, often unwittingly, are placing their children at some risk by being in an unregulated facility. There

has already been the death of a young child in this type of care, and I do not intend to allow the unchecked growth of this sector to continue. We will be seeking extensive consultation with the child care industry, both community-based centres and private providers, to ensure that the amendments meet their needs but are also workable and meet what I believe need to be very high standards to ensure the safety of children in these facilities.

**The CHAIRMAN:** In relation to child protection legislation—paragraphs 5 and 8 on page 16 of the MPS refer to the Child Protection Bill and the consultation process prior to its introduction. What form will this consultation take, and what opportunities are available for interested persons to access information and make comment on the proposed legislative provisions?

**Ms BLIGH:** The child protection legislation is in draft form. Cabinet has given authority to prepare it and an exposure draft has been approved for public consultation. Information seminars, as I alluded to before in answer to a question from the member for Indooroopilly, will be held during September and October across the State. We will be having seminars in Cairns, Townsville, Mount Isa, Rockhampton and Toowoomba, and we have already held one in Brisbane. Those will provide representatives from non-Government agencies, peak groups and any other interested individuals with the opportunity to find out more about the legislation, to listen to a range of guest speakers and to provide important feedback and comments, which will be collated for my consideration.

There is a range of resources that are available for distribution, both at the seminars and by mail. Information kits were prepared, including the draft legislation. To date, 500 of those have been forwarded to community agencies, peak groups and interested persons, including the shadow Minister. Might I say that I look forward to the comments of the member for Indooroopilly on the draft submission and particularly in relation to what I believe is groundbreaking, the charter of rights for children in our care. Resources distributed include copies of the consultation draft, a summary of the provisions, a shorter summary of those provisions and a comparison chart of the Children's Services Act of 1965, which this legislation will replace, and the draft legislation.

I have already convened a round table discussion of invited representatives from peak agencies and welfare groups with particular professional expertise in the field and other key individuals who work in the child protection area. That was held earlier this week and provided an opportunity for a much more thorough and rigorous analysis and discussion of the Bill by the key stakeholders. The group was quite diverse. Interestingly, it fully endorsed the proposed charter. Their only comments were related to the need to strengthen particular clauses. Another round table is proposed at the end of the process before the Bill is considered further by the Cabinet. Regional officers will be holding targeted consultation with key interest groups within their own region. Officers from the

legislation team within the Families Program will be meeting with key interest groups to allow them to be fully briefed on the content of the legislation. An invitation for public submissions will be advertised in the Courier-Mail on Saturday, 3 October. That is tomorrow.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** Page 7 of the MPS refers to amendments to domestic violence legislation. What budget provision has been made to implement that legislation?

**Ms BLIGH:** The previous Government made an allocation in last year's budget of the \$1.5m over three years, a total of \$500,000 each year specifically for the implementation associated with amendments that I am in the process of working up with the department for Cabinet's consideration. As I have outlined earlier, the previous Government, despite making a budget allocation, did not manage to get that legislation into the Parliament. There is a range of amendments that require urgent attention. They go to the technical matters to do with the effective operation of the legislation. I think 13 urgent amendments were identified by the Domestic Violence Council and provided to then Minister Woodgate in October 1995. They then sat on the Minister's desk, metaphorically speaking, for two and a half years when the former Minister, Minister Lingard, finally put them out for consultation in January this year. However, the number of service providers that he sent the documents to and the very short amount of time that he allowed for consultation—I think it was a turnaround time of 14 or 21 days—caused a lot of consternation and concern right across the sector. I had many complaints about it. I know that he did as Minister. When he was replaced subsequently by Minister Wilson, she withdrew that information from the public consultation, because it required substantial work and people needed more time to consider those amendments. I look forward to being able to bring those amendments into the Parliament by the end of this year. Again, that is another piece of legislation that has been woefully neglected and left to languish. We have moved ahead as quickly as we can on it. I look forward to being able to debate it further.

**The CHAIRMAN:** As to juvenile justice centres—an answer to a question on notice includes some information regarding the \$6.3m commitment over four years to the implementation of three new community justice centres. Have you decided that those centres will be located at Logan City, Townsville and Ipswich or is that still undecided at this stage?

**Ms BLIGH:** That decision has been made. That decision was made in Opposition, because they were election commitments that were announced during the election campaign. All of the locations identified have been identified as areas of high need with relatively large numbers of juvenile offenders on court orders. For example, as of April this year, the Logan/Beenleigh area had 148 young people resident there on supervised court orders, while the figures for Ipswich and Goodna were 136 and in the Townsville/Thuringowa region they were 162. That compares, for example, with 60 young people on

supervised court orders at the Sunshine Coast and 43 at Pine Rivers. Unfortunately, the member for Crows Nest is not here, because he would be reassured to know that there are only 11 at Roma. All of the pilot locations have historically produced—it is not just a one-off—disproportionately large numbers of admissions to detention and are situated close to youth detention centres in both Wacol and Townsville. Staff from the pilot centres will be working closely with staff in the youth detention centres so they can provide intensive pre and post-release services to juveniles admitted to detention.

There are also some very successful small-scale offender projects with annual budgets of approximately \$190,000, each of which are established at Logan City and Ipswich, which will be able to integrate with the new juvenile justice community centres. As you would no doubt be aware, indigenous young Queenslanders are overrepresented in all of the pilot locations. In April 1998, they constituted the following proportion of statutory juvenile justice clients: in Townsville/Thuringowa, 56% of all clients; Ipswich/Goodna, 40%; and Logan/Beenleigh, 25%. In addition, in the Logan/Beenleigh area there are significant numbers of young people from non-English-speaking backgrounds. It is our intention that those centres will provide a much more targeted service to those young people and hopefully correct their offending behaviour.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** I refer to Program Outlays—Juvenile Justice on page 23 of the MPS and particularly to the item Internal Service Charges 1997-98. Can you advise the Committee what the \$314,000 was expended on?

**Ms BLIGH:** It represents internal service charges that were charged by the Department of Justice in the 1997-98 financial year for services that were provided internally to juvenile justice programs then located in the Justice Department. The Department of Families, Youth and Community Care does not have those internal service charging arrangements, so we do not anticipate having that expenditure. I am sure that the Committee would be interested to know that, of the \$314,000 allocated there, \$306,000 was spent on the previous Government's ill-conceived juvenile justice crime scare campaign. No doubt people will recall the billboards, television commercials and council buses plastered with misleading images designed to scare rather than to inform the general public about juvenile crime.

In my view, the member for Indooroopilly was a participant in an extravagant misuse of taxpayers' money in committing those funds to that purpose. It was nothing short of a scandal that such a large amount of scarce resources was wasted on nothing more than blatant political propaganda. In my view, it was an entirely negative campaign put in place at the same time that the Government was out publicly calling for the need to value young people as a way of arresting the unacceptably high rate of youth suicide throughout Queensland. In Queensland we have a youth suicide rate that is 17% above the national average. There is simply no justification for

it. It is something which, in my view, we have to be absolutely dedicated to reducing. I believe we ought to be targeting a rate that is below the national average, below every other State in Australia, instead of leading the States in such a shameful statistic.

It is important to set the record straight. Only 1% of all young people aged between 10 and 16 years ever come into contact with the juvenile justice system. To portray all young people as criminals, as that blatant political advertising did, is not only manifestly dishonest; it is destructive of the attempts that we are all making to try to affirm young people rather than blame them. Anecdotal officer advice suggests that the amount of \$306,000 was only part of a much larger sum, probably in the vicinity of \$600,000, spent on this campaign from the funds of the Department of Justice. That \$306,000, I am sure you would agree, could have been much better spent and more effectively spent on a number of measures to reduce juvenile crime.

The current average, for example, of a grant to the YACCA Program—that is, the Youth and Community Combined Action Program, which has been highly successful in a number of areas—is \$68,000. It does not take much to realise that we could have funded a number of those programs out of that kind of money, instead of using it to emblazon the side of city council buses basically implying that all young people deserve to be behind bars. I can reassure the Committee that those kinds of funds will not be committed out of this portfolio for any such purpose in the next financial year.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I refer the Minister to page 31, paragraph 8 of the MPS, which notes that the department intends relocating the Brisbane South Regional Management Centre and the Ipswich Regional Management Centre. I also understand that the Brisbane North Regional Management Centre was relocated in 1997-98. How were these significant moves approved and are they fully funded in the budget?

**Ms BLIGH:** They are new regional management centres. They were approved by former Minister Lingard at Caboolture—that Regional Management Centre had been located at Lutwyche—and the centre that was located at Mount Gravatt is now to be located at Beenleigh. A new premises was also approved for the existing Ipswich office.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Who approved those last two?

**Ms BLIGH:** They were approved by Minister Lingard.

**The CHAIRMAN:** All three?

**Ms BLIGH:** I am advised that the Caboolture office was strongly promoted by the former director-general because of his friendship with the former Caboolture Mayor. This is despite the fact that there were never any funds identified in the budget to cover the new lease and the additional administrative costs. Moreover, there was no business case carried out in the decision to relocate these offices. The merit in the move to Caboolture when there were

other much higher funding priorities was questionable.

The end result is that this department has had to find \$3.6m in scarce funds over the next four years to meet the burden of paying the lease costs on an office that was never identified as a need and was never provided for in the budget. The new Beenleigh and Ipswich offices were able to be established within existing funding limits. However, all of these moves have left the department with what I regard as a very strange outcome, that is, that we do not have any regional office of the department in the Brisbane area.

The additional travel involved in officers and organisations in getting to Caboolture and Beenleigh has been very difficult for both staff and clients. No doubt, the Caboolture and Beenleigh areas are growth corridors and no doubt officers of the department should over time have been located there. But I am sure that you would agree that no such move should be made or contractual obligations entered into on behalf of the Government without the funds being available in terms of growth funds. As I have already identified, if the \$306,000 that was wasted on bus advertising could have gone to a lot of new youth programs across the State, you can only begin to imagine how my department could have usefully spent the \$3.5m that it is now committed to for an office that it never needed and was never budgeted for.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Before I hand over to the non-Government members, considering the time, if we go for just 15 minutes each, that will give us time to wrap up by 4 o'clock. Thank you, Mr Beanland.

**Mr BEANLAND:** One of the questions on notice related to the funding at page 6 of the MPS of \$2.4m over three years for three work-based child-care facilities. Could you just indicate where those facilities are going to be located?

**Ms BLIGH:** There has been no decision taken at this stage on the location of the facility, except as we outlined in our election commitments that it was our intention to co-locate them wherever possible with existing large public sector workplaces, such as TAFE colleges or public hospitals. The centres are to be for employees of the Public Service and we would obviously be looking for locations where there is a high demand.

There have been some very preliminary discussions with a number of organisations in relation to the possible location of a centre in either the Royal Brisbane Hospital or in the redevelopment of the Cairns Hospital, but they are developmental discussions at this stage. It is a three-year program; three centres. We are in the process of identifying suitable locations and there is no final determination of that at this stage.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Are there actual funds allocated in this year's Budget for that?

**Ms BLIGH:** Yes, we are anticipating that we will be in a position to at least commence construction of the first centre within this financial year. The flow of funds is expected to be about

\$400,000 in the 1998-99 year and it is included in the figures in the Ministerial Program Statements. We are estimating an allocation of \$1.2m in the 1999-2000 year and \$800,000 in the 2000-2001 year.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Can I just go back to an earlier question. I asked the director-general about his staff numbers. I have been sitting here thinking about that. I am sure he said that there are 35 in the office of the director-general—35 staff. It seems to me to be an awfully large number of staff. I know that you were critical of the former director-general. He had a lot of staff.

**Ms BLIGH:** Sure did.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Could I ask what 35, or whatever the number is—I wrote down "35"—people do in the director-general's office? You mentioned audit. I accept that, but they are out in other directorates in other programs. Can I ask what 35 people do in your office, please?

**Ms BLIGH:** I will ask the director-general to provide more detail on that. I think that you will recall that he indicated that he had brought internal audit into the office of the director-general. The office of strategic planning is technically still located within the office of the director-general. I will ask Mr Smith to answer that in more detail.

**Mr SMITH:** There are a range of functions that are directly in the office. One is the internal audit function and another is misconduct prevention. Obviously, the standard functions of the CLLO and the strategic planning functions are still counted in that office. Some of those functions in agencies can obviously be outside of the direct office. If you were asking for the people who work with me directly, there are two people, an executive officer and an executive secretary. All the other functions are fairly standard functions of Public Service agencies. I could give you the details of the structures and the gradings and functions, if you wish those.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I might have that if that is possible. So much seems to be made of this matter that I might as well find out how it works out at the end of the day.

**Ms BLIGH:** We will provide that to you by the end of the day with a direct comparison. I think you will find that the bringing in of internal audit compensates for positions that are no longer used for other purposes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Sorry, I missed the last bit you said.

**Ms BLIGH:** We will provide that information to Mr Beanland by the end of today. I think he will find that the bringing in of internal audit to the direct responsibility of the director-general will directly compensate for positions which are no longer in the office of the director-general but have been put out to direct service delivery which, in my view, is where they belong.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Mr Beanland, do you want that taken formally as an answer to a question on notice, or just additional information?

**Mr BEANLAND:** Provided we get that by the 7th.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The answers to questions on notice are to be in by a certain date, not this afternoon.

**Ms BLIGH:** We believe we will be able to provide it by this afternoon, but we will do it as an answer to a formal question on notice.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Reference was made to offices. I notice on page 32 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements reference to area offices being relocated and upgraded. There are some 10 of those. Could I ask which offices they are? I presume that there are 10 offices.

**Ms BLIGH:** I will ask Gary Clarke to come to the table to give you more detail on that. You will see that it is both relocated and upgraded. To my knowledge, we do not have 10 offices relocating.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I would not have thought so.

**Ms BLIGH:** I will ask Gary to give you more detail on that question. In terms of your reference to my previous answer to another question about this matter, I was referring to regional offices. These relate to area offices.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Would you like to reiterate the question just so that there is no confusion.

**Mr BEANLAND:** On page 32 of the MPS, reference is made to nine to 10 area offices to be relocated and upgraded. What are the 10 area offices that are being upgraded?

**Mr CLARKE:** There is a list that I can get here in about five minutes of the offices throughout the State that are being upgraded.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Does that have a cost factor attached to it?

**Mr CLARKE:** Yes, it does.

**Mr BEANLAND:** If we could have that, please? I refer to page 34—

**The CHAIRMAN:** Excuse me, the Minister might not have heard that. That again is taken on notice to provide that information.

**Ms BLIGH:** Sure.

**Mr BEANLAND:** At page 34 you have allocated \$69,000 for capital works, for projects covering minor works and office accommodation. How is that divided up between the 10 offices? Is that in the figures that you are providing?

**Ms BLIGH:** Yes, that will be in the material that is on notice. It relates directly to the previous question that you asked about upgrades and relocations. It is capital money that is being allowed for that. I am advised that Mr O'Brien can provide more information.

**Mr O'BRIEN:** The capital works figure included under Corporate Services is only for the corporate services component of those offices. In the other programs the fitout costs of other offices across the State are published. If it is an area office, it would appear under the Families Program. That is why 10 offices are across all programs, but the property branch is within the corporate services program which manages the fitout.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I refer you to page 100 of Budget Paper No. 3, which relates to capital outlays. At the bottom of that page it is indicated that minor works have been allocated \$99,000 and office accommodation has been allocated \$70,000. How does that correlate with the \$93,000 for minor works and the \$76,000 for office accommodation cited on page 34 of the MPS? Again, it refers to corporate services.

**Ms BLIGH:** I will ask Mr O'Brien to give you an answer on that.

**Mr BEANLAND:** There seems to be a difference of \$6,000.

**Mr O'BRIEN:** It appears to be an error.

**Ms BLIGH:** The total is the same.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I noticed that the totals are the same, and that brings me to the next question. Browsing through this, I notice that the coalition capital works outlays had minor works at \$99,000 and office accommodation at \$170,000. That would seem to confirm that someone—either yourself, your officers or Treasury—decided to shave \$100,000 off the original figures to get the figures down. If you look at capital works and Office Accommodation—Disability, the coalition allocated \$635,000 and, on page 101, you allocate \$535,000, which is exactly \$100,000 less. I was browsing through and happened to see that there appears to be \$100,000 shaved off in each case, for no apparent reason.

**Mr O'BRIEN:** At the time that we did the budget in May, we were going on estimated actuals. We predicted that our office accommodation fitout program would not be completed. We predicted a carryover of about \$100,000 in office accommodation in each of the program areas. We managed to complete our office accommodation fitout projects and the carryover did not eventuate. The \$100,000 relates to that carryover. There was no shaving.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Is it just coincidental that they are all \$100,000?

**Ms BLIGH:** I think Mr O'Brien has answered the question. It seems that in this area, as opposed to all of the other responsibilities of the former Ministers, they managed to get it done sooner than they expected.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I refer you to page 17, under Key Performance Indicators, to the child protection cases. In 1997-98, child protection cases notified was estimated to be 17,055 and the actual figure was 16,500. In 1998-99, the estimate is up again, at 17,336. A similar situation exists with child protection cases finalised and child protection cases substantiated. Last year, all the actual figures were down on the estimates and are estimated to be up again this year; indeed, they are slightly in excess of the 1997-98 estimated figures. Is there any reason for that or is that just how the numbers are working out?

**Ms BLIGH:** When putting this document together we have to rely on the professional expertise of officers on the ground to make some sort of assessment of what they think the growth will

be in those sorts of areas. It might be more useful to provide you—and I am happy to do so—with the actuals from 1996-97 so that we can compare actuals. Obviously it is a question that is very difficult to predict. In fact, if I get you the actuals you will see that there has been growth, but the estimates have been higher than the actual growth. Certainly, my understanding is that the number of notifications and finalisations have both grown. That is the judgment of the officers in the area. If we end up with slightly fewer notifications, I do not think we would complain if it meant that fewer children are being harmed.

**Mr BEANLAND:** In relation to the Adoption of Children Act to allow the implementation of the Intercountry Adoption Program, are there expected to be any costs involved for the department?

**Ms BLIGH:** No, there are not. In fact, this relates to a Bill that is before the House, the intention of which is to allow Queensland to continue its current practice rather than being dragged into the national scheme legislation. If we were dragged into the national scheme legislation, those decisions would have to be made by courts rather than as they currently are administratively. If we were not going down this road, we would incur significantly higher costs through the courts. The purpose of this legislation is to make sure that it does not impose any extra costs.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Page 26 refers to the youth advisory forums. In 1998 you give priority to rural and remote young people, which I hope is very successful. Can you provide a list of where you propose to hold those forums this year and what funding has been allocated to them? There is reference to them on page 27 under Performance Indicators, but there does not seem to be an actual figure, unless I have overlooked it.

**Ms BLIGH:** Your question is in relation to the anticipated number of people who will attend them?

**Mr BEANLAND:** Firstly, where will they be held and when?

**Ms BLIGH:** Basically, the locations are chosen by the Local Government Association of Queensland. We do not have any influence over which locations it chooses, but it has been agreed that this year they will be held in rural and remote locations. By virtue of the fact that they will be held in remote communities, we anticipate that fewer people will attend them. However, we do not anticipate that they will be any less successful simply by virtue of the fact that they will be held in less populous places. The same number of forums will be held, but they will be held in areas such as that represented by Mr Cooper where you would naturally expect to have fewer people turning up than if they were held in Brisbane. I can certainly provide you with information as to locations, but at this stage they have not been determined. It is not within our power to determine them.

**Mr BEANLAND:** How many do you expect to be held?

**Ms BLIGH:** Sorry, that was my misunderstanding: the Local Government Association

has completed the list. We can get it for you, but we require to take it on notice.

**Mr BEANLAND:** That will include where and when?

**Ms BLIGH:** Yes.

**Mr BEANLAND:** You indicated that you expect there will be fewer young people in attendance this time round. Do you have any indication of the differences in the number of attendances between previous years and this year?

**Ms BLIGH:** On the Key Performance chart at page 27 of the MPS, we are predicting around about 500 as opposed to 800 previously.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Of course, that depends on how many there will be.

**Ms BLIGH:** That is right. Again, it is a question of prediction.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Mr Beanland, you have one minute left.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Also on that page, reference is made to the preparation of a youth charter. Who within the department will develop that charter and when do you expect it to be available?

**Ms BLIGH:** The proposal to develop a Youth Charter was again part of the election commitments released with the Labor Party's youth policy. It will be a whole-of-Government statement in relation to young people's participation in Government and community decision making. As you would be aware, my department is the lead agency for youth, and it will be coordinated by us. I anticipate that it will be developed in conjunction with other Government departments but also with the peak agencies that represent young people and the organisations that provide services to them. It will involve extensive consultation—I guess going back to where I started this morning—because it will be based on a sense of partnership and will take some time to develop. But it will be made public when it is finalised.

**The CHAIRMAN:** We have just over 10 minutes for the final session, which will be questions by Government members. I turn to page 28 of the MPS, which indicates that the total outlay on the Youth Program is \$15m. However, on page 26 there is a reference to your department's lead agency role for the coordination of youth programs and services. Given the priority the Government has placed on youth policy and the inclusion of young people's views in Government policy, can you provide the Committee with details of your vision for the operation of the youth component of your portfolio?

**Ms BLIGH:** It is my view, as Minister, and a view that is shared by the Government that young people in our community deserve the high level of service from this Government as does any other age group in our society, that their valuable contribution should be recognised and that they need affirmation and not condemnation. I am sure this interesting statistic will come as no surprise to you. I cite the often low turn-out rates for voting, for example, in the age group 18 to 25. That indicates to me a growing cynicism among a group of young people

about government and about being part of the democratic process.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Not having an election booth at the Livid Festival will affect it, too.

**Ms BLIGH:** It is a shameful state of affairs! The role of my department will be to provide a voice in the formulation of all Government policy to ensure that young people's needs are fully considered in Government policy formulation, program management and service delivery. Young people deserve the same access as others to Government services. The goal of the Youth Program in a lead agency sense, in my view, is to support the successful participation of the diverse range of young people through coordinated policies, services and programs not only in our department but right across Government and the community. This intersects with all areas of Government policy, whether it is economic, social, cultural or environmental policies.

The portfolio has an important role in providing leadership, coordination and direction across Government in issues crucial to young people such as youth suicide, employment and education, by ensuring that the Government and community understand the need of our young people and is able to respond to them appropriately. A Youth Charter, as I have already indicated, will be developed and the Government will ensure that it is well informed about the needs of young people by consulting through the youth advisory forums. In 1998, as I have articulated, those will be concentrated in remote communities. The Youth Program will also continue to provide grants and developmental support either directly through the department or through the community youth sector.

I could not agree more with the member for Chermide about the need for a polling booth at the Livid Festival. I am happy to take it on board that I should do more to lobby for that at any future elections.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** I refer to the description of the Youth Program on page 25 of the MPS and the focus on prevention initiatives in relation to self-harming and offending. What new programs will be initiated and what existing programs will be further developed to intervene early in problems facing young people?

**Ms BLIGH:** The department will be administering a number of innovative responses in 1998-99, including \$680,000 over four years to indigenous communities for youth suicide and self-harm prevention strategies. Funding of \$350,000 over four years will be allocated for the establishment of a pilot project to formulate public space policies for young people by local councils. This initiative will aim to try to prevent some of the conflict that we all know occurs from time to time between young people and other community interests in public spaces such as shopping malls. Funding of \$3.5m over four years will be allocated to a new crime prevention grants program, which will provide resources for innovative local initiatives targeting young people which communities who are experiencing these problems will be able to make

application for. The department will continue to administer a wide variety of prevention and early intervention programs targeting young people, and these programs are being monitored and reviewed to ensure that they do continue to be effective.

The Youth Support Coordinator Program, funded from the department, will be evaluated this year. It is a program which prevents young people at risk of leaving home or school early from doing so by ensuring that they are linked into community-based support agencies. Staff and management committee representatives of organisations funded under the Youth Development Program (Prevention) will receive induction training to enhance their skills in the areas of program design and evaluation to ensure that quality prevention programs are implemented.

The ongoing evaluation of the Youth Development Program (Early Intervention Services) at Cairns and Boonah will culminate in a final report due in July 1999. The evaluation will make recommendations regarding how to work effectively with young people and families in conflict to resolve the problems that they face. No doubt other members of the Committee will have shared my concerns at revelations of the national survey into opportunistic prostitution that was released publicly this week, which indicated that we continue to have throughout Australia and in particular parts of Queensland problems with young people who, as a result of family breakdown and because of a lack of income support and homelessness, turn to opportunistic prostitution and end up having to trade sex for food, cigarettes, drugs, accommodation and so on.

In the light of those sorts of revelations, this department will continue to provide the support that we provide through the Youth Program and the Supported Accommodation Program in other parts of the department to continue to provide as much support as we can to young Queenslanders to try to make sure that they do not end up in those sorts of circumstances.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** The program goal of the Youth Program, outlined on page 25, is to support the successful participation of youth across Government and the community. What strategies are being developed to implement this commitment?

**Ms BLIGH:** One of our election commitments was to improve the involvement in decision making by young Queenslanders. The Youth Program in my department will be working in consultation with peak organisations in the youth sector to determine the most appropriate ways that we can establish regional councils and a range of other strategies to ensure that young people are given a voice in the democratic process.

Interestingly, I was asked to participate the other night in an interactive relay chat line that was established by the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland, which I thought was a very innovative response to the very difficult question of getting young people involved in politics in that it gave them an opportunity to enter a chat line where they could talk to a Minister for a while. Unfortunately, we were unable to get it off the ground because of technical

difficulties, which I guess is the other side of the coin in relation to trying to utilise information technology to overcome some of the barriers to participation in the democratic process. But the project is up and running again and I anticipate being involved in that process within the next couple of weeks. I look forward to seeing how many young people take up the opportunity. Certainly, I will be talking to my colleague Minister Mackenroth about the outcomes from that and about whether we can look at expanding it across other areas of Government.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I think this will be the last question before we wrap up. You said that your director-general would go on for hours about year 2000 compliance; he has only three minutes. The last paragraph on page 31 of the MPS notes that two systems will be redeveloped to ensure year 2000 compliance. What is your department's level of exposure and what is being done to address the year 2000 problem? Is this just something to add a little spice to the life of your IT personnel?

**Ms BLIGH:** This question raises very interesting problems for our department. I will ask the director-general to give you some more details on how we are moving to address it. You are right; I have to say that if the director-general is passionate about anything it is Y2K. He is fond of saying "Y2K—Here to stay". Perhaps Kylie Minogue's music is the only thing that he is more passionate about.

**Mr SMITH:** Thankyou, Minister, for those comments on my taste!

**The CHAIRMAN:** Are these sorts of comments normal as part of the Estimates process?

**Mr SMITH:** The department's Y2K compliance strategy obviously is aimed at ensuring uninterrupted services to our clients. The department has spent a lot of time examining the status of year 2000 compliance and exposure. It is important in terms of our client service delivery in particular, whether it be in the adoptions area, the foster care area, disability services and so on. The department's strategic systems, the SAP financials and, as mentioned previously in the Estimates process, the Child Protection Information System, are year 2000 compliant. The Human Resource Management

System is currently not compliant. I am sure my Public Service colleagues would agree with me that if they want to be paid on 1 January 2000 it is necessary to replace that system. Work is occurring on a SAP HR module to be put in place by February 1999.

The department has had a controlled development environment in place for some time. That has ensured that development practices have complied with requirements. In relation to funds available in the budget this year, there is \$313,000 to address this issue. Also, the department has a non-recoverable loan of some \$1.163m for the SAP HR project. The department will make sure that community organisations that we fund—about a third of our budget is directed to non-Government organisations—are prepared for year 2000. We will be running awareness forums for the non-Government sector in the months ahead.

**The CHAIRMAN:** If I may, I just have a quick follow-up question. Is the growing sharing of information between States of information within your like departments an added complication to this process or are you working with other similar departments in other States to tackle this on a common basis?

**Ms BLIGH:** Again I will refer that question to the director-general.

**Mr SMITH:** We clearly have close working relationships with the other States, particularly in areas such as child protection. Often our systems are quite different and, therefore, our work to ensure year 2000 compliance has occurred primarily independently, but increasingly I can see that, through the standing committee of income support and social welfare administrators, we will be looking at issues of data sharing and the information systems that support that in future.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time allocated for the consideration of the Estimates of expenditure for the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and the Minister for Disability Services has now expired. I thank the Minister and her portfolio officers for their attendance. The hearing is now suspended.

Sitting suspended from 3.57 p.m. to 4.17 p.m.

**ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER POLICY;  
WOMEN'S POLICY; EQUITY AND FAIR TRADING****IN ATTENDANCE**

Hon. J. C. Spence, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Women's Policy and Minister for Fair Trading

Mr N. Lawson, Acting Director-General

Ms D. McDonald, Acting Executive Director, Office of Women's Policy

Mr J. Wauchope, Executive Director, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development

Ms C. Mackenzie, Acting Registrar, Queensland Building Tribunal

**The CHAIRMAN:** The hearing of Estimates Committee D is now resumed. The next item for consideration is the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Women's Policy and Minister for Fair Trading. The time allocated is two hours. For the information of the Minister and the new witnesses, the time limit for a question is one minute and for answers, three minutes. A single chime will give a 15 second warning and a double chime will sound the end of these time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will also sound two minutes after an extension of time has been given.

The Sessional Orders require that at least one half of the time available for questions and answers in respect of each organisational unit is to be allocated to the non-Government members and that any time expended when the Committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between the Government and non-Government members. Also in accordance with Sessional Orders, each Minister is permitted to make an opening statement of up to five minutes. Again a single chime will give a 15 second warning and a double chime will sound the end of that time.

For the benefit of Hansard, I ask departmental officers who come to the table to identify themselves when they first come forward. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Women's Policy and Minister for Fair Trading open for examination. The question before the Committee is—

"That the proposed expenditure be agreed to."

Minister, would you like to make a short introductory statement?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes, I would. Firstly, I would like to apologise for the absence of my director-general, Ms Marg O'Donnell. Marg unfortunately had an operation last week and has had to take formal sick leave until at least 12 October. I would like to

introduce the Acting Director-General, Mr Neil Lawson, in her place.

My portfolio brings together three very different areas which have some very common goals. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development, Women's Policy and Fair Trading share the aims of equity and social justice for all Queenslanders be they indigenous Queenslanders, women, consumers or all three. With this aim, the two departments, the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development and the Department of Equity and Fair Trading, have a combined budget of more than \$150m—\$104.4m for the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development, \$41.5m for the Office of Fair Trading and \$4.8m for the Office of Women's Policy.

Community Cabinet meetings, a Beattie Government initiative prompted by the member for Nicklin, have proven an invaluable means of communication for Queenslanders with concerns in all three areas of my portfolio. Outside of those meetings, I have also travelled to the Torres Strait, Cairns, Mackay, Nambour, Gympie, the Gold Coast and elsewhere in the last 12 weeks to make contact with women, indigenous people, consumers and business people.

Unlike our predecessors, we regard indigenous affairs as an area demanding serious policy development. We have established a discrete department where the aim is to emphasise self-reliance over welfare, development over dependency. By absorbing \$49m for infrastructure spending into the new Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development, we have streamlined the delivery of vital services for these most needy Queenslanders. As a lead agency, this department will work with other Government agencies wherever a team approach will provide a smarter outcome.

The Government is fully attuned to the importance of financial accountability in publicly funded indigenous communities and organisations as shown in my statements to Parliament. Accountability is also paramount in this process this afternoon. We have not lost sight of social justice. We will grasp important indigenous community issues which past Governments have ducked or only grudgingly addressed, such as unpaid salaries, lost entitlements, traditional Torres Strait Islander adoptions and reconciliation. Like indigenous Queenslanders, women from all parts of the State want practical and relevant solutions to everyday challenges. These include vocational training, assistance in keeping pace with the information technology juggernaut and programs to combat domestic violence. A reinvigorated Office of Women's Policy will be well placed to develop its sensible policies, based on sound research and consultation. Consumers also fit into the justice equation. The 20,000 ageing Queenslanders who live in retirement villages will enjoy a more secure life-style from amendments soon to be introduced.

I will also propose a reform program for the building and construction industry which will help improve licensing, contracts and consumer protection. Fair, speedy and affordable dispute resolution will be central to this plan. I am confident that the interests of both consumers and the industry will be well protected under these reforms. As in other areas of my portfolio, the principles of equity and a fair go for all will be paramount.

I have two statutory authorities attached to my portfolio responsibilities. They are the Residential Tenancies Authority and the Building Services Authority, along with the Queensland Building Tribunal. It has been the case in previous years that questions of the statutory authorities have been asked before those for the Government departments so that those particular officers could leave. Will that be the process today?

**The CHAIRMAN:** I have no objection, but it would be up to the Committee members. I think this was flagged earlier in the week and it was requested that they stay for the period of time.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** That was the agreement we reached, Mr Chairman.

**The CHAIRMAN:** They will stay for the time and the questions will be asked as they arise.

**Ms SPENCE:** Fine.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The first period of questions will be from non-Government members.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** What previous experience had your Director-General, Marg O'Donnell, had in directors-general positions?

**Ms SPENCE:** Marg O'Donnell did not have previous experience as a director-general. However, her CV is extensive. She had experience in a number of areas that are of importance in my portfolio. I do not have her CV in front of me now, but my recollection is that she worked for the Federal Office of Women's Policy. She has also worked in establishing the dispute resolution centres in Queensland. That brought her in touch with a lot of indigenous Queenslanders particularly. She has worked in the Justice Department in the Queensland Government. Prior to taking on the position of director-general for me, she was the Legal Ombudsman for the Government of Victoria. She has an extensive curriculum vitae and has experience basically in all areas of my portfolio responsibilities.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Was the position advertised?

**Ms SPENCE:** No, that position was not advertised. When we came to Government and fulfilled our election commitment of establishing two new departments, it was obviously necessary to work very quickly. We did not inherit a director-general, as other departments would have done, so it was important to get one on board very quickly. The Government did an executive search and came up with some names. People were interviewed and Marg O'Donnell received that position.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I refer you to an answer given by the Premier, Mr Beattie, to a question asked by the Opposition Leader, Mr Borbidge. He responded

in relation to directors-general: "If they had previously been appointed to one of those positions, they will be entitled to be reappointed; they have gone through a merit selection process and they were appointed on merit. It is that simple. Those who do not fit into that category will have their positions advertised." Did the Premier support your appointment of Marg O'Donnell?

**Ms SPENCE:** Absolutely.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** So the position was not advertised. The process that was employed was one of identifying Marg O'Donnell as the most appropriate person for the position of director-general of your department?

**Ms SPENCE:** That is true.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Is the principal consultant of Sagacity Pty Ltd, Mr Kent Maddock, listed in your response to a question on notice, the same Kent Maddock employed by your department in the capacity of acting general manager of Business and Executive Services?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes, he is the same.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Is Mr Kent Maddock, who is now acting general manager of Business and Executive Services, the same Mr Kent Maddock who was employed in the Department of Justice before the change of Government? If so, what was his Public Service classification?

**Ms SPENCE:** I understand that he was previously employed by the Department of Justice, but I will have to seek advice with respect to his classification. I have just been informed that Kent Maddock was the deputy director-general of the Department of Justice, SES3. He left that department in April 1996.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I refer you to a consultancy, listed in a response to question 12 from the Opposition—the firm is Sagacity Pty Ltd, which lists a Mr Kent Maddock—to identify issues in relation to the Aborigines Welfare Fund and present a report suggesting options and strategies for dealing with those issues. That is for \$10,000. At what time did Mr Maddock—if it is the same Maddock; I take for granted it is—conduct that consultancy for your department?

**Ms SPENCE:** The Sagacity consultancy is complete. I think it completed its contract on Friday of last week.

**Mr LAWSON:** That consultancy was commissioned in July this year. I cannot remember the exact date. The report has been submitted.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Did Mr Maddock have responsibility for that consultancy or was he in fact the consultant?

**Mr LAWSON:** There were a number of people who worked with him on that, but he was the primary consultant—his firm, Sagacity.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** When was he employed to perform that consultancy?

**Ms SPENCE:** We do not have the exact date in front of us, but we believe it was July this year.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** At what time did he take up his appointment in your department?

**Ms SPENCE:** I have just been informed that Kent Maddock actually began in our employ on Monday, 18 September, after the consultancy report was furnished to me.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Was Mr Maddock known to you before you were appointed Minister for this department?

**Ms SPENCE:** I believe that I had not met Mr Maddock before he began his consultancy and first started reporting to me.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I move on to the fitout of the director-general's new office, which I believe is at a cost of \$267,000. Could you please advise the Committee of the cost to the Government of the fitout of your new office in Mineral House and whether you have sought or received approval from the Premier, given that he has publicly stated there would be no ministerial office upgrades?

**Ms SPENCE:** I came prepared with an answer, in expectation that you would want to know that figure. This is not necessarily a ministerial office upgrade. When I became Minister there was no ministerial office, because we created new departments. I did not take over from an existing Minister. We had a very difficult situation in that the departments I now supervise are basically in five different locations in the city. It was felt necessary for me to get the director-general and the departmental heads of each agency together on the same floor of a building. We are attempting to do that now. This week we have moved into level 18 of Mineral House, and level 17 of Mineral House will also become available to us in the near future.

I think you would be wrong to draw the conclusion that establishing a new ministerial office, a home for our new director-general and a home for two new departments is not in line with the Premier's promise not to upgrade ministerial or departmental offices. However, I am happy to give you the ministerial office budget in the shift to Mineral House. It is \$368,399.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I also asked you whether you received approval from the Premier for the relocation of your ministerial office.

**Ms SPENCE:** I believe that approval was obtained from the Premier for that.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Is your department still being charged rent for the former Environment Minister's office?

**Ms SPENCE:** I understand that QPM has been paying the rent for the former Environment Minister's office and that that rental has not come out of our departmental budget thus far.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Have you had any discussions on the future use of that office?

**Ms SPENCE:** I understand that the use of the former Environment Minister's office will be the subject of discussions between the Premier and the Minister responsible for that office, who would be the Minister for Public Works.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I take you back to the Sagacity report, which you said was completed last Friday; is that correct?

**Ms SPENCE:** No, I think I was wrong there. I read the report last Friday, but we actually received it earlier than that. I am sorry, Mr Davidson, I actually received the report and had a formal presentation by the consultants on Friday, 18 September.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** You also stated that Mr Maddock took up his position on 18 September 1998; is that correct?

**Ms SPENCE:** No, it was Monday, 21 September.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Was Mr Maddock actually compiling that report for you, and was he interviewed for the position that he now holds during the process of compiling that report?

**Ms SPENCE:** I understand that Mr Maddock has been employed to work in the position that he currently holds for a period of two months, and it is a temporary position. We are going through the process of advertising formally for that position. In creating the two new departments, we have also had to create a corporate structure for those departments which did not exist. When we brought Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy from the Families portfolio—

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I take a point of order, Mr Chairman. I did not ask that question.

**Ms SPENCE:** I think this is relevant to the line of questioning that is being asked.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Can I just hear the point of order?

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I do not believe that it relates to the question that I asked.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I thought it was carrying on from it. I will hear the answer, and if I believe that it does not, I will certainly stop the Minister short.

**Ms SPENCE:** When we brought the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy from the Families Services portfolio, we did not necessarily bring any corporate support. There was some money brought over from that, but not necessarily bodies. The same can be said about when we brought the Office of Consumer Affairs out of the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. There was some money that was brought into the new department, but not necessarily bodies to work in the corporate structure. It was necessary for us to engage some people immediately to provide corporate support in setting up a new department—doing things like preparing our budget, preparing us for Estimates and getting the two departments operating efficiently. There have been a number of temporary appointments made to those corporate support positions. As you would be well aware, to go through the process of advertising and employing people is an eight-week process in this Public Service. So there are a number of people who are temporarily occupying positions in the corporate structure of my new departments, and I can guarantee that those positions will be advertised properly—and some of

them already have been—and the proper selection process will be entered into.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I appreciate that. I think that you would be aware that I also went through an amalgamation of two departments. I am very much aware of the frustrations, if you like, of appointing senior people into positions with a degree of urgency. But I remind you that Mr Maddock's consultancy was to identify issues in relation to the Aboriginal Welfare Fund and to present a report suggesting options and strategies for dealing with those issues. I ask you again whether or not Mr Maddock was conducting that consultancy for your department at the time of interview or the time of consideration for his appointment to his position.

**Ms SPENCE:** I think it is a fair question. I know that I have already explained that the consultancy that Sagacity was undertaking for my department was completed on 18 September, and Mr Maddock assumed his temporary position on 21 September.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** But I have asked you, and I ask you again: given that he was appointed on Monday, 21 September, and given that the report was delivered on 18 September, at what point was Mr Maddock interviewed for the position in which he is currently acting?

**Ms SPENCE:** I am advised that there were no formal interviews for this temporary position, but there would have been ongoing discussions between my director-general and Mr Maddock, obviously, during the period of his consultancy about whether he was available and able to take up the position that he is currently fulfilling.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** So what you are saying is that he delivered a report of a \$10,000 consultancy on the Friday and was appointed to an acting position on the Monday?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes, that is it.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I will come back to that later. Given your pre-election commitments in your New Directions policy to open regional Consumer Affairs Offices in areas of rapid growth, have you dedicated funding in this budget for any new offices?

**Ms SPENCE:** No, we have not dedicated funding in this budget for the establishment of any new offices. As you would be aware, the Fair Trading budget looks very similar to the Fair Trading budget that we inherited from the previous Government. We have not given up on our election commitment to establish new offices for Fair Trading in this State. However, I felt that it would have been premature, in committing ourselves to the opening of new offices in this year—given that I had been a Minister for only three or four weeks before we started framing the new budget—I felt that I did not have time to ask the department to conduct a needs analysis about where new offices might be established. I think that these decisions do need careful examination. I am sure that you would agree that, in the expenditure of public moneys, you do not want to just put your finger on a map and say, "We would like an office there, please." We need to do some examination about the most needy areas for new offices in this State. That is

something that we will be doing during the next financial year. I hope to come back to you in next year's budget process and announce where the new offices will be located in Queensland.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Given that you have been in the job for three months, have you had any discussions with any departmental officers about identifying areas of need?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes, certainly, that is an issue that we have talked about. I am informed that some of the offices that have been opened in the past are no longer as busy as they once were. For example, recently we took away the full-time investigator from the Mackay office and relocated that person elsewhere. We have taken two other investigators out of regional offices and put them on the Gold Coast because the Gold Coast is a needy area for investigation. So these things are quite fluid. I believe that it is really important that we make the right choices when we decide to open new offices.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Why has the responsibility for the Retail Shop Leases Act been given to your department?

**Ms SPENCE:** The Retail Shop Leases Act is a piece of legislation that is often located in fair trading departments in other States. The machinery of Government committee discussed that issue when establishing the new structures and the requirements of the new department. It was decided that it would sit fairly in the new department. I have to be honest with you that I am not totally convinced that this is the right location for it. I am having conversations at the moment with the Minister for State Development as to whether we have made the right decision to move it to the Office of Fair Trading or to whether it would be better left in the department where it was formerly located. Hopefully we will make a decision on that in the next few weeks.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** So there were discussions between you and the Minister for State Development on the relocation?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes, there were initially. Now we are both Ministers and have inherited those new departments, we are reassessing many of our functions. That is one that we are talking about.

**The CHAIRMAN:** We will move to Government members' questions.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** On page 1-13 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements you have advised that you intend to continue production of Queensland Woman. Would you advise what has happened to that newspaper?

**Ms SPENCE:** I was initially enthusiastic about the former Government's initiative of establishing a newspaper for Queensland women. I was very critical of the content of that particular newspaper from time to time; however, I think the notion of having that kind of publication for the women of Queensland is a really positive one. I am happy to keep the newspaper in circulation for Queensland women. We plan to be continuing with four publications per year. I think that we will be changing the focus of the newspaper. I hope that we can truly

make it a newspaper that Queensland women feel they have some ownership of. I will be encouraging a new look newspaper and encouraging contributions from Queensland women, not only individuals but also Queensland community organisations. I truly feel it is a wonderful opportunity for organisations in regional and rural Queensland particularly to share information about what they are doing in their own communities and give ideas to other women in Queensland. I intend to launch the new look Queensland Woman newspaper later this month. It will be sent out for publication next month.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** You refer again on pages 1-13 and 1-3 of the MPS to regional and rural service delivery. What does your Government plan to do to meet the needs of rural women in Queensland?

**Ms SPENCE:** The Labor Government has a number of initiatives that will be of great interest to regional and rural women in Queensland. One of them is the retention of the Rural Women's Consultative Council. That was an initiative of the previous Government. I am very happy to encourage the continuation of that council, because I think it has done a very good job of getting out there and addressing the needs and communicating the needs of regional and rural women to Government. That, after all, is the intention of such a council. The council has for some time expressed its desire to be more closely attached to the Office of Rural Communities. I am happy to relocate its secretariat from the Office of Women's Policy into the Office of Rural Communities. Although that will be a position that will be budgeted for by the Office of Women's Policy as it was in the past, it can now reside with the Office of Rural Communities.

There are a number of other initiatives that will directly benefit women in Queensland in regional, rural and remote communities. We have allocated \$1.6m over four years from the Office of Women's Policy budget to promoting information technology to those particular areas. That is a new initiative in this Budget from the Labor Government. I will be outlining how that initiative will work in the near future.

As well, we hope to be facilitating through the Office of Women's Policy a Women and Reconciliation Program. The former Government did little to foster reconciliation in this State. As a member of the State Reconciliation Council, I know that reconciliation is an issue that is very heartfelt by women in Queensland. I think that we as a Government have a role to play in helping community organisations establish and promote reconciliation projects if there is a will in that community. I believe that there is a place for the Office of Women's Policy to develop a project to assist that. The basis of that will happen outside Brisbane in rural and regional Queensland rather than in the urban area where reconciliation is already up and going to a certain extent.

The Office of Women's Policy will also develop a greater presence in rural and regional Queensland than it has in the past. I have asked my officers to

travel more into those areas. As the Opposition spokesperson for this, as I travelled into rural and regional Queensland, women would say to me that they do not see anything of the Office of Women's Policy. They would say, "We don't know who they are or what they are about."

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** Still on pages 1-3 and 1-13, you refer to the creation of employment opportunities for women. Can you outline some projects related to women that the Government will initiate that will assist the Government's jobs strategy?

**Ms SPENCE:** As you would be aware, employment is a major priority of the new Labor Government. We have an important initiative called Breaking the Unemployment Cycle where the Government will spend \$283m over four years and create 24,500 jobs. It is very important that women get their fair share of the jobs that are created. Obviously, as the Minister responsible for women, I am very aware that we need to play a role in this; otherwise there will be a lot of male apprentices and male trainees put on in traditional areas and women will not be promoted into those new jobs. A number of initiatives in this Budget will help women gain employment. I am pleased to say that the Office of State Development has a Women in Business Project, which will include \$30,000 for women's business grants as well as \$200,000 for women re-entering the work force. There is a \$420,000 Indigenous Women's Apprenticeship Initiative in the Department of Housing. The Department of Public Works intends to promote a forum for female apprenticeships. My own Office of Women's Policy is promoting a \$16,000 Palm Island Mentoring Strategy, which is quite an interesting strategy, because it has been initiated by Soroptimist International of Townsville, a club with which you might be associated yourself, who put this idea to the Women's Consultative Council. The Women's Consultative Council recommended it to Government. We are now funding it. The soroptimists in Townsville are going to be working with the people on Palm Island to help them ease into employment and create business. I think it is a very exciting project.

The Budget contains an \$80,000 budget for the Working Women's Service. Although it is in place to provide a whole range of information for women in the work force, I am informed that much of their time is spent talking to women who have recently lost their employment and want some assistance to rejoin the work force. That is an initiative that we are continuing. I think the other major initiative that will help women get jobs is the funding commitment for an additional \$2m to fund child care in Queensland.

**Mr WELLINGTON:** I refer the Minister to page 1-8 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements. In relation to the Retirement Villages Bill, when will it be ready for presentation to Parliament?

**Ms SPENCE:** I know the member for Nicklin is very interested in the whole retirement village issue. Given the number of retirement villages on the Sunshine Coast, I think that is understandable.

As members would be aware, I recently made a statement to the Parliament to express my desire to complete a review of the Retirement Villages Act—a rewrite of the Act—and a draft Bill as soon as possible. I have publicly given a commitment that we will have a draft piece of legislation out for public consultation by December of this year. I know that I have set myself quite a challenging task, or at least I have set the department a challenging task, to get this legislation rewritten and out by the end of the year. It is legislation that is long overdue for a rewrite.

I know that previous Governments—the former coalition Government and the former Labor Government before that—were all working on the rewrite of the retirement villages legislation. I am well aware that there have been a number of working parties looking at this legislation for the last eight or nine years. I have decided that a small group of retirement village residents and retirement village owners need to sit down and thrash out the difficulties with the legislation and come to some sort of common ground on the difficult issues. I have convened a working party of four on each side of the equation, and they have met on five occasions now. As their convenor, they have someone from the dispute resolution centre acting as a facilitator between the two groups. From reports that I have had from that working party, they really are finding some common ground on the very major issues with respect to retirement village legislation. So I am very confident that we can do that rewrite and have it out there by the end of December.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I refer to page 1-9 of the MPS, which refers to the Auctioneers and Agents Fidelity Guarantee Fund as a source for funding for fair trading programs—it is almost at the bottom of the page there—of \$21.316m. Apart from the administration of the Auctioneers and Agents Act, for what other purposes is money from this fidelity fund used?

**Ms SPENCE:** I am happy to report to the Parliament that at present there is a balance of \$49.7m in the Auctioneers and Agents Fidelity Guarantee Fund. It is an interesting fund. In the last year, over \$1m of the fund was paid out to Queensland consumers. Consumers might make claims and be paid from the fund over a whole range of issues, but I am told that, basically, they are paid out because of disputes or difficulties arising from motor vehicle transactions—people who have bought cars that might have tampered odometers or people who have bought cars that might be stolen or have encumbered titles, some payouts to consumers because of real estate agents who have stolen trust moneys and real estate agents who might have misrepresented the consumer on a land or a house package. So over \$1m was paid out to Queensland consumers.

The balance of payments from the fund was paid out to housing assistance programs. In the last year, \$9.8m was paid out from that. There are also expenditures made for professional and vocational training from that fund. We fund courses for the REIQ at TAFE and we also fund community legal

services to promote consumer awareness, particularly with respect to issues that concern the fund, which is basically motor vehicle transactions and real estate actions. That is basically where the department has traditionally used the money from that fund in the last year. Perhaps my Commissioner for Fair Trading might like to add something to that answer.

**Mr LAWSON:** Certainly, in the last financial year there were some 144 claims against real estate agents totalling \$138,000. Motor dealers represented a major source of claims during that time with 140 claims in excess of \$800,000. The value in claims between real estate agents and motor dealers traditionally tends to be similar, but unfortunately the collapse of three motor dealers specialising in historic and prestige cars contributed to a significant variation during the last year.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I refer to pages 1-2 and 1-8 of the MPS where reference is made to the introduction of legislation to replace the Auctioneers and Agents Act 1971. What do you propose to do in relation to the Agents and Motor Dealers Bill?

**Ms SPENCE:** As members would be aware, the Auctioneers and Agents Bill was rewritten by the former Government and presented to Parliament. The former Government was unable to get that Bill through the Parliament because the Labor Opposition had great difficulties with many of the proposals in it and we were supported in our concerns by the member for Gladstone. So the former Minister for Consumer Affairs decided to let the Bill sit on the floor of the Parliament rather than continue debating it.

I agree that there is a great need to have the auctioneers and agents legislation rewritten. There is an expectation out there in the industry in Queensland, particularly motor dealers and real estate agents, that the Bill needs some changes. I have instructed the department to commence work immediately on the rewrite of this legislation. We have decided not to convene another consultative committee or working party, because I think that there has been a lot of consultation with industry and consumer groups in Queensland about the nature of this legislation. Instead, we are getting to work right now. I have my officers working on the rewrite of the legislation. When we have completed that, which I hope will be very soon, we will put the draft legislation out for public consultation and hopefully get that through the Parliament by the end of the year or early next year.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** On page 1-7 of the MPS, reference is made to the role of the Office of Fair Trading in improving consumer safety compliance through inspections. I understand that the Office of Fair Trading also supports consumer safety by making an annual grant to an organisation called Kidsafe. Can the Minister explain the purpose of this grant?

**Ms SPENCE:** I can, and I am pleased that you asked the question because this week I visited Kidsafe House at Herston and launched a new publication from the Department of Fair Trading

called "Safe Nursery Furniture", which has in it a lot of good advice to offer new parents in Queensland.

In launching that particular publication, which we did at Kidsafe House, I discovered that the Office of Fair Trading makes an annual grant of \$3,000 to that particular organisation. The house and the organisation is also funded by the Department of Health primarily and, I understand, with some funding from the Department of Education. It is a wonderful resource to have right next to the Royal Brisbane Hospital, because it provides new parents with a venue in which to learn about safe furniture and safe practices for newborns and infants. It has a lot of wise advice to provide to people about the types of equipment that they should be purchasing when they become new parents and also the types of things to avoid, in particular, nursery furniture and items for young children.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I refer to tables on page 1-3 and, to some extent, on page 1-9 and I ask: what is the additional funding in the Office of Fair Trading in 1998-99 as compared to 1997-98?

**Ms SPENCE:** There is additional funding in this year's Budget for the Office of Fair Trading. In fact, there is a variance of just over \$7m in the funding. There are a number of reasons for this. The establishment costs of the new department have been included. As well, written into the department's budget this year has been funding for a grant payment to the Queensland Building Services Authority of \$1.45m.

I am pleased that the office has received additional funding this year. It reflects the priorities of the new Labor Government to give greater prominence to fair trading issues in Queensland. We have said for many years that consumer issues took second place to a lot of other issues in the Department of Attorney-General and Justice in the former portfolio. It was an election commitment to establish a new department and give greater prominence to fair trading issues in this State. Therefore, we established the new Department of Equity and Fair Trading.

With a greater budget I am quite confident that we will be able to deliver great gains to Queensland consumers—gains like new retirement village legislation or the proper rewrite of the Auctioneers and Agents Act—and we will be able to look at codes of conduct in things such as the fitness industry and the dating industry. We know those areas have been of concern for some time, but because the Office of Consumer Affairs really did not have the resources to deal with those very important issues, they were never addressed by Government. I am quite confident that we will be able to address a lot of the important issues in the next year. Therefore, we have been able to obtain additional funding for the new department. I pass to the acting director-general to talk about some other areas of concern.

**Mr LAWSON:** By way of explanation, \$2.45m of the apparent increase actually relates to a delayed payment. As the Minister referred to in answer to an earlier question about how the auctioneers and

agents moneys are used, normally each year there is a \$9.8m transfer to the Housing Assistance Program. As the accounting processes turned out, the final quarterly payment for 1997-98 did not happen before the close off on 30 June. That amount carried over and was transferred this financial year. There is just an accounting adjustment to be made in that. That explains \$2.45m of the increase.

**The CHAIRMAN:** It is again time for non-Government questions.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Minister, referring to the Retail Shop Leases Act, given that you and the Minister for State Development had discussions about whether it should be housed in your department or his, is the review of that Act ongoing? Given that you have responsibility for the Act at the moment, do you still intend to bring the amendments to the House? How advanced is the review of the Retail Shop Leases Act and who has responsibility for it in your department?

**Ms SPENCE:** I will pass that over to the acting director-general, who has responsibility for it.

**Mr LAWSON:** In relation to that particular legislation, a review is required to be completed by next year. Early on we had discussions with that section of what is now the Department of State Development that previously had responsibility for the legislation, to talk about what those requirements might be. The effect in terms of transferring the final responsibility, in terms of the day-to-day activities, are still being discussed with that department. However, they are well aware, as we are, that a review of the legislation has to be completed by 1999.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** When the Act was transferred to your department, did the resources and the personnel who administered the Act under the old Department of TSBI transfer across with the responsibility?

**Ms SPENCE:** We are still discussing the transfer of the funding for that particular Act to our department. Obviously, the officers have been transferred to our department. They are still in their previous location, which I understand suits them very well because they have the large conference room upstairs that you would be well aware of. This is not unusual. Other issues are still being debated with other Government departments in terms of the funding and resourcing of the new obligations that have been taken up by the new Department of Equity and Fair Trading.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** That is amazing, and I do not know whether you appreciate the importance of the Retail Shop Leases Act to business in this State. Obviously that has been a factor in the decision not to give small business a title in this Government. It is now three months since I was advised that you had responsibility as the Minister and I had responsibility as the shadow Minister for the Retail Shop Leases Act, yet today you state that you still have not been able to transfer the responsibility, the offices and the resources that administered that Act on behalf of small business and business in this State into your department.

**Ms SPENCE:** I assure you that retail shop leases is also an issue of importance to me. As I travel around Queensland, small businesspeople talk to me about this issue and I am well aware that the issue needs addressing immediately by small business in Queensland. However, there is no problem. The officers in that section are working on the review of the Act and business is continuing as normal with the Retail Shop Leases Act. The fact that we have not quite established how much money should be passed from one department to the other is not really an issue at this point in time. Wages are being paid to the officers who are working on the Act. They are still located in the same premises. This is really just a bit of argy-bargy between one department and the other, but work is proceeding as normal.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Three months of argy-bargy at the cost of small business. I believe that Ian Kerr had responsibility for the Retail Shop Leases Act in the Department of Tourism, Small Business and Industry. As the Minister who now has responsibility for that Act, have you met with Mr Kerr?

**Ms SPENCE:** Absolutely. He has had at least one meeting with me in my ministerial office, which lasted for well over an hour. I was very pleased to make his acquaintance and to find out what he is working on. I understand that we have another meeting planned in the near future.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** What have you done to advise small business that the Retail Shop Leases Act is now under your portfolio?

**Ms SPENCE:** I will pass that to the acting director-general.

**Mr LAWSON:** There has been nothing specific in terms of advising small business. One of the things that we want to achieve is a smooth transition, a seamless transition, if you like—

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Three months.

**Mr LAWSON:** But it is three months with no change in terms of the service delivery. There has been no hitch or anything happening out of step. We are very keen that the service provided by Ian Kerr and the other two staff in the registry, plus all their mediators and part-time tribunal officers, is continued and is not disrupted by a machinery-of-Government change. With the other department we have been looking to resolve which resources might be transferred. Given that there are obligations beyond the day-to-day activities that Mr Kerr and his staff perform, we need to resolve that. As far as the client is concerned, I do not think the client would notice any change whatsoever in the last three months, and that is the important thing.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Going back to the issue that I raised with you earlier about the fact that you had not advertised your director-general's position, can you again state your position on Mr Maddock's appointment? Was that SES position advertised in the Government Gazette and, if so, what date was it advertised?

**Ms SPENCE:** I am advised that the Saturday before last the position was advertised in the

newspapers and it has also been advertised in the Government Gazette. As I said before, Mr Maddock is only temporarily filling that position for a period of two months until the position was properly advertised and can be properly filled.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** So you are telling us here today that Mr Maddock was appointed before the position was advertised in the Government Gazette or the newspapers?

**Ms SPENCE:** Certainly. As I explained before, in the creation of the new department there was a need to appoint people to positions in the corporate structure. We had to establish some sort of corporate structure immediately because, as I explained, when we brought the offices over from other Government departments, the corporate personnel did not come with them. They stayed with their former departments. Although we brought some budget for the corporate structure over from the former departments, we did not necessarily bring the personnel over for those positions. Having established new departments yourself, I am sure that you can understand that there is a need to get people in place very quickly to work on things like human resources, accounts and formulating budgets. Some of those people have been appointed in temporary positions while we advertise properly and go through the correct selection procedure. Mr Maddock is one of many people filling those temporary positions.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I am very much aware of that, but are you aware that all Public Service positions must be advertised in the Government Gazette unless specifically excluded and, if so, that exclusion must be published?

**Ms SPENCE:** I am advised that it has been advertised in the Government Gazette.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** But Mr Maddock was appointed before the advertisement in the Government Gazette. I think we established that, did we not?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes, and I thought that I had explained quite adequately that there are a number of people who have been appointed in temporary positions before those positions have been advertised.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Thank you.

**Ms SPENCE:** I am sure you might reflect on the way your own Government appointed people in the past to acting positions before they were advertised in the Government Gazette.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The Minister was answering the question. I ask you for the second time to not interrupt. You cannot just say, "Thanks" and cut her off. If she is answering the question, she is entitled to do so and not be interrupted.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** That is provided her answer is relevant. But I take your point, Mr Chairman.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Perhaps you do not take the other point, and that is that you need to read the Standing Orders about how the Committee works. It

is not up to you to decide whether the Minister's answer is relevant.

**Ms SPENCE:** Thank you, Mr Chair. I do not believe I have used the whole three minutes of my time to complete that answer.

**The CHAIRMAN:** No, you have not.

**Ms SPENCE:** I would like to give the rest of that time over to my acting director-general.

**Mr LAWSON:** This was a very key position in terms of establishing the new department. Originally, we seconded a senior officer from the Premier's Department. We envisaged that we would have him with us right through until the period when the job was advertised and the normal selection process was completed and filled. He indicated his desire and it met with the Premier's Department requirements for him to return early—probably some two months early, as it turned out. We then had the situation where we had to fill urgently a position with someone who we thought was well enough experienced in terms of corporate services at a very senior level in Government. Consequently, it was considered that Mr Maddock was someone who could step into that breach and carry us through that period of time.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I will pursue that in another forum. I understand the position was advertised on the 25th. I understand that you have already stated here today that the position was filled on the 21st. I will pursue that matter at a later time. I now draw your attention to the fact that in answer to question 19 you have stated that you have 12 SES positions or equivalent positions. You have listed those. A number of them are acting. How many SES officers did you inherit upon becoming a Minister?

**Ms SPENCE:** I can give you that detail. I will just have to find it. We inherited two positions from Fair Trading. We inherited one from the Office of Women's Policy. We inherited three from the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. An SES position came over to us from the Office of Indigenous Affairs that was established in the Premier's Department. Mr Wauchope was from the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. We also inherited another SES officer from the Indigenous Infrastructure Program from Local Government.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Given that there are five or six—depending on who I am listening to—were the 12 positions that you have now filled that are neither acting or permanent appointments advertised before the time of the appointment?

**Ms SPENCE:** I am informed that a number of those positions that you are alluding to are not necessarily SES positions but might be SO positions. You are quite right; at least half of those positions are acting positions at the moment and they are currently being advertised.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** How were the people identified? Was there a formal interview process for the people who filled those positions, or were they appointed by the director-general?

**Ms SPENCE:** I will have to take advice. As you would be aware, as the Minister, I was not involved in that process at all. That is a process for the director-general of the department. I will ask the acting director-general to comment on the procedure.

**Mr LAWSON:** I was involved in some of the appointments as far as the temporary engagement of persons to fill those positions. That was done on the basis that there was a temporary position created. It was still subject to a later evaluation before the position description was to be finalised and then advertised. The normal selection and merit process would then proceed. Again, it was a matter of looking at the level of the position that had been advised in terms of a consultancy report and getting someone on board to work through the start up of the new department. All of those positions were based on an interview with the person who had been identified. In some cases they were officers suggested to us by the Office of the Public Service as being of suitable calibre to come across and help us in such a project. It was then a matter of getting them to agree. It was very much on the basis that they understood that they would be coming across with no promises whatsoever as far as any other position was concerned in the organisation, but that they would be helping temporarily during the start-up phase.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Are you saying that there was full consultation with the Office of the Public Service and approval given by the Office of the Public Service for the appointment of these positions?

**Mr LAWSON:** We agreed with the Office of the Public Service on the basic starting structure as a starting point for the department in terms of the levels. That was a matter of some discussion with the Office of the Public Service. It was agreed that we could proceed to fill those positions temporarily subject to a final review of the classification level and the detailed position descriptions of those positions and then proceed to advertisement and normal appointment.

**Ms SPENCE:** I think we have a bit more time?

**The CHAIRMAN:** If anyone else has a mobile phone that is on, would you please turn it off.

**Ms SPENCE:** I would like to make the point that I am informed that most of the people who are acting in those temporary positions were existing public servants who have been seconded into those positions. They have not been necessarily plucked from outside the—

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Most?

**Ms SPENCE:**—Public Service to fill those positions. I am sure you will agree that that is quite normal. When you have vacant positions in the Public Service, you get secondments to fulfil those positions while you go through the whole process of advertising.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** You said "most", you did not say "all"?

**Ms SPENCE:** I do not have a detailed brief in front of me now, and that is why I did not say "all".

However, I am happy to get one to present to you before the end of these proceedings.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Did you seek Governor in Council approval for the appointments to those SES positions?

**Mr LAWSON:** No, those positions were, as I said, created temporarily and were temporary appointments. The final positions that have been determined and classified would be formalised in the normal way and then advertised.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Are you required to seek Executive Council approval?

**Mr LAWSON:** Not in terms of the temporary creation of a position at that level. I do not believe so.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Mr Chairman, I will now pass over to my colleague the member for Maroochydore, who has some questions for the Minister.

**Miss SIMPSON:** How much time do we have left in this session?

**The CHAIRMAN:** Four minutes. We could either have a break now or you could ask one or two questions.

**Miss SIMPSON:** The Community Jobs Plan document issued by the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations describes a \$4.1m project to increase support for women in rural and remote Queensland, promising 60 jobs. Could you please detail how this \$4.1m will be spent?

**Ms SPENCE:** I will have to give you the same answer that the Minister with responsibility for women's policy gave to me when I sat in that chair for the past two or three years, and that is that my department is not responsible for the women's programs or service delivery of every other Government department. What we are responsible for is our own budget, and we are obviously interested and have input into policy decisions of other Government departments, but we really do not carry the detail of every other Government department's policy, projects and service delivery, and we should not really be expected to.

**Miss SIMPSON:** In other words, you do not know what that \$4.1m consists of?

**Ms SPENCE:** You quite rightly identified that that particular project is the responsibility of the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations. I am sure the Minister for that department would be happy to provide you with that kind of detailed answer.

**Miss SIMPSON:** With respect, that is a major sum of money and there is also no detail provided within that particular Minister's documents. As you are the Minister who is responsible for women's policy, surely you would have some detail as to a \$4.1m announcement under the heading of Employment Initiatives for Women?

**Ms SPENCE:** As I just detailed, it has never been the practice in this Estimates process for the Minister responsible for Women's Policy to come to this Committee and have the detail of every other

Government departments' projects in front of her. I tried to ask questions like this in previous years and got the same response as the member for Maroochydore is getting now with good reason. My Office of Women's Policy is only a unit of about 20 people who are obviously involved in policy with other Government departments but are not responsible for the budgets or the budget decisions that are carried by other Government departments.

**Miss SIMPSON:** If we look at that \$4.1m initiative announcement for women's jobs, that would amount to about \$68,000 per job. That seems to be an extraordinary allocation. I find it hard to accept that this is within the Government's statements. Surely your policy unit takes some interest in what is happening in the other departments in relation to women's policy.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Excuse me, I am going to rule on this. Could I just clarify something? Is the \$4.1m in this Minister's budget or in another budget?

**Miss SIMPSON:** With respect, there are initiatives in other departments which are listed within this Minister's policy statements, yet here we have a major announcement which does not seem to have any details.

**The CHAIRMAN:** If I cannot get a straight answer from the questioner, I will ask the Minister. Is the \$4.1m in your budget or someone else's budget?

**Ms SPENCE:** It is not in my budget. As the member knows and has stated today, it is in the budget of the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations. Could I just add—

**The CHAIRMAN:** No, I am ruling on a question at this stage. If it is outside a portfolio area, you cannot ask the question.

**Miss SIMPSON:** Okay, I will relate it then to the women's budget package and the fact that the Minister actually earlier talked about the women's budget package and the Queensland Government's so-called allocation for a four-year package to create these jobs on page 6. We have no detail in regard to the women's jobs which are allegedly being created.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I am sorry, at this stage we have gone over time. You did say you would ask one or two questions in the four minutes that we had left. We have gone almost six at this stage. I think we will need to hold that for the reconvened session. We are now breaking for probably a bit less than 15 minutes. We will reconvene and have two shorter sessions of questions from the Government and non-Government member sides.

Sitting suspended from 5.22 p.m. to 5.35 p.m.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Before I come back to Government members' questions, the Minister wanted to clarify something on the previous question.

**Ms SPENCE:** I said before that I would get back to Mr Davidson on a question that he was asking me about the SES positions in my department. I assumed that I would be able to read that into the proceedings later on. I understand that I cannot do that; I can either table it today or take it on

notice. The information has not been provided to me in a form that I could table today, so I am wondering whether I could take that particular question on notice and provide answers later.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Is that acceptable, Mr Davidson?

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Which particular question is the Minister referring to?

**Ms SPENCE:** There was a question regarding the SES positions in my department.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** There were a number questions on SES positions. Which particular question?

**The CHAIRMAN:** There was one on which the Minister said that she would get the information and bring it back by close of session. In discussion with the research director and me, the Minister thought that she could read it into Hansard. I said: no, it would need to be tabled or taken as a question on notice. Are you happy for it to be taken as a question on notice?

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Which particular question are you referring to? I cannot remember.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Minister, if it is during Government question time, you can read it in if it gets here in time—and it should—otherwise if there is no time to read it in, just table it.

**Mr WELLINGTON:** I refer the Minister to page 2-2 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements and ask: what steps are being taken by the department to address the overrepresentation of indigenous people in contact with the justice system?

**Ms SPENCE:** I thank the member for Nicklin for his question. Obviously, the overrepresentation of indigenous people in custody is a cause of concern for us as a Government. It is not new. The figures are appalling. While indigenous Queenslanders represent 3% of the Queensland population, they represent close to 50% of the population in juvenile detention centres and close to 33% of the people in custody in adult centres. Each year my department makes a report with respect to Aboriginal deaths in custody. However, it is our aim, obviously, to reduce the number of indigenous people in custody in this State, and we have put in place a number of programs to ensure that this is the case.

One of the programs new to this department this year is putting some more funds into domestic violence programs for indigenous Queenslanders. Many of the reasons that indigenous people end up serving custodial sentences are the result of domestic violence situations. If we can actually reduce the incidence of domestic violence amongst indigenous Queenslanders, we can hopefully reduce their incidence in custody. We also have a number of programs to do with the indigenous community—local initiative programs and community courts. I would like to pass this over to my executive director, Jim Wauchope, who has been sitting next to me all afternoon and has been waiting for the opportunity to speak to elaborate on some of these programs.

**Mr WAUCHOPE:** I will just add a couple of things in relation to this. We have been particularly pleased with the local justice initiatives program. It has worked exceptionally well both in remote communities and in urban communities. Like all projects, there are variations. Some are indeed better than others, but certainly in places like Palm Island and Kowanyama those programs have had a dramatic impact particularly on the number of juveniles offending. The system works. It is designed to allow the communities themselves to take control of their young people and other people who are offending. It is essentially designed so that people are dealt with within the community rather than through the court system with all the problems that that brings. We are certainly very pleased about the fact that we will be able to continue that program this year, and we look forward to its continuing success.

**Mr WELLINGTON:** Can you provide any details, in addition to what you have just stated, on steps you are actually taking to resolve that problem?

**Mr WAUCHOPE:** I would be most happy to supply you with the guidelines of that program and the detail of some of the reviews we have undertaken of what has been done. I will certainly supply that to you early next week. Thanks for your interest.

**Ms SPENCE:** I understand that a video has just been made available by my department—it has been given to me in just the last week—about community justice programs and community courts. Perhaps we can provide you with that at some stage.

**Mr WELLINGTON:** Thank you.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** Can details be provided of inquiries received and investigations undertaken by each of the regional offices of the Department of Equity and Fair Trading? Further, what is being done to monitor the levels of investigation services to regional and rural areas to ensure that those services are meeting the needs of consumers?

**Ms SPENCE:** The Department of Equity and Fair Trading has nine offices throughout Queensland. I think it is a little-known fact that we actually have great representation out there in Queensland. That is distinct from our central business office. We have offices on the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast and in Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton, Mackay, Maryborough and Toowoomba.

In the last financial year, 161,814 calls were presented to those regional offices. Not all those calls require investigations, but I understand that close to 7,000 investigations were performed by Fair Trading officers throughout Queensland in the last financial year. As I mentioned in answer to a previous question, not all of our regional offices have investigators. Sometimes investigators are shared between regional offices and sometimes we have to move investigators around to areas of greater need.

The Department of Fair Trading is very concerned about the length of time people are kept waiting on the telephone before being attended to. As we all know, it is a cause of frustration with all bureaucracies. The department has worked very hard

in the last year to reduce the average hold time. I am told it is now an average of 55 seconds, which is an improvement on previous years. I am sure you will all agree that 55 seconds is still a long time to sit in a queue, waiting for someone to speak to, but the department has put in place a number of measures to ensure that that time is reduced in the future.

When I became the Minister and started visiting various areas in the department, I was very impressed to see that in town they have a big red number system on the wall to show how long callers are waiting before being answered by an officer in the department. So everyone is constantly aware how long each caller is being placed in a queue. I think those sorts of procedures will help ensure that the department reduces its call wait time in the future and ensure that officers are working harder to answer calls.

I am told that the average call talk time is two minutes and that the regional public counter staff in the Office of Fair Trading handled 42,776 transactions in the past year. I think we have officers of Fair Trading who are doing a marvellous job. They probably get little recognition for the wonderful work they do, and we really do need to tell Queenslanders about the services that are available to them.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Minister, I have an electorate similar to yours, which has a very high population of elderly people. We see a number of instances of people, often men, posing as cleaners or tradespeople, preying on elderly citizens. It comes to our attention and the police are usually called. What is the relationship between your department and the police in terms of investigation? I have been disturbed to hear police say, "We do not have the powers or the ability to investigate and we just hand it straight over to the Department of Fair Trading." What are the protocols between the department and the police in terms of inspectors handling those situations?

**Mr LAWSON:** We are very pleased to respond to allegations of door-to-door trading which may not comply with the Fair Trading Act. Quite often these people may seek to intimidate the occupants of a house or certainly try to con them into approving work to their house, which may involve roof painting, cleaning the house or doing some repairs. They will do that often on the basis of breaching the door-to-door sales provisions, which require a 10-day cooling off period before any work whatsoever can be done.

That is a matter our field inspectors can deal with, and we can certainly advise clients straight away of their rights. If people have people on the premises who are trying to act in that manner, we can dispatch an investigator. In addition, some of these people may be posing as building tradespeople and therefore, if they do not have a Gold Card, may also be in breach of the Building Services Authority requirements. In some cases, the Building Services Authority people may become involved.

Certainly in regional areas our people are well known to the local police. I think there is a fairly clear understanding at that level as to whose responsibility it is. Unfortunately, of course, sometimes people may

contact police directly when they encounter this problem. In that case, the police should redirect them straight away to the Office of Fair Trading. If it is a case of blatant intimidation, where it is almost physical in terms of extracting payment, then that is also a police matter.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I might pursue that in detail in another place.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** Page 2-10 of the MPS refers to your intention to improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In line with this commitment, what is the Government doing to ensure that Torres Strait Islander child-rearing practices, including traditional adoption, are recognised in State legislation?

**Ms SPENCE:** The whole issue of traditional adoption in the Torres Strait, referred to as Kupai Werem, is something I was made aware of for the first time when I became the Minister with responsibility for this area. Torres Strait Islander child-rearing practices are quite different from those on the mainland. It really involves the promise of giving a baby from your family over to another family for the rest of their lives. That is a decision made before the birth of that baby. This is a traditional practice in the Torres Strait. It goes on today in mainland Queensland and also in the Torres Strait but, unfortunately, does not have formal recognition under law. I think we probably are wrong in referring to it as an adoption practice, because it is really not like adoption as we understand it. It is probably a bit more like surrogacy, and it is common practice.

The difficulty with it in terms of our law is that the children who are given over to the new family and remain with that family for the rest of their lives cannot get a birth certificate under the name of that new family. They have to have the birth certificate with the birth parents' name on it. Apparently this is a cause of great concern for those children, because they no longer see themselves as being of the birth parents' family. They see themselves as very much part of their adopted family.

It is something that the Torres Strait Islander people have been lobbying Government for over a long time. The former Government held a workshop about this issue in Townsville last year. Two hundred people attended the workshop to discuss the issue. Because of the limited resources in the department, I was concerned that the issue was not being progressed at a legislative level. That is what they really want. They want some legislation which formally recognises their child-rearing practices and overcomes some of the obstacles they currently face. I have instructed the department, and they have engaged a solicitor to work on this piece of legislation. That solicitor is working with the working party at the moment to get through the bureaucracy and, hopefully, we will be able to put some legislation out there for public comment in the near future.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I refer to the Program Outlays on page 2-3 of your MPS. What are you doing to ensure that money allocated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people goes to where it is intended, that is, to improve the quality of life of

these people, and does not get used in ways for which it is not intended, for example, benefiting just a few people at the expense of the community?

**Ms SPENCE:** My department administers a number of grant programs which have been formulated following extensive research of material and statistical data from various sources—different levels of government. We use the university, we use the Australian Bureau of Statistics and we use the community sector. Members of the Aboriginal community and the mainstream community are asked to apply for grants from my department in a number of areas each year. Consequently, those grants are objectively assessed by officers in my department. The programs cover various forms, including support for capital needs, such as infrastructure facilities; heavy equipment, including earthworks, machinery and motor vehicles; and provision for specialised training of council staff. We also encourage the provision of services which focus on the needs of the community. The grants programs are advertised and we seek expressions of interest. They are open to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. If the applicant is not an incorporated body, it must be sponsored by another appropriate organisation. Applicants are assessed and prioritised at regional levels and then forwarded to me for consideration and approval.

There are two basic types of groups that are funded primarily by my department. Firstly, there are the deed of grant in trust councils. The audited position of those councils is tabled in Parliament every year. The second type of group is the community group, which my department subjects to strict accountability standards in accordance with conditions outlined each year in the financial reports of my department. You would have heard me speak about this issue in the Parliament. We, as a Government, are very concerned to ensure that there is accountability to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations which my department funds, and we are scrupulous in ensuring that that level of accountability remains.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** Pages 19 to 23 of the Women's Budget Package refer to a range of programs aimed at reducing violence towards women. Domestic violence is very high in many Aboriginal and Islander communities. What do you intend to do to reduce this problem, given that you are the Minister for Women's Policy as well as the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy?

**Ms SPENCE:** The Office of Women's Policy has been given \$1m in additional funding in the next financial year for domestic violence programs. I intend to devote half of that money to domestic violence programs for indigenous people. The level of domestic violence amongst Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people in Queensland is often not reported, but some research suggests that more than two-thirds of indigenous women in Queensland have been victims of domestic violence. In the past, Governments have underfunded this area. When you go to somewhere like Palm Island and realise that

that is the area in Queensland which has the highest incidence of domestic violence but it does not even have a 24-hour shelter for women, you realise just how underfunded domestic violence in the indigenous community has been. Mornington Island, which I recently visited, does not have a 24-hour shelter, yet it has a very high incidence of domestic violence.

Basically, we have a lot of catch-up activity in this State if we are to provide services that women in Queensland need to get away from their violent partners. It horrifies me that those services are not available in the areas of most need in this State. So if I, as a Minister with responsibility for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Women's Policy can improve the plight of, and the services offered to, indigenous women in this State in terms of domestic violence, then I think that I will have achieved something in this term of Government.

It is not just about the women or their partners; it is also about the children in these households. It is also about reducing the levels of violence and the numbers of indigenous people who are in our criminal system. We really do have to start at the grassroots and provide the services out there for indigenous women, particularly in Queensland.

**The CHAIRMAN:** We have only a minute and a half left for questions from Government members. Unless there is a very short question, we might move on to questions from non-Government members.

**Miss SIMPSON:** Talking about domestic violence—given your policy commitment before the election in your New Directions statement on women to increase domestic violence prevention programs by \$2m per annum, how do you explain the fact that only an extra \$1m is provided in the 1998-99 budget and that this is a broken election promise?

**Ms SPENCE:** I do not accept that this is a broken election promise. As you have correctly identified, \$1m in additional money is available in the budget of the Office of Women's Policy. With respect to the additional funding for domestic violence in other portfolio areas, I do not have the detail of that in front of me.

**Miss SIMPSON:** It does not add up to another \$1m.

**Ms SPENCE:** As you would be aware, the bulk of the domestic violence budget in this State comes under the portfolio of responsibility of the office of the Minister with responsibility for Family Services. There is also some domestic violence funding in the Health Department. I cannot pretend to you that I am across all of their budgets today, but I am sure that they would be happy to provide to you their budgetary information with respect to their own domestic violence funding.

**Miss SIMPSON:** It is \$1m short, and the Labor Party has broken a promise. However, I will move on to my next question. In the same Labor Party election document on New Directions, it promised an extra \$2.5m for women's health services. Yet on page 26 of your Women's Budget Package

you have delivered only an extra \$1.23m. Is this not another broken Labor Party promise?

**Ms SPENCE:** Mr Chairman, the member continues to ask questions that are not related to the MPS.

**Miss SIMPSON:** They are in your papers. They are in your Budget package.

**Ms SPENCE:** However, I can comment—although I do not have the exact knowledge of the detail with respect to this—that some of that promise of additional women's health expenditure, which was in the New Directions statement prior to the election, was committed to the funding of women's health centres in the future. If the worst comes to the worst and we see the re-election of a coalition Government in Canberra tomorrow, and funding for the women's health centres in Queensland is ultimately withdrawn, then we have promised Queensland women that, if that occurs—

**Miss SIMPSON:** You said it was additional money.

**Ms SPENCE:**—a State Labor Government will make up that funding shortfall. Thankfully, that has not occurred yet, but that was certainly a pre-election promise that, hopefully, we will not have to meet.

**Miss SIMPSON:** It says that it is additional money.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I have a question about the BSA. How many domestic building disputes were finalised in the Queensland Building Tribunal through hearing by tribunal members—not mediation—in 1996-97 and 1997-98?

**Ms SPENCE:** I just do not have that level of detail in front of me at the moment. I will call forward our representative from the Queensland Building Tribunal, Christine Mackenzie, to see if she can provide you with that information.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Through the tribunal, not mediation.

**Ms MACKENZIE:** You want to know the matters that were finalised by hearing in the 1996-97 year; is that right?

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Yes.

**Ms MACKENZIE:** The figure I have here is 209.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** In 1997-98?

**Ms MACKENZIE:** 141.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** What was the average cost of each domestic building dispute finalised by hearing in 1996-97, 1997-98?

**Ms MACKENZIE:** I am afraid I do not know that answer.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Will you take that on notice, Minister?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes, I am happy to take that on notice.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** What was the time taken by the Queensland Building Tribunal to finalise 50% of domestic building disputes during 1996-97, 1997-98?

**Ms SPENCE:** I can give you some information, Mr Davidson. The tribunal currently resolves 61.6% of its matters through mediation in an average of 48 days. If the matter is unable to be resolved by mediation and goes to the tribunal, of the tribunal's 1997 applications, 93% were finalised in an average of only 88 days, that is, three months, and a median of 57 days. That does compare favourably to the Magistrates Courts in Victorian and Queensland, which finalised 90% of their cases in 12 months, and the District and County Courts, which finalised 50% to 60% of their cases in that period. I am not sure that I gave you all the level of detail that you want, but we are happy to take that on notice if that is not satisfactory.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I need a bit more information. I am not referring just to disputes lodged in those years, but all the disputes finalised and the 1996-97 and the 1997-98 averages. Given that the average of the Victorian tribunal is 64 days, I might give you a number of questions and you can take them on notice if you prefer.

**Ms SPENCE:** I am happy to do that.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Do you have the questions written now? They cannot be provided after the hearing. You can ask them now and the Minister can take them on notice, but you cannot provide them after 6.30 p.m..

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I will ask them now and the Minister can take them on notice.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The Minister can choose to take them on notice.

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes, I am happy to take these on notice.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** What was the time taken by the Queensland Building Tribunal to finalise 50% of domestic building disputes during 1996-97, 1997-98? What was the average cost of each domestic building dispute finalised by hearing, not by mediation, in 1996-97 and 1997-98?

**Miss SIMPSON:** In the coalition's Women's Affairs Budget Outlook 1998-99 there was \$0.81m for an Eating Disorder Strategy. You have slashed that allocation by half as indicated in your Women's Budget Package on page 141. How do you justify that decreased commitment to combating eating disorders when about 90% of victims are female?

**Ms SPENCE:** The member is quite right: we halved the funding for that program. We still have \$410,000 that is allocated to the delivery of that particular program. We have used the other \$0.4m allocation that we have taken away from the Healthy Bodies Program to institute a new program to improve communication with rural and regional Queensland. That project will be known as assisting women and will focus on the provision of IT to rural and regional Queensland. It was for a number of reasons that we made the decision to reduce the budget of the Healthy Bodies Awareness Campaign. It is the prerogative of the new Government to change the priorities. We believe rural and regional Queensland needed some IT services, so we were happy to make that decision. We have also been

given certain information that the money that we took from the Healthy Bodies Program was going to be devoted to advertising. I have been informed by health professionals that those types of campaigns to do with advertising bulimia and anorexia are often counterproductive. There is not sufficient medical research to show that a Government campaign aimed at advertising those particular issues would give us any success in Queensland. I personally also believe that those particular issues are well covered by the mainstream media. You can pick them up in most women's magazines these days. Those are issues that are talked about openly in the general community. I was not convinced that a \$400,000 advertising campaign to talk about bulimia and other eating disorders was really necessary. We made the decision that the research component of the program would remain, but the advertising section of that particular program might be money better spent elsewhere.

**Miss SIMPSON:** I have already referred to the Community Jobs Plan. That particular document refers to the Office of Women's Policy delivering a \$4.1m project. Did the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations consult with you? Do you talk with them at all? Is the Office of Women's Policy just a token outfit?

**Ms SPENCE:** In many ways, I think I did inherit a token outfit from the former coalition Government, but I can assure you that I will be doing everything in my power to ensure that, firstly, the Women's Policy Unit is fully staffed in the next year—that is something that has not occurred in the past—and that the people working in that unit get out there and talk about policy, which is something that I think they have neglected to do in the past.

**Miss SIMPSON:** Did you know about that project you are supposed to be delivering?

**The CHAIRMAN:** The Minister is still answering the question. Would you let her answer the question, please.

**Ms SPENCE:** You might not like to hear about the record of the Women's Policy Unit under the former Government. I can assure members that the unit we did inherit was understaffed and lost its policy focus under the previous Government. That is something that I am determined to change. We will staff that office and ensure that the women who work in that office are policy experts and learn to coordinate strategies with other Government departments. If there has been a failure of that policy unit in the past to discuss issues with the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, we will rectify that and make sure our policy officers do that in the future. There was, in fact, no policy officer working on employment or industrial relations issues in the former policy unit. Obviously that was not a priority for the former Government. It is a priority for this Government. I am determined that one of our policy officers at least will be working on that particular issue in the future.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I cannot let this question go by. I refer to the Staffing Resources—Fair Trading table on page 1-11 and the column for the 1997-98

financial year. Do your staff, particularly departmental and ministerial, not know how to add up? I would imagine that you signed off on that program statement, so obviously I believe you would have read it. I see that the Fair Trading administration has 251 positions, technical has 20 and there are two lawyers. That comes to a total of 273; yet it says "275". Are two hidden anywhere?

**Ms SPENCE:** I would like to find that out myself. It is a bit of a worry. I will ask for some advice if you do not mind.

**Mr LAWSON:** In terms of the table that is presented on page 1-11, the column in terms of actuals should read 273 and not 275 as stated there if those numbers are correct in that table.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I just bring that to your attention, Minister. Next time you can get somebody else to do the adding up for you. I refer to your response to questions on notice regarding the capital works expenditure by your department in the 1998-99 financial year, and I ask: how do these figures relate to the figures contained in Budget Paper No. 3?

**Ms SPENCE:** Are you referring to capital works in the Department of Fair Trading or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs?

**Mr DAVIDSON:** The Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development, yes. There seems to be 982, 982, 982, 982 over four quarters for a total of 3.9.

**Ms SPENCE:** Could you just refer to the page again, for me?

**Mr DAVIDSON:** It is question on notice No. 14 and it relates to the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development. The estimated capital works expenditure is 982, 982, 982, 982. Have you got that there?

**Ms SPENCE:** No, I have not got that question on notice in front of me. I will just be a minute.

**The CHAIRMAN:** While that is happening, Mr Davidson, you have five minutes left and then there will be 10 minutes for Government questions. Then we will finish. That will end up with 61 minutes for non-Government questions, 51 minutes for Government questions. So basically you have five minutes left.

**Ms SPENCE:** I thank the member for the question. I know what you are referring to now. I actually asked the same question myself when I read this answer. I am told that this is really just the way they average out the yearly expenditure on capital works, because it is just impossible to estimate what they are going to spend each quarter for the various departments. This is a normal practice and this is the way it is averaged out. I agree with you that it looks pretty silly, but that was the answer that I was given.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I will accept that answer. I also refer to comments made by the Premier on ABC radio on 20 July 1998 relating to the security of payment to subcontractors in which he said, "I have asked Robert Schwarten"—who was the relevant Minister at the time—"to come to Cabinet with an

outcome by the end of August. We all know what needs to be done. Let's do it. We will make a decision on it and everyone will know exactly where we stand by the end of August." With those comments in mind and also taking into account your statements reported in both the Courier-Mail and Business Queensland about your commitment to the security of payment issue, I ask: why have both you and the Minister for Public Works and Housing failed to meet the deadline?

**Ms SPENCE:** As you know, I am responsible for the Building Services Authority and the Minister for Public Works is responsible for other subcontractor issues with respect to State Government procurement. The Government has recently formed a Cabinet committee to look at the recommendations with respect to the Building Services Authority's recommendations on security of payment for subcontractors. I have spent a lot of time in the last two months that I have been Minister talking to the industry groups and the Building Services Authority about the recommendations of the implementation of the steering committee, which came out of the Scurr inquiry.

Obviously, this is something which your Government was well aware of because you signed off on those particular recommendations. The new Government has yet to have an in-depth look at those recommendations. The Cabinet committee that was formed last Monday has been given the responsibility to look at those recommendations. We hope to have a report to Cabinet in the near future giving a clear direction not only to the Building Services Authority but also to the building industry in Queensland of the direction of the new Labor Government with respect to the ISC recommendations and also to security of payment issues.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Was there a given time frame that you as the Minister responsible would report back to Cabinet?

**Ms SPENCE:** No, Cabinet talked about the need to do this quickly. There obviously is a need. We have inherited a Building Services Authority, which has had an operational deficit for the past three years. Unfortunately, as I mentioned before, there is a \$1.45m payment that is coming out of my department's budget to be given to the Building Services Authority to help them with their operational deficit. There is no way that I, as the responsible Minister, am about to sit back and go to the Treasurer next year and say, yet again, "The Building Services Authority cannot pay its debts. It needs the money from consolidated revenue." Some tough decisions are going to have to be made by this Government, because your Government failed to make those tough decisions. I do not think that Queensland taxpayers should be funding an authority such as the Building Services Authority.

There are a number of options at our disposal. We can do as you recommended, and that is double and triple the licence fees that are being paid by subcontractors and builders in this State, or we can pull back the services of the Building Services

Authority to ensure that they remain within budget. There are a number of other options in between. These are serious issues, and we are examining all of those options. We know that they are urgent, because the budget deficit position of the Building Services Authority is an urgent one. We are going to have to make some decisions very quickly. I have not been given a date, but I can assure you that this will be done as quickly as possible.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time is now up. There is about 10 minutes for Government members' questions and then we need to wrap up. I refer to page 2-3, the 7th dot of the MPS, which refers to developing a range of strategies aimed at reducing racist attitudes and behaviour, including a Queensland Government anti-racism policy. What do you intend to do? Do you have any time frame for that activity?

**Ms SPENCE:** I thank you very much for the question. There has not in the past been an anti-racism strategy developed by the Queensland Government. Given the climate of our times and the growing incidence of racism in our community, I believe that now is the time for the State Government to become involved in this issue. In the past, a number of Government departments have undertaken pretty good anti-racism strategies themselves. I would particularly like to commend the Education Department, which has done some good work on this. But there has never been a whole-of-Government strategy. So that is the first thing that I expect that the department will start developing in coordination, obviously, with other Government departments.

The department intends to formulate some community education resources because, as I mentioned before when we were talking about reconciliation, I believe that out there in the Queensland community there is a lot of goodwill and people want to play some part in reconciliation and anti-racist issues but they really do not know where to start. I think that if the Government provides some sort of community education resources for local reconciliation groups, that will be a start to that. I think that we as a Government have a role to play in correcting misinformation when racist attitudes and statements are made, particularly publicly. All too often in the Queensland media, we see racist comments being made by journalists and others. I think that we have a role in counteracting those particular comments. I am asking my department to step up their vigilance in that regard. I will be asking the department to promote cultural awareness training among Government departments.

I read an article in the Townsville Bulletin only this week where the police in Townsville stated that they really were lacking knowledge of cultural awareness protocols when dealing with indigenous people. We really have to play some role in ensuring that our Government workers for a start understand cultural protocols not only with indigenous people but with other Queenslanders. I would hope that in developing those protocol documents that we can make them available for the general community as

well. So there are a number of ways that the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development can involve itself in these anti-racist strategies. It will become the lead agency in this particular area. I would encourage all members of Parliament to play a part in this particular process.

**The CHAIRMAN:** You have mentioned specifically the Education Department. Do I take it that that is something that they are doing with school students? Is that the program to which you are referring?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes, certainly. I understand from talking to officers in the Education Department myself that, in fact, there have been people in central office working on some very good material in the last few years about anti-racism and writing some good policy. Unfortunately, it hits the Minister's desk and does not go any further. I think that a lot of work is actually there and we really need to resurrect it and have another look at it and see if we can institute some of the policies that they have been advocating for some time.

**The CHAIRMAN:** You said that you need to work with other Government agencies and departments and that you are taking the lead role. You also said that the material may be there and it may already have been developed but it has not been promoted or coordinated and that is the key role that your department would play. How will other departments be encouraged to take that up? Some could say, "Why should we take something from another Minister into our department when we are busy enough." What persuasion do you intend to bring to bear so that this can get picked up?

**Ms SPENCE:** There is actually a lot of goodwill amongst other Government departments in terms of anti-racist strategies. I do not think they have a problem in recognising that our department has the expertise to develop policies for use throughout the bureaucracy generally. I do not think that is a problem at all. As you say, it is just encouraging other departments to actually get involved and ensure that their own officers receive the cross-cultural training that we are advocating. Obviously, I will be doing that at Cabinet level. In promoting those strategies, I know that I have the support of the Premier and the Office of Multicultural Affairs, and we will be working very closely with those agencies.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** I see on page 2-3 of the MPS that you intend to develop culturally appropriate mechanisms aimed at addressing the very high rate of youth suicide amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. What are those mechanisms?

**Ms SPENCE:** There is a high incidence of youth suicide in indigenous communities. I understand that one of the highest levels of indigenous youth suicide occurs in the Brisbane area. I am told that there is a lack of services to assist young people and that, even when services are available, there is a lack of knowledge about them. There is also a lack of coordination between the providers of the services. That is one of the reasons

why we established a new department for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs.

In the past the office was located in the Family Services Department and it was unable to take a lead-agency role and coordinate activities across Government. When one looks at something like youth suicide, one finds that money is being spent in small programs that are being delivered across Government. The Education Department is doing its own thing, the Health Department is doing something, the Family Services Department is doing something and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Office was doing something. They were not talking to each other. Everyone was consulting with the Aboriginal community and putting bits of money into programs, but there was a lack of coordination at a whole-of-Government level.

We are hoping that the establishment of the new department will enable it to take that lead-agency role and provide some coordination across Government. The whole issue of youth suicide is one where we can better spend the public dollar, provide better services and effect some cost savings in the process.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** On 2-12 of the MPS you refer to the development of a justice agreement. What does this involve?

**Mr WAUCHOPE:** In July 1997, Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers with responsibility for justice, police and corrective services and indigenous affairs, along with members of the indigenous community, met to examine issues relating to the implementation of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Each jurisdiction, except the Northern Territory, signed an outcome statement that gave a commitment to addressing the overrepresentation of indigenous people in the criminal justice system. The thrust of that was working out some way of formalising a partnership between Government and the community to address those issues.

The resolution included agreement by the States to work towards developing multilateral agreements between Governments and the indigenous community to focus on plans that address the justice issue as well as the underlying social issues. Once again, it is about planning what you are going to do and having some sort of agreement against which you can monitor the progress that you are making. As the Minister said earlier, we see a particular role for the new department in leading that process, because not only is our department involved but a whole range of departments are involved. We want to take the opportunity to get everybody together to work towards the development of that agreement. We are doing that. Again like another issue that the Minister referred to, there is a fair amount of goodwill there in terms of a willingness to do something. It just needs a process for somebody to lead it to a conclusion. That is just one of the many activities in which the new department will be playing a leading role, utilising the funding that has been provided in this budget for salaries and operating costs.

**The CHAIRMAN:** That is the last question. I believe you wish to——

**Ms SPENCE:** I have been provided with an answer to the question asked by Mr Davidson about the temporary positions within the SES service. Can I table that today?

**The CHAIRMAN:** That can be tabled and taken as additional information. Ladies and gentlemen, the time allocated for the consideration of the estimates of the expenditure for the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Women's Policy and Minister for Fair Trading has now expired. I thank the Minister and her portfolio officers for their attendance.

That concludes consideration by Estimates Committee D of the matters referred to it by Parliament on 15 September 1998. I thank Hansard, the attendants, the Committee staff and the Parliamentary Service staff for their cooperation and assistance. I declare this public hearing closed.

The Committee adjourned at 6.26 p.m.